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ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

Zaida Maldonado Perez

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Method and Praxis in Theology
Asbury Theological Seminary
ST501 Tues. 9:00-11:40 am
Fall 2004
Dr. Zaida Maldonado Pérez

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Contact Information:
Office Hours: FORTHCOMING
(O) 407-482-7647
(You can also reach me by phone, preferably during office hours, or by email.)
Zaida_Perez@asburyseminary.edu

Course Description:

This is an introductory course relating method to practice in theology. This course will involve an examination of different ways in which the Christian tradition has understood the sources, norms, and criteria for the development of church doctrine. Special attention is given to a critical analysis of contemporary theological methods and the influence of postmodern science. The connection between theological method and Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of divine revelation, will serve as the center point for developing an Evangelical/Wesleyan theology in the postmodern world. This class is designed for beginning students, and serves as preparatory study for all course offerings in theology.

Overview:

“Why am I doing what I am doing the way I am doing it (and not another way)?” In the 12th century, Anselm of Canterbury expressed the desire to deepen his knowledge and therefore also his relationship to God as “faith seeking understanding.” Others have stated it by asking, “what would Jesus do?” or, “how can I be faithful in this time and place?” All of these questions have a key common denominator—a conscious effort to understand our faith in order to better our service and our relationship to God, to our communities, to the world. This conscious effort demands that we explore the variety of methods that have often led to very different responses to the same question. These responses, articulated in the corpus of Christian doctrine, reflect the differing theologies that not only vie for our attention but point to the role of reflection, understanding and judgment in the task of theology. In this sense, the title of our course may be somewhat misleading as it suggests that there might be one method or praxis in theology. Our readings covering a variety of topics and methods in the Christian faith will prove that this is not the case. Though questions may remain the same, our differing contexts and historical situations may call for a reexamination of previous responses and often, a reformulation of the very questions themselves.

In short, the task of theology is not a finished process. It is our calling as leaders and ministers to attend to this process with the utmost diligence and prayer.

As stated in the catalog, this is an introductory course that will help prepare you for all course offerings in theology.
Course Objectives:
(These objectives are taken from the core course description and are normative for the Wilmore and Orlando campuses)

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek/Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;
2. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy;
3. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;
4. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern and postmodern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern);
5. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
6. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
7. Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;
8. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

Course Texts:
4. A Reading Packet to be purchased from Cokesbury*

Highly Recommended:
(This little book will be worth your while!)
A list of other recommended readings will be handed out in class.

Course Structure:
The course is divided into three sections. Each section is subdivided into modules that delimit specific learning goals as well as general questions to guide your reading. Modules also reflect assignments due and discussion questions. For example:
Section One will introduce you to the overall task of theology. It is divided into modules one and two.
Section Two will explore methods and sources in theology. It is divided into modules three - five.
Section Three will consider postmodernity and the theological endeavor. It contains module six.

Course Assignments:

Assignments for each module will usually be divided into three sections:

- Questions for reflection and discussion: Familiarize yourself with these before reading the assigned material. Their aim is to guide your reading and focus. They will also be used to stimulate discussion in class and groups. Be prepared to respond when asked. They form part of your class participation.
- To Turn in: These are written assignments. Please stay within the stipulated pages.
- Extra Credit (in some modules): Students are encouraged to respond to no more than two, as needed.

*READING PACKET (Purchase from Cokesbury)

*Materials in Reading Packet: FALL 2004

Abbreviations used:


15. Clement of Alexandria’s “The Rich Man’s Salvation” 11-17, in Documents in Early Christian Thought, pp. 203-206


20. “Gutierrez: Orthopraxis, Not Orthodoxy,” in RCT. Pages 388-393

NUMBERS 30-36 are from RCT
23. Agustine: Free Will and Sin, pp. 176-180
24. Luther: Sin and Grace, pp. 180-185
25. Tennant: Difficulties In The Classic Doctrine, pp.185-189
27. Niebuhr: The Pride of Power, pp.192-196
28. Farrer: Beyond Augustinian Theodicy, pp.199-204