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ST 501 Method and Praxis

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SYLLABUS FOR ST501 EXL
METHOD AND PRAXIS IN THEOLOGY

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Office hours in the Chat room: TBA

Please check for the latest version of this syllabus prior to the beginning of class.

The Fine Print ;-) "This extended learning syllabus is intended for distribution to members of the course only (and not for general distribution on the internet!). If you intend to share part of this material with others you need to ask for permission.”

ExL Support Team:

For technical support contact Jared at ExL_Support@asburyseminary.edu
For general concerns, questions, or problems email Extended_Learning@asburyseminary.edu or contact Kevin Osborn at ExL_Director@asburyseminary.edu
For library reference support contact Hannah Kirsch, Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu

Windows and Icons:

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules (No interaction takes place here. This is where the prof. posts course materials only).

The Discussion Center will be used for all public, class communication. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else which would be of interest to your classmates and the professor, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The (Class Number) Office is for private correspondence between you and the professor. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates, including assignments, papers, projects, and personal correspondence. This should not be used to ask general course-related questions.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the Discussion Center from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask questions, or to explore topics. Remember: None of the conversations carried on in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, chapel services in Estes Chapel,
Introduction

Welcome to ST501XL! I’ve always enjoyed studying and teaching Theology. As I reflect upon the special nature of this online course, I cannot but remember the unique memory of my first Theology class. It was years ago, in Romania, Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain… We were just a few young students gathered in a small room waiting with great expectations for two Western ‘tourists’ (who happened to be theologians as well)...

I will never forget the excitement of listening to their lecture, as they were unfolding the great ‘Christian story’ before us. In an hostile environment where people would not only laugh at such views but actively persecute those who hold them, we somehow felt that we were not alone… As we were praying together, we felt we were ‘on line’ with thousands of other Christians living at thousands of miles distance from us…

We live in a free country today and yet, every time we delve into the Word of God, we enter a different world and hear a different ‘story’… Christian Theology is about discerning the forever-new meaning of this story as it challenges the prevalent ‘story’ of our consumerist society.

Course Description
(from the catalog)

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 post-modern science. The connection between theological method and Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of divine revelation, will serve as the foundation for developing an Evangelical/Wesleyan theology in the postmodern world. This class is designed for beginning students, and it serves as preparatory study for all course offerings in theology and doctrine.

Course Learning Objectives

Upon 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. Sketch, in broad terms, the development of the canonical heritage of the Church and draw out the appropriate theological implications.
3. Describe, again in broad detail, the manner in which the Church has undertaken doctrinal development.
4. 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.
5. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith.
6. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern).
7. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism.
8. Articulate the significance of narratival methods for grasping the biblical story in its fullness.
9. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method.
10. Articulate the relation between various methods and Wesley’s methodological commitment to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
11. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

The readings assigned throughout the semester will deal with the matters represented in these learning objectives, though on occasion the lectures will draw in important components that extend beyond the direct scope of the readings. Additionally, please review the bibliography below for further readings on the topics we will be discussing in class.

**Expectations and Course Requirements**

Some of you may have more experience in ExL learning than me and even feel more comfortable in this environment. As it is my first on-line teaching I would very much appreciate your feedback. So please feel free to send me your worries, comments and suggestions.

**What I am expecting from you:**
As you sit comfortably in front of your screen, you need perhaps to be reminded that this is not an independent study course. You may feel ‘alone’, but you’re
really not! Your ‘actions’ in this virtual environment (or lack of actions for that matter) are monitored :-) (I guess, the post-modern ‘critique of presence’ may have an interesting application here!) We ‘came together’ (albeit in a non-traditional way) to grow and to learn as a team. In this sense, we are all in a ‘training process’ and perhaps we shouldn’t differentiate too dramatically between ‘training’ (our discussions among us in both the chat room and the Discussion Center) and ‘performance’ (your formal assignments and papers). Nonetheless, evaluation is fundamental to the learning process and my role is not only to facilitate the process of the dissemination of information but to evaluate it and offer proper feedback. There are a few things worth remembering in this respect:

1) You are expected to stay up-to-date in assignments and be actively involved in the classroom and in the team to which you will be assigned. The specific details of your assignments and the concrete evaluation standards of your participation and interaction in the Discussion Center and in your teams will be spelled out in each module.

2) Send all class-related questions/answers to the Discussion Center unless otherwise instructed. Sometimes, I will specifically request that you send the assignments to the Office. Also, you may want to use the Office for questions/concerns addressed specifically to me (i.e. issues you don’t want others to read).

3) Each module is the equivalent of a three-hour on-campus lecture. As the class takes 14 weeks to complete, the necessary time you need to set aside for the course is approximately 8 h per module/week. As stated above, apart from reading the material and preparing your assignments, spending time in the classroom is vital for the overall success of the course.

4) If you have special commitments/problems that prevents you from ‘showing up’ on-line for a couple of days, let me know in advance. If you encounter unexpected/urgent problems, let us all know, so that we may pray for you and, if need be, re-schedule assignment(s). (IMP! If you encounter serious problems and cannot finish your assignment(s) please remember what qualifies for ‘unavoidable emergency.’ I quote: “A grade of ‘I’ denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment” (Catalog, 29)).

5) Send longer assignments as ‘attached files’. For regular discussions and interaction in the Discussion Center use normal E-Mail and try to limit your message to 200 words.

6) You are free to use the Chat room (synchronous communication), but please remember that what happens there is NOT STORED ANYWHERE. So there will be no record of your brilliant ideas. In order to properly
assess your participation in the class you need to use the Discussion Center.

7) You may also want to remember in this connection that when assessing your participation in the class, quality is an important factor. That is to say, not all postings ‘are created equal’. So, before hitting ‘send’ make sure that you post a thoughtful remark/assessment/critique, etc. In other words, messages of the type ‘I don’t agree’ or ‘Good response!’ will probably not count very much. After all, there’s a good reason why we have both a Chat Room and a Discussion Center.

Things you can expect from me:

1) All the necessary materials and assignments will be available on-line, at 9 am (ET) the latest, on the starting date of each module.

2) I will respond to all of your messages on a first come first serve basis. I might not intervene in all your discussions (especially when working in teams), but I will read all your postings and intervene when appropriate. If you need urgent assistance write ‘URGENT’ in the subject line and send your message to the Office.

3) If I need to be away from my computer for more than 2 days, I’ll let you know in advance and provide you with contact information in case you need urgent assistance.

4) Prayer is central to the study of Theology. As we start to see this connection better during our course, we will also practice it as we ‘get together’ as a class. If you have a specific prayer request post it to me (or to the class, as you feel appropriate) and I (we) will pray for you.

Assessment and Grading

50 percent of the grade will be constituted by the assignments for each module and by the level of interaction in the Discussion Center and in the Individual teams. (25% for the level of interaction and 25% for the assignments). The long essay that will conclude the course (2,500 words) will make the other 50% of the grade. The title (or titles) for the long essay will be posted during the course.

More specific assessment details will be provided with each module depending on the nature and length of the assignment.

I am including below the standards for grading from the seminary catalog.

A  4 = Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives
B  3 = Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives
C  2 = Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives
D 1 = Marginal work: minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives
F 0 = Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

Please note that for ‘good, solid work’ you get the grade of B. In order to get a grade of A, you must produce exceptional work, that surpasses the objectives of the course; That usually translates into a combination of the following:
- Well researched and comprehensive analysis and criticism that goes beyond what is required for the assignment.
- Work that is exceptionally articulated, well structured and concise;
- Insightful and creative work that includes elaborate and profound interaction with the material and advances the present discussions on the subject matter.

Following are the types of issues that devalue a paper listed in the order of their importance.
- Faulty logic; incoherence; lack of discernment in evaluating what is at stake in the argument; answering a different question;
- Insufficient interaction with the material; insufficient research; weak argument; poor structure
- Grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, etc; While I am mainly interested in content issues, persistent grammatical and spelling errors will reduce your grade.

Regarding the writing standards you may want to follow The Chicago Manual of Style. Particular attention should be given to argument construction, outline, the standard of language expected in a paper as well as the proper way of referencing resources. If you plan to work hard anyway, it would be a pity to miss helpful hints on impressing your professor with your wide-ranging erudition:-)

How To Submit Work

The assignments for each Module will be generally posted to the Office by the end of each Module (unless otherwise instructed). More specific instructions regarding both class participation and assignments will be given in each Module.

Required Reading

Larry Wood, Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Interpretation (digital manuscript). - selections
Stanley J. Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology*, (Carlisle, Patternoster Press, 1991) - selections

**Recommended Reading**

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I,1; I,2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)

Other materials (articles, reviews, book selections) will be made available during the course (in digital form).

**Course Schedule**

**Module 1**

Introduction to theological method; Overview. 
Terminology. Doctrine & Criteria;

Main Reading: Grenz & Olson (*Who Needs Theology?*). 
Recommended reading: Pannenberg (*An Introduction*); Barth (*CD 1.1, Introduction*); Tillich (*Systematic Theology, Introduction*).

**Module 2**

Theology and History; Tradition & Canon. 
Dogma, historical theology and systematic theology;

Main Reading: Alister McGrath (ch. 1-3); 
Recommended reading: William Abraham (ch. 1, 2 and 5); Lindbeck (ch. 4); Gunton (ch. 5) Trevor Hart (Part 4).

**Module 3**

Early Greek Philosophy & the Church Fathers; 
The Cappadocian Contribution; The relationship between Philosophy & Theology

Main Reading: Wood (ch. 2); Zizioulas
Recommended reading: Colin Brown (ch. 5 & 6)
Module 4

Rationalism, Modernity and Theology; The Enlightenment heritage
The Foundationalist ideal;

Main reading: Wood (ch. 4); Stanley Grenz & John R. Franke (Beyond Foundationalism, ch. 2)
Recommended reading: Grenz & Olson (20th Century Theology, ch. 1); Trevor Hart (ch. 2); Brown (ch. 11; 16;)

Module 5

Faith within the bounds of Reason; Kantian epistemology
The collapse of foundationalism & the rise of skepticism;

Main reading: Wood (ch. 6); Alister McGrath (ch. 4;5;) Kant (selections from Religion within the Bounds of Reason – digital format)
Recommended reading: Brown (ch. 17;18) Grenz & Olson (20th Century, ch. 2);

Module 6

Hegel’s concept of Spirit; Reason and History
The rise of modern historical consciousness. Critical thinking, history and Hermeneutics;

Main reading Wood (ch. 7); G. Ille (selections from Hermeneutical Explorations of Agency as Prolegomena for a Theological Epistemology) – provided in digital format);
Recommended reading: Grenz & Olson (20th Century, ch. 2); Hegel (selections in digital format)

Module 7

Hermeneutics, Post-modernity and Theological method. Critique of totality and critique of method. Is Epistemology outdated?

Main reading: Grenz & Franke (Beyond Foundationalism, ch. 1;Part II); G. Ille (Hermeneutical Explorations, selections)
Recommended reading: Nancey Murphy (ch 4);

Module 8
A return to Kant? Overtones of Kant in Modern theology; Neo-kantianism and Post-Hegelian Kantianism; Neo-orthodoxy.
Regulative ideas vs. mystery. A look at Eastern Orthodox thought;

Main reading: Paul Ricoeur, Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation (in Essays); G. Ille (selections Hermeneutical Explorations, selections); Murphy (Part I); Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 3);
Recommended reading: Alan Torrance (ch. 5); Adina Davidovich, Religion As a Province of Meaning: The Kantian Foundations of Modern Theology (Harvard Theological Studies)

Module 9

Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology. Story and History. Metaphor, Narrativity and Concept;

Main reading: Wood (ch. 21); Paul Ricoeur, Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties in Paul Ricoeur, Figuring the Sacred; Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 9); Murphy (ch. 5); Recommended reading: George Stroup (The Promise, Part 1);

Module 10

Christ & Culture. Theological method and cultural appropriation. Contextual theology and Ideology; Liberation theology; Black/Hispanic theology; Feminist theology;

Main Reading: Murphy (ch 5); Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 7);
Recommended reading: Richard Niebuhr (Christ & Culture); Leonardo Boff (Introducing Liberation Theology); Anne M. Clifford (Introducing Feminist Theology, ch. 1);

Module 11

Critique of ideology and post-critical reason; Theology and Metaphysics; Pannenberg’s rational theology;

Main reading: Larry Wood (ch. 18; 22); Pannenberg (Systematic Theology, vol. 1 ch. 1;4); G. Ille (selections)
Recommended reading: Pannenberg (Metaphysics).
Module 12

Trinitarian Theology and Theological Method; A proposal; The universal - particular dialectic; Is Trinitarian theology speculative?
Main reading: Grenz & Franke (Beyond Foundationalism, ch. 6); G. IIle (Hermeneutical Explorations - selections)
Recommended reading: Schwobel (Trinitarian Theology Today, ch. 6); Gunton (The Promise, ch. 1;5);

Module 13

Theology and modern science. Toward a new conception of truth; (Michael Polanyi; Thomas Kuhn;)
Main reading: Wood (ch. 17); Murphy (ch. 6); G. IIle (selections)
Recommended reading: Ted Peters, (Theology and Natural Science, pp. 649-665); Polanyi (Personal Knowledge);

Module 14

Wesley’s Theological method; Continuing Wesley’s heritage in the post-modern context;
Main reading: Donald Thorsen (Wesley’s Quadrilateral)

Obtaining Library Materials and Reference Assistance

Email: Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu
Toll-Free Reference Help Line: 1-866-454-2733

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local libraries, if possible. However, library services are always available to students through Asbury’s B. L. Fisher Library. All requests for books and journal articles should be e-mailed to the Reference Desk (ATS_Reference@asburyseminary.edu). The Reference workers (Hannah, Robbie, and Nina) will also assist ExL students with reference requests, using various online databases, or doing research on a specific topic.

To request material from the B.L. Fisher Library, begin by searching the library catalog (for books available in the library) or one of the restricted journal
databases available on the library's website
(http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library - choose “library catalog” or “restricted
databases”). Then send an email to the reference desk citing the sources that
you would like to request. If you need help searching the databases, do not
hesitate to call (1-866-454-2733) or email the reference desk. Students who live
within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Wilmore campus should come
to campus to obtain their materials.

Please allow 5-10 business days for all requests to be filled. ExL students are
billed for the cost of photocopies (5 cents per page); however, shipping via
media rate is free. (Media rate normally takes 5 business days for shipping, but it
can take two weeks to addresses in the West). Express mail services (prices
vary according to weight) and scanning (10 cents per page in pdf format) are
also available. Requests generally require 1-2 business days to be processed.
Plan ahead and make your requests early enough to allow for shipping and
processing!