

## **ST 6130: Contemporary Theology**

### **Dr. Michael Allen**

This course offers in-depth analysis of significant works in contemporary theology. Students will gain experience in engaging primary sources in modern theology capably as well as familiarity with broader trends, texts, movements, cultural issues, and pastoral concerns that have shaped theology in recent times.

#### *Instructor*

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Feel free to contact me whenever needed (preferably via email). When in doubt about protocol or anything regarding class material, write and ask. Also, feel free to stop by my office whenever the door is open.

#### *Textbooks*

Michael Allen (ed.), *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). ISBN 9781108840446.

All other readings will be provided on Canvas in PDF format.

#### *Requirements*

##### 1. Reading

Reading must be completed before the class in which it is to be discussed. Class discussions will focus on readings, so you must be prepared to talk.

Theology is an activity done largely through the process of good reading. Read carefully. Read charitably. Read with others. Read with the expectation that you will learn from others, even when you disagree with their main point. Read even when a text is dense and difficult, for you will learn perseverance and fortitude here. Read that which seems trite and obvious, asking how others might object or criticize. Most importantly, read because God was willing to reveal himself in written words, and because we can best witness to God's grace with corresponding words. Read because words matter in God's economy of grace.

This class is a reading course. The bulk of your work circles around careful reading. Focus your time and efforts on reading.

##### 2. Reading Briefs

Students are expected to prepare two briefs each week (on the assigned chapter from *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* and on the other essay assigned). The purpose of the briefs is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of that text, as well as to state one's own analysis of it (in the form of questions, confirmations, objections, etc.). Briefs may include quotations from various points in the text (so long as page numbers are referenced).

Briefs should be no more than 350 words. They should be written in complete sentences and edited carefully.

Students are to bring a printed copy of their assigned briefs to class each week and to upload the document to Canvas by class time.

### 3. Class Presentation

Students will be assigned responsibility for a doctrinal topic. They will read the related chapter to that doctrine in *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*. They will identify and read another major book (ideally one cited or referenced in that *NCCCD* chapter) on that subject as well as a range of major academic book reviews of that book. They should gain approval from the instructor for their selection. They will then present a succinct, 1-2 page brief on that book's contribution to recent study of that topic, providing hard copies for the entire class.

### 4. Final Paper

Students will write a final paper on a major topic, theme, figure, or debate in contemporary theology (i.e. the last 50-75 years). Students are expected to discuss their subject with the professor and will be guided to gather bibliography and to develop an outline. They will then present a synopsis of their work in progress for group discussion. Presentations will occur in our final week of class. All papers are to be uploaded on Canvas by 11:00 a.m. on May 10.

### *The Grading Structure*

Grades will be assessed as follows:

Reading Briefs	40%
Student Presentation	20%
Final Paper	40%

The grading scale can be found in the Academic Catalog. As laid out in the catalog, a "B" is the work normally expected of a student. An "A" is given for someone who consistently outperforms expectations, and a "C" is given for persons who only minimally and occasionally meet expectations. Read the Academic Catalog to see what grades reflect.

### *Academic Honesty* (adapted from Dr. Timothy Phillips of Wheaton College)

1. The assignments are designed to extend and deepen your comprehension and appreciation of Christian theology and to increase your facility with theological

method. The processes of defining a topic, researching the results of others' studies, critiquing those studies, and organizing your conclusions in a clear and cogent presentation provides valuable skills for your various leadership ministries. The use of sources is an essential step in appropriating the learning of the Church's tradition in its relationship to cultures to help us understand and faithfully practice Scripture.

2. Using information obtained from a source without indicating it (whether by footnote, parentheses, or bibliography or some other appropriate reference, depending on the type of assignment) is plagiarism (intellectual thievery and lying). This applies to **any** information that you gain from someone that is not “common knowledge.” It does **not** apply **only** to exact quotations or precise verbal allusions. Altering the wording does **not** remove the obligation to acknowledge the source.
3. Cheating is the presentation of someone else’s work, which the student ought to have done personally. This includes submitting answers to test questions derived by some means other than that intended by the instructor. It also includes turning in written assignments composed in whole or in part by someone else.
4. Cheating or plagiarism results, at minimum, in the disqualification of that unit of the course affected. A student caught plagiarizing or cheating will forfeit that project. A second offense will result in the forfeiture of the course. Punishments may be more severe than the minimum depending upon the specific situation.

#### *Computer Policy (Modified from Dr. Alan Jacobs of Baylor University)*

Computers, tablets, and smart-phones are not allowed in class. Think I’m over-reacting? Think you’re a master of multitasking? You are not. No, I really mean it. How many times do I have to tell you? Notes taken by hand are almost always more useful than typed notes, because more thoughtful selectivity goes into them; plus there are multiple cognitive benefits to writing by hand. And people who use laptops in class see their grades decline — and even contribute to lowering the grades of *other people*. Also, as often as possible you should annotate your books.

Note that, in light of this policy, you will need to bring your textbook as well as any other materials (your brief and the PDFs from Canvas) to class in hard copy.

#### *Further Resources*

For wider survey of the contemporary scene, I suggest making use of John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2007). ISBN 9780199569649. A spate of volumes in the Cambridge Companions to Religion and Oxford Handbooks of Religion are also useful to glean the state of the question in various fields of theology.

#### *Course Schedule*

Our class time each week will involve three things: working through major theological movements, student presentations on the state of the discussion regarding pertinent doctrines, and seminar discussion of significant essays.

*Week 1: February 6*

Lecture: Feminist Theology (NCCCD, ch. 11)

Presentation: The Triune God (NCCCD, ch. 1)

Seminar: Otto Herman Pesch, *The God Question in Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther*

*Week 2: February 13*

Lecture: Theological Interpretation of Scripture (NCCCD, ch. 12)

Presentation: Creation and Providence (NCCCD, ch. 2)

Seminar: John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

*Week 3: February 20*

Lecture: Radical Orthodoxy (NCCCD, ch. 13)

Presentation: Humanity (NCCCD, ch. 3)

Seminar: David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis" (in *Theology Today*)

*Week 4: February 27*

Lecture: Public Theology (NCCCD, ch. 14)

Presentation: Israel (NCCCD, ch. 4)

Seminar: Rowan Williams, "Doctrinal Criticism: Some Questions" (in *The Making of Orthodoxy*) and David Yeago, "The New Testament and Nicene Dogma: Toward the Recovery of Theological Exegesis" (in *Pro Ecclesia*)

*Week 5: March 5*

NO CLASS

*Week 6: March 12*

Lecture: Disability Theology (NCCCD, ch. 15)

Presentation: Christ (NCCCD, ch. 5)

Seminar: Michel Rene Barnes, "de Régnon Reconsidered" (in *Augustinian Studies*) and Kristin Hennessy, "An Answer to de Régnon's Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of 'His' Paradigm" (in *Harvard Theological Review*)

*Week 7: March 19*

NO CLASS

*Week 8: March 26*

Lecture: Black Theology (NCCCD, ch. 16)

Presentation: Atonement and Sin (NCCCD, ch. 6)

Seminar: Bruce McCormack, "Grace and being: The role of God's gracious election in Karl Barth's theological ontology" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*)

*Week 9: April 2*

Lecture: Pentecostal Theology (NCCCD, ch. 17)

Presentation: Holy Spirit (NCCCD, ch. 7)

Seminar: Kathryn Tanner, “Jesus” (in *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*)

*Week 10: April 9*

Lecture: Analytic Theology (NCCCD, ch. 18)

Presentation: Holy Scripture (NCCCD, ch. 8)

Seminar: A. N. Williams, “Mystical theology redux: The Pattern of Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*” (in *Modern Theology*)

*Week 11: April 16*

Lecture: Apocalyptic Theology (NCCCD, ch. 19)

Presentation: Church and Sacraments (NCCCD, ch. 9)

Seminar: John Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology” (in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*)

*Week 12: April 23*

Lecture: Reformed Catholicity (NCCCD, ch. 20)

Presentation: Eschatology (NCCCD, ch. 10)

Seminar: Vincent Lloyd, “What Love Is Not: Lessons from Martin Luther King, Jr.” and William Cavanaugh, “Love as a Habit: A Response to Vincent Lloyd” (in *Modern Theology*)

*Week 13: April 30*

Lecture: Ressourcement Thomism (NCCCD, ch.21)

Seminar: Sarah Coakley, “Recasting ‘systematic theology’: gender, desire, and *théologie totale*” and “Doing theology ‘on Wigan Pier’: why feminism and the social sciences matter to theology” (in *God, Sexuality, and the Self*)

*Week 14: May 7*

Seminar Presentations of Final Papers

*May 10*

Final Paper Due (11:00 a.m.)



### Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Contemporary Theology  
Professor: M. Allen  
Campus: Orlando  
Date: Spring 2024

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes	Rubric	Mini-Justification
<i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes. *As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>	<p>➤ Strong</p> <p>➤ Moderate</p>	

		➤ Minimal ➤ None	
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Weekly writing as well as final paper. Classroom discussion each week.
<b>Scripture</b>	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Minimal	Engagement of contemporary readings of Scripture.
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Engagement of contemporary versions of Reformed theology in readings and discussions.
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Discusses holiness and vocation in modern world.
<b>Desire for Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Addresses contextualization and questions of secularism in modern world head on.
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Offers Reformed commentary, learning from but also critically assessing, sources outside and inside the Reformed tradition.
<b>Preach</b>	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Addresses theological framework for contemporary ministry/preaching but not task itself.
<b>Worship</b>	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Minimal	Addresses theological framework for contemporary ministry/liturgy but not task itself.
<b>Shepherd</b>	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	Addresses theological framework for contemporary ministry/shepherding but not task itself.
<b>Church/World</b>	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Weekly engagement of how doctrines have related to wider cultural issues in the modern world.

