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Introduction to Christian Theology

SAH-TH500, Fall Semester
September-December 2026
Tuesday 9 am-noon

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this course is to further reflective understanding and appropriation of major Christian teachings in loving engagement with God and the world in the context the contemporary global church with a view to pastoral practice. It treats principally central themes of Christian doctrinal reflection (e.g., revelation, scripture, Trinity, creation, sin, Christ, reconciliation, Holy Spirit, church and hope) as well as critiques and reformulations of the faith in the light of the ordered and sanctified components of Christian theological expression (Scripture, tradition, experience and reason). The goal of the course is doxological, formational and missional: to learn to love, praise and serve the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit for the reconciliation of all things.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

In completing this course, a student will be able to:

- (1) Describe and relate central doctrinal themes of the Church universal. Students will acquire fluency in the language surrounding sites of perennial Christian discussion in the West and the Majority world.
- (2) Differentiate between some major streams of Christian theological reflection. Students will be reading in different theological traditions and so acquire the ability to distinguish between them and to articulate what is at stake in their differences.
- (3) Deploy theological language to interpret, construct, challenge, reform and recontextualize. Students will acquire fluency in doctrinal language in order to interpret by means of it. First theological language is learned and then students will learn to interpret by means of this language for the sake of life that that is life. While theology is always written in a context and influenced by it, theological endeavour also seeks to depict what the context is; that is, to discern what God is doing and some shapes of faithful response at seminal moments.
- (4) Deliberately misread (reframe) challenges and opportunities in the light of the Gospel in the worship of the triune God, and the love of the neighbour and the world. Theology leads to doxology, edification of others and prophetic practice.

FORMAT:

This class meets for three hours a week over 11 weeks, week 7 is reading week and there is no class. The primary format will be interactive lecture and discussion of questions raised by the student's close reading of required texts.

EXPECTATIONS/EVALUATION:

- (1) Class attendance and preparation of all required reading **before** class.
- (2) A one-page summary of the material read for each class. This page should engage a theme that runs through the readings and raise at least one big question. **It is due for the class for which the material is read.**
- (3) A paraphrase of the Apostles' Creed of **six pages in length**. This paraphrase should work at unpacking the content of the creed, as though you were doing so in the context of an adult study group (or you can imagine yourself offering a description to an inquirer re. the general outline of Christian confession). It should draw on readings and class material and address **five major themes** of the course; a bibliography of at least five resources beyond class reading should be included.
Deadline: Friday, December 18, 2026
- (4) A creed of your own that summarizes in **six pages** what you believe about **five of the major themes** of the content of the course. These should be the same themes as you use in (3). Students will not be evaluated on the "correctness" of their expressions, but on the lucid, careful and consistent articulation of the elements of their "creed" as a work in progress. A bibliography of at least five resources beyond class reading, and beyond the extra five resources used in (3), should be included. You should also draw on assigned class reading. **Deadline: Friday, December 18, 2026.**

ONLINE COURSE:

This is a hybrid course. Online students will engage with the professor and class online using zoom. The zoom link will be uploaded to Populii for synchronous students and a link to the recording of the class will also be posted to populi for synchronous students following the class.

The daily assignments are due according to the schedule indicated on the course outline. They must be emailed to the professor at richardt@vst.edu before the live class begins – Tuesdays at 9 a.m. There is no assignment for the first class on September 15.

*In the place of class discussion **asynchronous students** will listen to the lecture portion of the class and provide a single page summary.

DEADLINES:

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the

dates specified in the syllabus for each course. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time will affect the final grade for the course. Two late assignments will result in a reduction of one letter grade for the course without legitimate excuse. Students registered for this course onsite, including all international students, are permitted no more than two absences. More than two absences will result in a loss of credit for the course.

Required Texts/Readings: The textbook is available online at Amazon and other places. It is your responsibility to secure a copy and come to the first class having read the readings for the day.

Rigby, Cynthia. *Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018 -referred to as HF in the course outline)

During the summer you should read:

Jenson, Robert. *A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Volf, Miroslav. *The Cost of Ambition: How Striving to be Better than Others Makes Us Worse*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2025.

These books will be available at online bookstores.

All other course readings, articles and chapters listed in the weekly reading, will be found on Populi – access codes are provided with course registration.

RECOMMENDED TEXT:

McKim, Donald. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Revised and expanded 2nd edition. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2014. (*This is an especially good resource since it provides short two or three sentence [not article length] definitions for theological terms). You will get great benefit from this resource for the whole of your theological education.

COURSE SCHEDULE/READINGS:

Week 1: September 15 - The Task of Theology

HF (*Holding Faith*), pp. xi-xxxv (Preface and Introduction).

Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport, “The Interpretative Challenge for Grace and Peace in the Global South: A Hermeneutical Perspective,” pp. 7-18. In *Emerging Theologies from the Global South*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2023).

Charles Mathews, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 1-27.

Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (University of NC Press, 1996), 44-60.

Week 2: Sept. 22 - The Meaning of Revelation

HF, 3-29, chapter 1.

David Ford. 'Types of Christian Theology,' 20-30. In *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Week 3: Sept 29 - The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture

HF, Chapter 2, pp. 31-68.

M.W.L. Moberly, *The Bible in a Disenchanted Age*. Baker, 2018, pp. 79-109.

Serene Jones. "Inhabiting Scripture, Dreaming Bible," pp. 73-80. *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*. Edited by William P. Brown. Westminster/John Knox, 2007.

Frances Watson. "Does Historical Criticism Exist?" pp. 307-18. *Theological Theology*. Edited by David Nelson, Darren Sarisky and Justin Stratis. T&T Clark, 2015.

Week 4: October 6- The Triune God

HF, chapter 4, pp. 107-137

Sarah Coakley, "Seeing God: Trinitarian Thought Through Iconography," pp. 190-248. In *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Week 5: October 13 - The Good Creation and Providence

HF, chapter 5, pp. 141-167.

Norman Wirzba. *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World*. Cambridge, 2021, pp. 212-254.

Week 6: October 20 - Humanity, Evil and Sin

HF, chapter 6, pp. 169-185.

Miroslav Volf. *The Cost of Ambition: How Striving to Be Better Than Others Makes Us Worse*. Brazos, 2025, 143-160.

Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic*. London: Faber and Faber, 2014, pp. 167-204.

Week 7: October 27 - Reading Week, NO CLASS

Week 8: November 3 - The Person and Work of Christ

HF, chapter 6 beginning at the heading, "Salvation and Atonement," pp. 185-201.

Robert Louis Wilken, "The Council of Nicaea and the Christian Creed," pp. 88-98. In *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*. New Haven: Yale, 2012.

Samuel Wells, *Constructing an Incarnational Theology: A Christocentric View of God's Purpose*, 244-281. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2024.

Week 9: November 10 - Christ, Context and Religious Pluralism

Teresa Okure SHCJ. "The Global Jesus," pp. 237-249. In the *Cambridge Companion to Jesus*. Edited by Markus Bockmuehl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Jules A Martinez-Olivieri, "Quien Vive Christo! Christology in Latin American Perspectives," pp. 80-100. In *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Christ and Reconciliation: A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, vol. 1. 381-407.

Week 10: November 17 - The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

HF, chapter 8 and chapter 10, pp. 231-255; 285-303.

Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *The Holy Spirit: A Guide to Christian Theology*. (Westminster/John Knox, 2012), pp. 1-28.

Week 11: November 24: Church, Proclamation, Ministry and Sacraments

HF, chapter, 7, pp. 205-229.

William Willimon, *Proclamation and Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, pp. 1-49.
Reinhart Hutter, "Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine," 206-227. In *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Edited by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass. Eerdmans, 2002.

Week 12: December 1 - Eschatology: Hope for this life and the next

HF, chapter 9, pp. 259-284.

David Ferguson, "Eschatology," pp. 226-244. In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. Edited by Colin Gunton. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.

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Reference Works:

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Bowden, John and Richardson, Alan. Editors. *Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*. 2nd Edition. Westminster/John Knox, 2003.

Ford, David. *The Modern Theologians*. 3rd ed. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 2005.

McKim, Donald K. Editor. *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.

_____. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996. (*This is an especially good resource since it provides short two or three sentence [not article length] definitions for theological terms).

Northey, Margot, Editor, et.al. *Making Sense: A Student's Guide to Research and Writing in Religious Studies*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012. **(The checklist for a good paper inside the front cover is worth the price of the book!)**

Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Webster, John B., Tanner, Kathryn and Torrance, Ian. *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Introductions, Thematic and General and Import Contemporary Work in Theology:

Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Translated with an introduction by D.W. Robertson, Jr. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1958.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Translated by Bromiley and Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960.

_____. *Dogmatics in Outline*. Translated by G.T. Thomson. London: SCM Press, 1949.

_____. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*. Translated by Grover Foley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963, pp. 63-73.

Brunner, Emil. *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption. Dogmatics, Volume 2.* Translated by Olive Wyon. London, 1952.

Bonino, José Miguez. *Room to Be People: An Interpretation of the Message of the Bible for Today's World.* Translated by Vickie Leach. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979, pp. 9-25 ("Only An Atheist Can be a Good Christian").

Brown, Robert McAfee. *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Cavanaugh, William, 'Freedom and Unfreedom,' pp. 1-32. In *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Chapman, Mark. *Anglican Theology (Doing Theology).* T&T Clark, 2012.

Coakley, Sarah, 'Seeing God: Trinitarian Thought Through Iconography,' pp. 190-248. In *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

_____. "Waiting for God – Feminist Christians and Contemplation." *Christian Century*, June 28, 2003.

Crawford, Matthew B. *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction.* Toronto: Penguin, 2015.

Davis, Ellen F. "The Soil that is Scripture," pp. 36-44. *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture.* Edited by William P. Brown. Westminster/John Knox, 2007.

Dulles, Avery, S.J. *Models of Revelation.* New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Ekem, John D. *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting.* Accra: Sonlife Press, 2005.

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Ferguson, David. 'Eschatology,' pp. 226-244. In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine.* Edited by Colin Gunton. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.

Ford, David F. *Theology: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford, 1999.

Frei, Hans. *Types of Christian Theology.* Edited by George Hunsinger and William Placher. Yale University Press, 1992.

Granberg-Michaelson. *Future Faith: Ten Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018.

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Guthrie, Shirley. *Christian Doctrine*. Revised Edition. Westminster/John Knox, 1994.

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Hanciles, Jehu J. *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.

Hart, David Bentley. *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Hayes, Richard B. "Reading Scripture in the Light of the Resurrection," pp. 216-238. *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Edited by Ellen F. Davis and Richard Hayes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Hooker, Morna D. "Chalcedon and the New Testament." *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine*. Edited by Sarah Coakley and David Pailin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

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Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017

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Moyse, Ashley; Maier, Harry; Topping, Richard. *Before Theological Study: A Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Approach*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2021.

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