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ST 501 Method and Praxis

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METHOD AND PRAXIS IN THEOLOGY

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 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.

Wesley once said to his preacher that the study of logic was the single, most important study next to the Bible if they were going to understand the Bible properly and to preach it effectively. This class is similar to a course in logic because its purpose is to help students develop the categories necessary for understanding the theological implications of the Word of God. If the Bible is to be understood in a thoughtful and practical way, theological method is helpful because it is like a tool that enables the Scriptures to be user-friendly as we study and interpret them for our day.

Praxis is an important component of this course. As a technical term, praxis means applying method to the concrete formulation of doctrine. What does it matter if one has a good method but does not develop an understanding of doctrine? We will examine a number of theologies, showing how various methods influenced the way theology is developed.

Learning Goals

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

Describe how classical Greek/Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;

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.

Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;

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);
Identify the keypoints in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;
Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

**Texts and Reading Assignments**

1. L. Wood, *God and History, The Dialectical Tension of Faith and History in Modern Thought* (Emeth Publisher, 2004). Learning to think theologically assumes that one has a basic grasp of the substantive issues in theology. This means one must be acquainted with the way that theology has been done since the earliest days of Church history. Because the key methodological issue of Christian theology is related to its historical claims, the focus of this work is on the relationship of faith and history, as it was specifically developed in modern thought. This work was written specifically for this new core course.

2. L. Wood, *Theology As History and Hermeneutics, A Post-Critical Evangelical Conversation with Contemporary Theology* (Emeth Publisher, 2004). There are many competing theological alternatives in the contemporary world, presenting evangelical thought with a challenge on how to learn from them while remaining true to the Scriptures. This work will introduce students to the representative theologians and movements of the 21st century. The uniqueness of evangelicalism is its commitment to the authority of Scripture, while at the same time being willing to dialog with opposing points of view in order to learn how to relate the enduring message of the Bible in today's world.

3. Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1990). This is an excellent work on Wesley's methodological assumptions. Asbury Theological Seminary is a confessional school of theology. Although we do not think that all schools ought to be confessional, the founding fathers decided Asbury would be established primarily to train students in the Wesleyan tradition and hence we have chosen to be confessional. Thorsen is a distinguished alumnus of Asbury, and his work on Wesley's methodology will introduce the student to the distinctive features of the Wesleyan way of doing theology.
Team Assignments and Weekly Schedule

- Each student will be assigned to a different team folder each week so that everyone will have some interaction with all other students throughout the semester. Please find your weekly team assignments in the TEAM FOLDER SCHEDULE.

- Each student will answer all the assigned interactive questions for each weekly module. The approximate amount of word-response for each question will be specified in the weekly interactive assignments.

- Each student will offer a brief reply to each and every team member’s response to the interactive questions, highlighting the salient points of his/her answers to the assigned interactive questions.

- The answers to the questions must be posted by Thursday midnight and the replies to each other must be completed by Saturday noon. The purpose of the questions and discussions is to encourage students to develop their understanding of the material and to interact with it in a critical and constructive manner. It is important that no one fall behind because tardiness affects everyone else and may negatively affect one’s grade. If you will be late for any week, notification should be given to the professor ASAP.

Hours per Week

The ATS catalog specifies that “students in masters level courses at the Seminary will normally expect to invest two and one-half (2.5) to three (3.0) hours of work per week outside of class in preparation for every hour of credit to be earned.” (See catalog section entitled “Academic Information,” subsection, “Preparation”). For a three-hour class on-campus, this would be seven and one half to nine hours per week, plus three hours inside the classroom, for a total of ten and one-half to 12 hours total hours per week. For an online three-hour course, the total amount time (including online interactivity) should not exceed 12 hours per week. Normally a three-hour class will have approximately 1200 – 1400 pages of assigned readings. Because of the challenging level of subject material, this course has fewer pages. The total amount of reading is approximately 730 pages, plus an additional 200 pages in collateral reading, for a total of 930 pages.

Grades

The final grade will be based on test performance. An “A” is 90–100, “B” is 80–90, “C” is 70–80, “D” is 60–70. The two tests will be objective type of tests with only one correct answer for each question.
The weekly interactive assignments are a basic requirement in order to receive credit for the course. Late and/or omitted submissions may result in a grade reduction.

**Weekly Schedule**

First Week (June 1)—*God and History*, pp. 1-50  
Second Week (June 7)—*God and History*, pp. 51-102  
Third Week (June 14)—*God and History*, pp. 103-170  
Fourth Week (June 21)—*God and History*, pp. 171-230  
Fifth Week (June 28)—*God and History*, pp. 231-308  
Sixth Week (July 5)—**First Test** over *God and History* (must be completed by midnight, July 9). I recommend that you get the test done early in the week so that you will not be squeezed with the rest of the assignment for this week.  
Sixth Week reading assignment—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. vii-xii, 1-26.  
Seventh Week (July 12)—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. 27-60  
Eighth Week (July 19)—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. 61-104  
Ninth Week (July 26)—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. 105-152  
Tenth Week (August 2)—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. 153-196  
Eleventh Week (August 9)—*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, pp. 197-242  
Twelfth Week (August 16)—**Second test** over *Theology as History and Hermeneutics* must be completed by midnight, August 17)  
Twelfth Week Reading Assignment—Thorsen, *Wesley’s Quadrilateral*  
Thirteenth Week—Thorsen, *Wesley’s Quadrilateral*