

Richard R. Topping
Vancouver School of Theology
Office: 604-822-9808, Rm. 401
Email: richardt@vst.edu

Modern Reformed Theology: Where Did the Spirit Go?

TH6/750

January-April 2026

Thursdays 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

PURPOSE:

This course is designed to acquaint students with evolving theological expression of the Reformed Tradition in its 19th and 20th Century embodiments as it responds and interacts with the rise of modernity and late/post-modernity. Particular attention will be paid to person and work of the Holy Spirit in these developments.

Through the examination of theological expressions of central doctrinal loci (revelation, God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, eschatology, etc.), students will become familiar with (1) some theological threads and tensions within the Reformed tradition, (2) recognize and appreciate constructive resources and limitations of the Reformed tradition (3) gain some understanding of the roots of current theological discussion and conflict within the tradition and (4) observe the Holy Spirit the agent of the Reform of the Church at work.

Attention to the authority of scripture, the nature of 'critical' scripture interpretation, the role of experience in theological reflection, the relationship between faith and culture and faith and science, Christianity among the religions, social justice and care for creation as directed by the Spirit will be given in the readings, lectures and class discussion.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

TH 650

- 1) In completing this course a student will be able to:
- 2) Identify a range of doctrinal expression and ecclesiastical ethos that are Reformed.
- 3) Describe and assess particular theological reactions/responses that took place within the Reformed tradition in the 19th and 20th Centuries as attempts to accommodate, reject and/or critically appropriate new learning or cultural practice and awareness (e.g., the response to Darwin, biblical criticism, religious pluralism, women's rights, and environmental crises).
- 4) Deploy the resources of 19th and 20th Century Reformed Theology to illumine the dynamics of current doctrinal and ethical discussion in the life of Reformed and Anglican Churches.

- 5) Evaluate and engage with the evolving role of the Holy Spirit in ecumenical and reformed theology into the 21st century.

TH 750 (in addition to the above)

- 6) Critically assess secondary literature on 19th and 20th century Reformed Theology in the light of your reading of the primary sources.
- 7) (Modestly) recommend an irenic resolution to a matter of doctrinal conflict or tension in Reformed thought of the 19th and 20th century.

FORMAT:

This class meets once a week for three hours over eleven weeks. The primary format will be lecture and discussion based on the reading of the assigned texts. We will also listen to recordings of some of the theologians who are the topic of conversation in the course.

EXPECTATIONS/EVALUATION:

- 1) Class attendance and preparation of all required reading **before** class.
- 2) A single page each day which traces a theological theme or topic that runs through the assigned texts. This is **not** just a summary. It is an attempt to relate the readings to each other to note similarities and differences in how a particular doctrine is handled. The summary should take place under a thesis statement so that your page is essentially an argument that you prove in the summary of the texts read. **These single pages will be submitted at the end of the class for which they are prepared.** The criteria for evaluation are: does the summary show evidence of serious, attentive and imaginative engagement with the readings and is the argument persuasive?
- 3) A summary/research paper (10-12 pages) which is an elaboration of one of your summary pages after it has been submitted and commented on by the instructor. This paper should: (1) review each of the readings, briefly (2-3 pages); (2) compare and contrast at least two of the readings in greater detail (3-4 pages) and; (3) contain your own critical reflections (3 pages) and offer some sense of the import of the issue/theme for the current life and times of your denomination (2-3 pages). You ought to draw on at least 10 resources other than course readings for this assignment. The paper will be assessed on the basis of its use of primary and secondary resources, its clarity and fidelity of depiction and contrast and its constructive and elegant conclusions. See the bibliography at the end of the course outline for help with secondary resources. **Due Date: April 17 for Graduating Students .**

TH750 EXPECTATIONS/EVALUATION:

- 1) See Expectations 1-2 above.

- 2) Write a paper of between 15-20 pages that (1) summarizes Karl Barth's essay on Schleiermacher found in *From Rousseau to Ritschl*, pp. 306-354 (this essay is also found in Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 411-459); (2) evaluates aspects of its accuracy and fairness to Schleiermacher; and (3) proposes an irenic and imaginative resolution to the theological rift between Barth and Schleiermacher on the points you raise under (2). You will need to include a bibliography of between 15 to 20 entries. Your paper will be evaluated based on accuracy of review, depth of critical engagement and elegance of resolution. A number of resources relevant to this exercise can be found in the bibliography. **Deadline: April 17 for graduating students, April 24 for other students; May 22 for Advanced Degree Students (not graduating).**

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 may affect the final grade for the course.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Stroup, George. *Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology*, Vol. II, *Contemporary Trajectories 1799-Present*. Westminster/John Knox, 1993. (order at amazon or other online book seller. Used copies are available).

COURSE SCHEDULE/LECTURE TOPICS AND READINGS:

Class 1: Introduction and Overview (January 22, 2026)

Reading (TH650): RR, pp. xxi-xxx; Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 1-13, 40-82, Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, pp. 1-15.

Reading (TH750): RR, pp. xxi-xxx; Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 1-82, Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, pp. 1-15.

Optional helpful background reading:

Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, pp. 1-29. Berkhof walks the reader through the thought of Kant in a way that illumines the theological project of Schleiermacher in the next chapter.

Hugh Ross MacKintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth*, pp. 1-30.

MacKintosh offers an important and reliable early twentieth century depiction of the philosophical and theological climate of modernity.

William Placher, *A History of Christian Thought: An Introduction*, pp. 237-254. This is a basic and quite readable overview of the late 18th century intellectual context of Christian theology.

John Vissers, *The Neo-Orthodox Theology of W.W. Bryden*. Princeton Monograph Series, pp. 1-26. This piece of historical theology locates the constructive efforts of Walter Bryden, a Canadian Presbyterian Theologian, within the dominant thought world of the time.

Class 2: Concerns and Methods of Theology (January 29, 2026)

Reading (6/750): RR, pp. 1-48. Placher, *The Triune God*, pp. 83-118; Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, chapter VII, sections 1-5, Book 3, chapter 1, sections 1-4.

Class 3: The Doctrine of God (February 5, 2026)

Reading (650): RR, pp. 49-102 and Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, pp. 30-52.

Reading (750): RR, pp. 49-102; William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, pp. 1-17, 181-215 and Dawn DeVries, "The Living God: The Problem of Divine Personality in Reformed Theology," *Reformed Theology for the Third Christian Millennium*, pp. 61-81.

Class 4: Creation and The Human Condition (February 12, 2026)

Reading (6/750): RR, pp. 103-140; Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, 137-156; Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion*, pp. 176-203.

Class 5: The Person and Work of Jesus Christ (February 19, 2026)

Reading (650): RR, pp. 141-178; James Dunn, "Toward the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology, 3-26, in Welker, ed. *The Work of the Spirit*.

Reading (750): Reading: RR, pp. 141-178; James Denny, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pp. 233-285; Leanne Van Dyk, "Toward a New Typology of Reformed Doctrines of Atonement," *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, 225-238.

Class 6: The Holy Spirit (February 26, 2026)

Reading (6/750): RR, pp. 179-196; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, pp. 87-95 (Becoming Spiritual Persons), 126-136 (Faith as Knowledge and Trust), 441-460 (The Spirit's Means of Grace: Proclamation).

Reading Week: March 2-6, 2026

Class 7: The Christian Life (March 12, 2026)

Reading (6/750): RR, pp. 197-241 (Regeneration and Sanctification); Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 485-507; Mateus, *Reformed World*, vol. 56:3, *The Grace that Shaped their Lives* (September, 2006), Nicholas Wolterstoff, "The Grace that Shaped my Life," pp. 251-264; Dominique Roulin, "AIDS, My Life as a Woman Pastor, Theology," pp. 269-271; Julio de Santa Ana, "On being a Protestant Theologian in those Years in Latin America," pp. 272-283; Young-Bock Kim, "My Minjung Theological Journey," pp. 308-315.

Class 8: The Church (March 19, 2026)

Reading (650): RR, pp. 243-296; Thiselton, *A Shorter Guide to the Holy Spirit*, pp. 99-109; Alan D. Falconer, "Word, Sacrament, and Communion: New Emphases in Reformed Worship in the Twentieth Century," *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. L. Vischer, pp. 141-158.

Reading (750): RR, pp. 243-296; Allan Sell, "The Ecumenical Vision," *A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic Theology: The Contribution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1875-1982*, pp. 112-130; Alan D. Falconer, "Word, Sacrament, and Communion: New Emphases in Reformed Worship in the Twentieth Century," *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. Vischer, pp. 141-158.

Class 9: Politics, Society and Culture (March 26, 2026)

Reading (650): RR, pp. 297-344; John de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1- 46. Allen, "The Spirit as Breadth," pp. 103-117 in *Naming the Spirit: Pneumatology Through the Arts*, ed. Taylor and Train.

Reading (750): RR, pp. 297-344; John de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 1- 46; Ford, *Modern Theologians*, 706-735.

Class 10: Eschatology (April 2, 2026)

Reading(6/750): RR, pp. 345-366; Thiselton, *A Shorter Guide to the Holy Spirit*, pp. 125-134; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, pp. 691-730.

Class 11: The Future of Reformed Theology and Practice (April 9, 2026)

Reading (6/750): From *Toward The Future of Reformed Theology*, (1) Nobuo Watanabe, "Reformed Theology in East and West," pp. 39-57, (2) Edmund Za Bik, "The Challenge to Reformed Theology: A Perspective from Myanmar," pp. 75-86; Jürgen Moltmann, "Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda," pp. 120-135; *Hope and Possibility Report*, Presbyterian Church in Canada, June 2025.

We will watch online the following in class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c44AU4hZsh0>.

This recording from November 9, 2022 is about the “The Global Impact of the Reformed Faith.” Panelists include: Dr. Yudha Thianto (Calvin Theological Seminary) on Indonesia, Dr. Jean Gomes (Discipleship Pastor, First CRC Byron Center) on Brazil, and Rev. Sam Ha (Calvin Theological Seminary) on South Korea.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Select Bibliography:

- Barth, Karl. *The Library of Philosophy and Theology*. Edited by John McIntyre and Alasdair MacIntyre. *From Rousseau to Ritschl*. London: SCM Press, 1959.
- *Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*. Translated by John Vriend. General Editor, John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- *Berkhof, Hendrikus. *Two Hundred Years: Report of a Personal Journey*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- *Busch, Eberhard. *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*. Edited and Translated by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Crisp, Oliver. *Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Theology*. Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010.
- *De Gruchy, John W. *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- De Gruchy, John W. General Editor. *The Making of Modern Theology: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Theological Texts*. Series includes Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Tillich, Barth, Harnack, Reinhold Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer, et. al. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- *Denny, James. *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917.
- *DeVries, Dawn. “The Living God: The Problem of Divine Personality in Reformed Theology.” In *Reformed Theology for the Third Millennium: The 2001 Sprunt Lectures*. Edited by B.A. Gerrish. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003.
- Dillenerger, John and Welch, Claude. *Protestant Christianity: Interpreted Through Its Development*. New York: Scribner, 1954.
- Duke, James O. and Streetman, Robert F. Editors. *Barth and Schleiermacher: Beyond the Impasse?* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- *Falconer, Alan D. “Word, Sacrament, and Communion: New Emphases in Reformed Worship in the Twentieth Century,” pp. 141-158. In *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*. Edited by Lucas Visser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Fergusson, David. Editors. *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*. Chichester, U.K.; Malden, Mass. : Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

- *Ford, David F. and Muers, Rachel. Editors. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Ford, David F. *Theology: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Frei, Hans W. *Types of Christian Theology*. Edited by George Hunsinger and William Placher. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Gerrish, Brian A. *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Reprint edition. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007.
- Grenz, Stanley J. and Olson, Roger E. *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1992.
- Hauerwas, Stanley and Willimon, William. *The Holy Spirit*: Nashville, 2015.
- Hendry, George. *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*. Philadelphia, 1961.
- Heron, Alasdair. *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible in the History of Christian Thought and in recent Theology*. London, 1983.
- Kaemingk, Matthew, editor. *Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for Life in the World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Kenny, Philip. *Twentieth Century Theologians: A New Introduction to Modern Christian Thought*. I.B. Tauris, 2010.
- *Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. Translated by Henri DeVries. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900.
- *Livingston, James. *Modern Christian Thought. Volume 1: The Enlightenment and The Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.
- Livingston, James; Fiorenza, Francis Schussler; Coakley, Sarah; Evans, James H. *Modern Christian Thought. Volume 2: The Twentieth Century*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.
- *MacIntosh, Hugh Ross. *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth*. London: Gilmour and Dean, 1937.
- *Mateus, Odair Pedroso. Editor. *Reformed World. Volume 56:3 (September 2006), The Grace that Shaped Their Lives*. (Various Reformed Theologians reflect on theology in their Christian Life).
- McGrath, Alister. *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution – A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First*. New York: Harpers, 2007.
- McGrath, Alister. Editor. *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- McKim, Donald K. Editor. *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.
- Noll, Mark A. Compiler and editor. *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983.

- *Nyomi, Setri. Editor. *The Legacy of John Calvin: Some Actions for the Church in the 21st Century*. Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Church and The John Knox Internatinonal Reformed Center, 2008.
- Pauck, Wilhelm. *The Heritage of the Reformation*. Revised and Enlarged edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- *Pauw, Amy Plantinga and Jones, Serene. *Feminist and Womanist: Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006.
- Peterson, Cheryl, M. *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life: The Spirit's Word For, In and Through us*. Grand Rapids, 2024.
- *Placher, William C. *A History of Christian Thought: an Introduction*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983.
- *Placher, William C. *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996.
- _____. *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology*. Louisville, 2007.
- Pradervand, Marcel. *A Century of Service: A History of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1875-1975*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- Quash, Ben. *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit*. London, 2013.
- Rogers, Eugene F. Jr. *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West*. Grand Rapids, 2005.
- *Sell, Alan P.F. *A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic Theology: The Contribution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1875-1982*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Schwarz, Hans. *Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Smart, Ninian, Editor, et. al. *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*. 3 Volumes. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Smith, Aaron. *A Theology of the Third Article: Karl Barth and the Spirit of the Word*. Minneapolis, 2014.
- Smith, James K.A. and Olthuis, James H. Editors. *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- *Stroup, George. *Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology. Volume 2: Contemporary Trajectories 1799-Present*. Westminster/John Knox, 1993.
- Thiselton, Anthony. *A Shorter Guide to the Holy Spirit: Bible, Doctrine, Experience*. Grand Rapids, 2016.
- Taylor, David O. and Train, Daniel, eds. *Naming the Spirit: Pneumatology Through the Arts*. Downers Grove, 2025.
- Vissers, John. *The Neo-Orthodox Theology of W.W. Bryden*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006.
- Welker, Michael. *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*. Grand Rapids, 2006.

- Welch, Claude. *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century. Volume 1, 1799-1870. Volume 2, 1870-1914.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 1985.
- Wells, David. Editor. *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- *Willis, David and Welker, Michael. Editors. *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Williams, Robert R. *Schleiermacher The Theologian: The Construction of the Doctrine of God.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.
- Yong, Amos. *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education after Pentecost.* Grand Rapids, 2020.
- Zahl, Simeon, *Pneumatology and Theology of the Cross in the Preaching of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt.* London, 2010.
- Zahl, Simeon. *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience.* Oxford, 2020.

*Indicates that at least portions of the book will be read for class.