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ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

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SYLLABUS FOR ST501

Larry Wood, Professor

ST 501 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 preachers 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:

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 keypoints 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.

TEXTS AND REQUIRED READINGS

1. Donald Thorsen, The Wesleyan Quadrilateral (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), pp. 125-225. This is an excellent work on Wesley’s methodological assumptions. Asbury Theological Seminary is a confessional school of theology. Though 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. 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.

2. L. Wood, *Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Interpretation*. This manuscript will be made available online in each of the modules. 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, history, and hermeneutics. This work is being written specifically for this new core course.

**HERE ARE SOME “RECOMMENDED READINGS” THAT WILL OCCASIONALLY BE REFERENCED (Not required)**

5. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). This book is a study in the doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, incorporating contemporary perspectives as well as highlighting the classic tradition. Chapter 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 3-80) offer various methodologies for determining the meaning of Jesus’ personhood.
7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991). This is a helpful introduction to the relevance of systematic theology, emphasizing the importance of coherent models of reality that assist in understanding the Triune Faith of the Church.
9. L. Wood, “Does God the Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 56.2-57.1 (Fall 2001 – Spring 2002): 24-47. The concept of divine foreknowledge is a highly debated issue in contemporary philosophy and theology. Related to it are the implications of relativity physics and the big bang theory. Science and religion have always involved in tensions, and this article illustrates how the two disciplines interface with each other.

**INTERACTIVITY**

1. Each student is assigned to a team folder.
2. Members of the team will answer each of the interactive questions.
3. Each student will then offer a general reply to all team members, responding to their salient points and insights.
   a. Your replies to each other do not need to include a reply to each, individual answer. A general reply to each other is adequate.
   b. The answers should be posted in a timely manner because all members of the team are required to reply to each posting.
4. This interactive activity is a weekly assignment and should be completed by Friday midnight of each week.
5. The purpose of the small groups is to provide students with a structured opportunity to develop more fully their understanding of the issues.

Here is a suggestion for viewing the modules. Go to your menu in First Class, click on “view,” click “change view properties,” and select “name” for the “sort on” option. This will organize your files in the right order of sequence.

GRADE

For a grade of “C”—
1. Students will respond to the interactive questions in a timely and complete manner.
2. Each student will complete all the assigned readings and will notify the professor of having done so by the end of the semester:

For a grade of “B” or “A”—
1. Each student will do all the above requirements for a grade of “C.”
2. Each student will write an interpretative term paper on theological method and praxis (8 to 10 pages double spaced).
   a. It is assumed that each student knows the mechanics of a term paper. Please follow The Chicago Manual of Style. Be sure to organize the paper around a purpose statement with supporting documented sources.
   b. Each student should use at least three sources, which may include the assigned readings and texts for this course.
   c. An interpretative paper means students will develop their understanding of what theological method entails and what particular theological method they prefer. For example, if the student thinks that the idea of salvation history as understood by Cullmann is the best option, the student should explain why he/she think so. Or if one thinks narrative theology as practiced by Stanley Hauerwas is best, one will defend the reasons for this option.
   d. Praxis means how theological method informs the way doctrines are formulated. For example, if one espouses narrative theology, praxis refers to how narrative method leads one to believe specific things about God. In other words, praxis is one’s doctrinal understanding that results from theological method.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1
L. Wood, Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Evangelical Interpretation, Volume 1 (manuscript online). Weeks 1-5 are from this first volume.

Introduction

Part One
The Ancient and Pre-Modern Background
Chapter 1. The Emergence of Historical Consciousness And Critical Thinking

Mythical Thinking in the Ancient Near East
Nature-Spirit Distinction in Hebrew Thought
The Emergence of Critical Thinking in Greek Philosophy
The Socratic Method
Aristotle’s Concept of God as Self-Knowing Mind
Some Differences Between Plato and Aristotle
The Monism of Stoicism—The Philosophical Fusion of Subject and Object
Plotinus—Divine Oneness and Mystical Pantheism
The Contrasting Views of the Hebrews and the Greeks
Origen: A Synthesis of Christian Revelation and Greek Philosophy

Chapter 2. Athens or Jerusalem? The Academy or the Church?

The Chalcedonian Settlement and the Subject-Predicate Distinction in Aristotle’s Logic
Aristotelian Categories as an Explanation of Jesus’ Unity with God and Man
The Concept of Personhood in Trinitarian Theology
The Formulation of the Concept of Personhood

Chapter 3. The Invention of Scientific History

Greek Substantialism as Anti-Historical
The Contribution of Early Christian Theology to Scientific History
The Universal Concept of History in the Medieval Period
Humanistic Historiography of the Renaissance
The Modern Concept of Critical History

Week 2

Part Two
Epistemological Dualisms in Modern Philosophy

Chapter 4. Cartesian Historiography: The Beginnings of the Modern Historical Consciousness

Descartes: Methodological Skepticism
Pierre Bayle: Historical Positivism
Spinoza: Reason and History
Spinoza As The Founder of Biblical Criticism
Richard Simon: Faith vs. Historical Certainty

Chapter 5. The Logic of Probability and Individuality

Leibniz: The Concept of Historical Probability
Lessing: The Fallacy of Misplaced Necessity
Herder: The Categories of Individuality and Relativity
David Hume: From Probability to Skepticism
Truth: Subjective, Objective, or Dialectical?
CHAPTER 6. KANT: THE COMPREHENSIVE DUALISM OF MODERNISM

Kant’s Critical Philosophy and the Enlightenment Project
The Knowledge Box
History Excludes Divine Revelation by Definition
The Faith Box
The Refutation of Natural Theology
The Moral Argument for God’s Existence
God As A Regulative Idea

WEEK 3

CHAPTER 7. HEGEL: ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE AND WORLD HISTORY

Hegel’s Critique of Kant
The Objectivity of Truth
Is Hegel’s Philosophy a Pantheism?
Reason vs. Feeling—Hegel or Schleiermacher?
The Reconciliation of Reason and History, God and the World
Is Hegel’s Philosophy A Faithful Interpretation of Christianity?
Does Hegel Turn The Concept of God into An Abstraction?

CHAPTER 8. HEIDEGGER: TRUTH AS THE SELF-DISCLOSURE OF BEING

Overcoming the Subject-Object Split
Being and Dasein
A Hermeneutic of Dasein
Being, Historicity, and Temporality
Being and Truth
φυσιξ in Early Greek Thinking
λογοξ in Early Greek Thought
Heidegger and Contemporary Theology

WEEK 4

Part Three
Dualisms in Modern Religious Epistemology

CHAPTER 9. THE DUALISMS OF KIERKEGAARD

Thought and Being
Paragraph-Material and Existential Communication
Quantitative Approximation and Qualitative Dialectic
Faith and Knowledge
Eternity and Time, The Moment and The Historical
God and Humanity

CHAPTER 10. MARTIN KÄHLER: THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE HISTORIC CHRIST

CHAPTER 11. KARL BARTH: THE WORD OF GOD AND HISTORY
CHAPTER 12. RUDOLF BULTMANN: THE DIVORCE OF HISTORIE AND GESCHICHTE

CHAPTER 13. GERHARD EBELING: “PURE WORD” AND “MERE FACT”

WEEK 5

CHAPTER 13. WOLFHART PANNENBERG: A CRITIQUE OF THE NATURAL-SUPERNATURAL DUALISM OF MODERN THEOLOGY (END OF VOLUME 1)


Preface

PART FOUR
The Integration of Faith, History, and Hermeneutics

CHAPTER 1. BEYOND THE MODERN CONCEPT OF REVELATION

Jesus Christ As The Only Revelation
The Different Meanings of the Word of God
The Bible As A Witness to Revelation
A Critique of Barth’s Concept of Self-Revelation
Self-Revelation As Indirect Rather Than Direct
Story or History?

WEEK 6, WEEK 7

CHAPTER 2. THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD AND BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Fundamentalism and Biblical Literalism
American Evangelicalism and Biblical Inspiration
Pannenberg and Post-critical Evangelicalism
Historical Events and The Word of God
Form Criticism and The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration
N. T. Wright and The Historical Critical Method
The Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit

WEEK 8

CHAPTER 3. BEYOND THE MODERN CONCEPT OF SELFHOOD—A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY

John Macmurray: “The Failure of Modern Philosophy”
Paul Ricoeur: A Narrative-Based Ontology
Toward A Relational Ontology
Jean-Paul Sartre: Human Nature (Substance) or Human Condition?

CHAPTER 4. BEYOND THE MODERN CONCEPT OF TRUTH

Richard Rorty: A Critique of Modernism
Polanyi: A Post-Critical Philosophy
Jean-Francois Lyotard: A Critique of Metanarrative

CHAPTER 5. PANNEBERG’S THEOLOGY OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

Reality As History
Theology and The Historical Method
Pannenberg’s Theology of the Resurrection
The Historical-Critical Method and Jesus’ Resurrection

WEEK 9

CHAPTER 6. HISTORY AND HERMENEUTICS

Schleiermacher—The Psychologizing of Hermeneutics and Authorial Intent
Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason
Bultmann: The Pre-Understanding of Human Existence
The New Hermeneutic of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs
Pannenberg: The Integration of History and Hermeneutics

CHAPTER 7. PAUL RICOEUR’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

“To Believe Again”
Hermeneutic Phenomenology
Biblical Language As Poetic
Testifying Truth
A Hermeneutic of Revelation
The Autonomous Text, Not Autonomous Reason
A Reader-Response Theory of Interpretation
The Deconstructionism of Derrida
Transcending Postmodernism

WEEK 10

CHAPTER 8. POSTLIBERAL HERMENEUTICS AND NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

Theology As Realistic Narrative
The Cultural-Linguistic Approach
Stanley Hauerwas and Narrative Theology

CHAPTER 9. HERMENEUTICS, IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM, AND LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

Latin American Liberation Theology
Black Liberation Hermeneutics
Feminist Liberation Theology

WEEK 11

CHAPTER 10. MOLTMANN’S CONCEPT OF THE TRINITARIAN HISTORY OF GOD

Moltmann’s Multidimensional Model of Experience
The Perichoretic Unity of the Trinity
The Modern Concept of Person
Trinitarianism As Panentheism
The Panentheism of American Process Thought
The History of God
The Postmodern Relevance of Moltmann’s Doctrine of the Trinity

Week 12

CHAPTER 11. FAITH AND THE CRITERION OF TRUTH

Hermeneutics Replaces Epistemology
Canon and Criterion—William Abraham
Scripture As Canon or Criterion?
The Impasse Between Canon and Criterion
William Abraham or Kierkegaard?
Heniz W. Cassirer—A Personal Testimony

WEEK 13
WESLEY’S QUADRILATERAL
Assigned Reading:
Donald Thorsen, Wesley’s Quadrilateral, pp. 125-225.