ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

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Asbury Theological Seminary- ExL Campus
ST501 Method and Praxis in Theology – Spring 2008
3 units of credit

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

Online Section Descriptions and Communication guidelines:

The Virtual Classroom is built upon the open-source Moodle platform. By logging into http://virtual.asburyseminary.edu you will have access to this course and be able to collaborate with participant-colleagues and me throughout the course. The following are functions with which you should familiarize yourself:

1. The **Course Information Center** contains many features to be used throughout the semester:
   a) **Course News and Announcements**, where I will post items important for the entire class;
   b) **Syllabus**, where a copy of the syllabus is provided;
   c) **To Professor**, which is a way for you to post a message directly to me and we can discuss an issue privately;
   d) **Course Questions**, which is a public forum where you can publicly post any questions you have regarding the course so others may see your message and respond. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the schedule, the assignments, or anything else that may be of interest to other participants and me you should post it to the Course Questions Forum;
   e) **Prayer Forum**, which is a public forum where you can post prayer concerns and praises for all to see. This is a way for us to build community;
   f) **Open Forum**, which is a public forum where you can post anything that is not course-related for all to see. Examples include someone getting married, an upcoming birthday, discussions on
topics not course-related, etc. This is a way for us to build community.

2. **Modules**, which are located below the Course Information Center, will contain forums where group discussions will take place, documents or other files to download or view online, and assignment links where you will post your assignments to me. Modules will be clearly labeled so you can follow along during the semester.

3. **Resources**, a section located on the left side, provides links to items you may want to use often in the semester.

**Introduction**

Welcome to ST501XL! I’ve always enjoyed studying and teaching Theology. As I reflect upon the special nature of this on line course, I cannot help 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 anticipation 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 a hostile environment where people would not only laugh at such views but actively persecute those who held them, we somehow felt that we were not alone... As we were praying together, we felt we were connected with thousands of other Christians living at thousands of miles distance from us...

Communism is long gone now in Eastern Europe and we face new problems and challenges today. Many of you may, perhaps, wonder whether academic concern with theology, doctrine and method might eventually really help, in our task of proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel.

Alan Wolfe, a sociologist of religion opines in one of his recent books that doctrine no longer plays a significant role in the lives of ordinary Christians. Many Christians in North America today feel that doctrine and talk about method is often not only unnecessary but unproductive and ultimately divisive. In a number of mega churches today, ‘feeling is believing’ and the traditional language of Christianity tends to be replaced by motivational speeches and self-help exhortations.

While the Good News of the Gospel certainly brings about ‘peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’, it also confronts us with a radical intellectual option, that is supposed to articulate truth, name falsehood and lead to wise living. The Good News, the ‘Christian story’ certainly presupposes more than doctrine but is never less than that. Proclaiming the Gospel and building up the Church entails reflection and discernment since every time we delve into the Word of God, we enter a
different world and we hear a different ‘story’... (I mean, different than the prevalent consumerist ‘story’ of our time!)

God has spoken and continues to speak today. It is this ‘otherness’ of God’s speech that makes theological reflection productive! Christian Theology happens in this space opened up ‘in front of the text’, as we obediently respond to it in faith.

This course is concerned with the ‘how’ of this reflection (method) and with the actual ‘performance’ of men and women of faith that shaped the history of dogma in their particular historical context (praxis).

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**

**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 action 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 forums) 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 group to which you will be assigned. The specific details of your assignments and the concrete evaluation standards of your participation and interaction in the forums and in your groups will be spelled out in each module.

2) Send all class-related questions/answers to the appropriate forums unless otherwise instructed. Also, you may want to use the To Professor link 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 13 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 prevent 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 forums try to limit your message to 600 words.

6) In order to properly assess your participation in the class you need to use the forums.

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.

**Things you can expect from me:**

1) All the necessary materials and assignments will be available on-line, at 9 am (EST) 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 groups), 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 using To Professor.

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 forums and in the Individual groups. (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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4 = Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3 = Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2 = Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1 = Marginal work: minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 = Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 appropriate assignment link 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, *God and History*, EmethPublisher.Com  
Larry Wood, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, EmethPublisher.Com  

**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?).*

**Module 2**

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

Main Reading: Larry Wood (*God and History*, ch 1,2);
Recommended reading: Lindbeck (ch. 4); William Abraham (ch. 1, 2 and 5); 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. 3); Zizioulas (*The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution*) – article provided in digital format

Recommended reading: Colin Brown (ch. 5 & 6)

**Module 4**

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

Main reading: Wood (ch. 5); 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. 6,7); 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. 8); 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: Murphy ch. 4; Wood (*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*); Lyotard (The Post-modern Condition, selections);
Recommended reading: G. Ille (*Hermeneutical Explorations*, selections); Grenz & Franke (*Beyond Foundationalism*, Part I; Part II); Pannenberg, (Metaphysics and the Idea of God).

**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: Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 3); Paul Ricoeur, Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation (in Essays – digital format); Lossky (*Theology and Mysticism in the Tradition of the Eastern Church* (digital format)

Recommended reading: G. Ille (selections *Hermeneutical Explorations*, selections); Murphy (Part I); Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 3); 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 and Concept;
Main reading: Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 9); Murphy (ch. 5);
Recommended reading: George Stroup (The Promise, Part 1); Paul Ricoeur, Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties in Paul Ricoeur, Figuring the Sacred.

Module 10

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

Main Reading: Grenz & Olsen (20th Century, ch. 7); Wood (Theology as History and Hermeneutics);
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: Pannenberg ‘God’s presence in History’ (digital format); Wood (Theology as History and Hermeneutics);
Recommended reading: Pannenberg (Metaphysics); Pannenberg (Systematic Theology, vol. 1 ch. 1;4); G. Ille (selections)

Module 12

Trinitarian Theology and Theological Method; A proposal; The universal – particular dialectic; Is Trinitarian theology speculative?
Main reading: G. Ille (Hermeneutical Explorations – selections); Grenz & Franke (Beyond Foundationalism, ch. 6);
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.
Main reading: Wood (*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*); Murphy (ch. 6); G. Ille (selections)
Recommended reading: M. Polanyi (selections provided in digital format); Thomas Kuhn (summary of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*); 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: Wood (*Theology as History and Hermeneutics*); Chilcote (Re-imagining the Wesleyan Quadrilateral) provided in digital format; W. Abraham (Keeping up with Jones; On John Wesley’s conception and use of Scripture) provided in digital format; Donald Thorsen (*Wesley’s Quadrilateral*)

**ExL Contact Information:**

For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program**, contact Dale Hale:

ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu  
Phone:    (859) 858-2393

For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media** contact Information Commons:

Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu  
Phone:    (859) 858-2233  
Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

**Accessing Information Commons Materials:**

1. **General Questions:**  
   § The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here: http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information/hours

2. **Materials Requests:**  
   § To search the library catalog for available materials, click here: http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information  
   § ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary’s Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled.
Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.

§ ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

3. **Research Questions:**
   § ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

4. **Online Databases:**
   § To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to [http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information](http://www.asburyseminary.edu/information) and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0’s to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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