

Reformed Theological Seminary/Jackson
01ST5355 Systematic Theology Foundations Syllabus (MAC)

Dr. Ligon Duncan

Fall 2025 Monday, 1:00pm – 4:00pm Central Time

Course Description

From the RTS catalog: “This course is designed for counseling students. It will provide a basic introduction to Christian doctrine.” We will expound and apply Christian truth with a view both to your personal faith and practice, as well as your professional practice. In introducing Christian doctrine, you will gain familiarity with and competence in thinking theologically and practically about the rule of faith and rule of love. We will survey the doctrines of **Scripture** (inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, clarity, necessity, canon); **theology proper** (God, Trinity, creation, providence); **anthropology** (man, Fall, sin); **Christology** (the person and work of Christ); **soteriology** (salvation, the application of redemption); **ecclesiology** (church, means of grace); and **eschatology** (last things), following the outline of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and *Catechisms*. All along we will remember the crucial nexus between faith and life, doctrine and practice, and thus endeavor to stress the importance of these doctrines for Christian thought, life, ministry, and in particular, professional counseling.

Required Materials:

***The Holy Bible** – The ESV or NASB recommended. **The ESV Study Bible** (Crossway) comes with an impressive array of features (and free access to numerous online resources).

***The Westminster Confession of Faith** (WCF), and **Larger** (LC) and **Shorter Catechisms** (SC) (Banner of Truth, 2018). The Confession should be brought to class with your Bible every day. There are other good editions too. The PCA and OPC editions are also available online for free, but you should have a print copy to read, mark, underline, highlight and reference.

*Ligon Duncan, *Westminster Confession Study Guide*, 2020. [This document is attached to your syllabus & available in Canvas]

*Supplemental Readings - Other readings will be assigned and provided over the course of the semester.

Suggested Preparatory and/or Supplementary Study Resources

These books are NOT required reading, but they will help you theologically before, during and after the course and would be good companions and resources for the rest of your life and service. I’m recommending them to you, especially if the field of systematic theology is relatively new to you.

***Louis Berkhof**, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Banner of Truth, 1960). This abridgement of Louis Berkhof’s much larger *Systematic Theology* is a great overview of the subject and will match up well with our class lectures.

***Charles Octavius Boothe**, *Plain Theology for Plain People* (Lexham, 2017). Born a slave, Boothe became an influential African American Baptist minister, establishing and pastoring the First Colored Baptist Church in Meridian, MS and the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL (where MLK would later pastor).

***Sinclair Ferguson**, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Banner of Truth, 2013). Sinclair is an old friend, and one of RTS’s most renowned professors. He is a very good writer and one of the best theologians alive. Especially on the doctrine of sanctification (e.g., *The Whole Christ*, Crossway; *Devoted to God*, Banner of Truth; *Devoted to God’s Church*, Banner of Truth), you want to read everything he has written.

***Bruce Milne**, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, 3rd edition (IVP Academic, 2012). Bruce Milne is a longtime Baptist pastor in Vancouver, Canada. This is a good, clear, solid, basic introduction to theology.

***Donald Macleod**, *A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine* (Christian Focus, 2010). Macleod is a master of making difficult things seem simple, without compromising their profundity. I studied under Macleod at Edinburgh. He is a world class theologian with a pastor’s heart and a journalist’s pen.

***J.I. Packer**, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Zondervan, 1994). This will introduce to many of the technical terms and basic content of systematic theology. It will be a helpful reference to you.

***J.I. Packer**, *Knowing God* (IVP, 1973). This book will help you appreciate the application of good doctrine in Christian life and experience. See also the study outline provided for the book at LigonDuncan.com

***Chad Van Dixhoorn**, *Confessing Our Faith: A Reader’s Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth, 2014). Chad is arguably the world’s leading expert in the Westminster Assembly (he did groundbreaking work on it in his now published Cambridge PhD thesis. This is the best modern commentary.

Other Recommended Advanced Materials:

***Herman Bavinck**, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Eerdmans, 1956). Also available reprinted as *The Wonderful Works of God* (Westminster Seminary Press, 2020). We are living in the age of new and heightened interest in and appreciation for Bavinck (1854-1921), but his *Reformed Dogmatics* is 4 Volumes, 3024 pages, 756,000+ words, and would take you north of 50 hours to read. This work is an abridgement (see, I'm looking out for you).

***Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology* New, Combined Edition (Eerdmans, 1996). Still the standard for orthodox, 20th century American Reformed theology. Berkhof distills Bavinck for you. It's still a sizable volume, but worth it as a life-long reference work.

***Eric Johnson**, *God and Soul Care: The Therapeutic Resources of the Christian Faith* (IVP Academic, 2017). Dr. Fesko had you get this for ST535 Theological Foundations for Counseling last year. It may prove helpful in the application of this course.

Course Objectives

My prime aim is to move you to know and love God more and better, by your getting to know what he says about himself and his will in his Word, the Scriptures. I want to motivate you to want to glorify God with your lips and lives, because you have come to a deeper understanding of his truth. I also want help you to think soundly about how your Christian faith, and the truth of the Bible, informs your vocation and practice. To this end, I hope to assist you in gaining a competent basic grasp of the content and issues involved the various areas of theology that we cover, and a facility to communicate and apply them with some fluency.

This is a course in systematic theology—concerned with the answer to a series of interrelated questions: What does the entire Bible teach on a specific issue? How have theologians and churches of the past and present formulated this issue? How do I apply this truth in the present in my life and to my practice? Systematic Theology is inherently practical. William Perkins once famously said: “Theology is the science of living blessedly forever” (*The Golden Chaine* (1590), 1). If that is this case, and it is (!), then good theology ought to have a lot to say to you about what it means to live blessedly, and how to help others do so too.

By the end of this course students will:

1. Understand the basic shape and content of Christian doctrine.
2. Understand the biblical sources of basic Christian doctrine.
3. Gain competence in engaging primary and secondary theological sources.
4. Be able to relate Christian faith to life and practice, especially the practice of counseling.
5. Be more competent in thinking through and applying the therapeutic implications of Reformed doctrine.

Theological Standpoint

The course will be taught from the standpoint of a personal and ecclesial commitment to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In particular, it reflects the theology of the Reformed tradition as expounded by its best representatives from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries. We will engage in our theological work, seeking to submit all our thinking to Scripture, but greatly indebted to (for instance) the Church Fathers, Calvin, Protestant Orthodoxy, the Scottish Divines, and the Princetonians, and in conversation with the best and most important of the whole Christian tradition. Students who do not come from this theological tradition, or who disagree with it, need to know that their professor will love and respect them anyway! He wants to serve them well by clearly, kindly and warmly articulating systematics from the standpoint of classical, confessional, Reformed theology. It is his opinion that evangelicals of all stripes are well served by familiarity with the Reformed theology—which is Protestantism's preeminent intellectual theological tradition. We all come from some theological perspective, and that is best admitted out loud and put on the table for all to see.

Teaching/Class Methodology

Lectures will cover all the major topics, but *I want us to be as interactive as possible in the classroom*. Your ability to be comfortable answering theological questions and articulating theological truth is a major objective of the course, hence class discussion is very important.

Course Assignments

Reading, Quizzes, Class Participation (30% of course grade): Reading must be completed before the class in which it is to be discussed; students must be prepared to discuss the assigned readings for the day thoughtfully and graciously in class. See the class schedule for due dates and the participation rubric for further explanation of this assignment. Note:

Students will also be assessed weekly via Canvas on their assigned readings. Class participation means attending and actively participating in lectures & class discussions. Here's the grading rubric for that:

A (100)	B (89)	C (79)	D (69)	F (59 – 0)
Provided many good ideas for Class consideration; inspired others; Clearly Communicated desires, ideas, questions, and comments. Was respectful of others.	Participated in discussions; shared questions and comments. Was respectful of others.	Listened mainly; occasionally asked a question or offered a comment. Was respectful of others.	Seemed bored with discussions; rarely spoke up, and questions or comments were off topic. Was disrespectful of others. Or, dominated class time by not permitting others to ask their questions.	Failed to attend class—missed more than three lecture periods total.

Application Paper (35% of course grade): *How Doctrine Informs My Counseling*. You will write a ten-page application paper, taking a particular doctrine studied in the course and exploring its application to your counseling. For instance, “How the doctrine of justification by grace informs my counseling” or “How the doctrine of God’s providence informs my counseling.” Your topic must be approved. You will need at five solid secondary theological sources and five application/counseling sources. You will briefly explain/articulate doctrine, show it from the Scriptures, and then apply it to your counseling work, indicating how it may be useful in a variety of situations and also addressing potential misapplications. More instructions forthcoming.

Final Oral Exam (35% of course grade). Students will schedule a half hour time slot with the professor, and answer questions that cover the range of topics surveyed in the course. Some of the questions will stress your knowledge of the course content, while other questions will assess your ability to apply the content.

Course Outline and Assigned Reading

The student should read the indicated portions of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*, and the Study Notes that Dr. Duncan has attached to the syllabus, prior to the time Dr. Duncan expounds those portions in class. **The class will meet from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm Central Time.** The class schedule is as follows:

Monday, August 25 – Class #1 (About Holy Scripture - Course Outline 1.1-1.10)

Class Hour 1 - Who we are and why we are here
 Class Hour 2 - The Bible
 Class Hour 3 - The Bible

Monday, September 8 – Class #2 (About God, and The Trinity - Course Outline 2.1-2.3)

Class Hour 4 - Who is God?
 Class Hour 5 - What is God like?
 Class Hour 6 - What is the Trinity?

Monday, September 15 – Class #3 (About God's Eternal Decree - Course Outline 3.1-3.8)

Class Hour 7 - God is in charge of everything (including evil), but isn't to blame for anything
 Class Hour 8 - God is in charge of everything, but human choices and actions are real and free
 Class Hour 9 - God is in charge of everything, but what we do matters

Monday, September 22 – Class #4 (About Creation - Course Outline 4.1-4.2; About Providence - Course Outline 5.1-5.7; About the Fall of Man, of Sin and of its Punishment - Course Outline 6.1-6.6)

Class Hour 10 - God made everything; and made human beings, male and female, in His image
 Class Hour 11 - God rules over absolutely everything and everyone, for His own glory
 Class Hour 12 - Human beings messed up everything

Monday, September 29 – Class #5 (About the Fall of Man, of Sin and of its Punishment - Course Outline 6.1-6.6; About God's Covenant with Man - Course Outline 7.1-7.6; About Christ the Mediator - Course Outline 8.1-8.8)

Class Hour 13 - What is the nature of sin?

Class Hour 14 - God's covenant as His plan from the beginning and as His answer to our sin

Class Hour 15 - Christ as our Savior from sin

Monday, October 13 – Class #6 (About Christ the Mediator - Course Outline 8.1-8.8; About Free Will - Course Outline 9.1-9.5; About Effectual Calling - Course Outline 10.1-10.4)

Class Hour 16 - The Biblical Testimony to Jesus' Divinity

Class Hour 17 - Human Freedom

Class Hour 18 - Divine Calling

Monday, October 20 – Class #7 (About Justification - Course Outline 11.1-11.6; About Adoption - Course Outline 12.1; About Sanctification - Course Outline 13.1-13.3)

Class Hour 19 - Justification

Class Hour 20 - Sanctification

Class Hour 21 - Adoption

Monday, October 27 – Class #8 (About Saving Faith - Course Outline 14.1-14.3; About Repentance - Course Outline 15.1-15.6; About Good Works - Course Outline 16.1-16.7)

Class Hour 22 - Faith

Class Hour 23 - Repentance

Class Hour 24 - Good Works

Monday, November 3 – Class #9 (About the Perseverance of the Saints - Course Outline 17.1-17.3; About Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Course Outline 18.1-18.4; About the Law of God - Course Outline 19.1-19.7)

Class Hour 25 - Perseverance

Class Hour 26 - Assurance

Class Hour 27 - God's Law

Monday, November 10 – Class #10 (About Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience - Course Outline 20.1-20.4; About Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day - Course Outline 21.1-21.8; About Lawful Oaths and Vows - Course Outline 22.1-22.7)

Class Hour 28 - Christian Freedom

Class Hour 29 - Christian Worship

Class Hour 30 - Vows

Monday, November 17 – Class #11 (About Civil Government - Course Outline 23.1-23.4; About Marriage and Divorce - Course Outline 24.1-24.6; About the Church - Course Outline 25.1-25.6)

Class Hour 31 - Christians and Government

Class Hour 32 - Marriage and Divorce

Class Hour 33 - The Church

Monday, November 24 – Class #12 (About the Communion of the Saints - Course Outline 26.1-26.3; About the Sacraments - Course Outline 27.1-27.5; About Baptism - Course Outline 28.1-28.7)

Class Hour 34 - Communion of the Saints

Class Hour 35 - Sacraments

Class Hour 36 - Baptism

Monday, December 1 – Class #13 (About the Lord's Supper - Course Outline 29.1-29.8; About Church Discipline - Course Outline 30.1-30.4; About Synods and Councils - Course Outline 31.1-31.4; About the State of Men after Death, and the Resurrection of the Dead - Course Outline 32.1-32.3; About the Last Judgment - Course Outline 33.1-33.3)

Class Hour 37 - Lord's Supper

Class Hour 38 - Church Discipline and Government

Class Hour 39 - Last Things

Contact Information

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Assisting me to facilitate this course will be my TAs:

William Skinner (email: wskinner@fpcjackson.org)

George Herndon (email: georgeh@fpcjackson.org)

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas in pdf format. The TAs above are available to answer questions for you about logistical matters related to the course.

Policies and Important Information

All written work must conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style, if applicable. If a student does not have a copy of the APA manual, one should be purchased, or accessed via the RTS Library, or students may use one of the many APA style websites available online (e.g. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>). Assessment will include how well students represent their thoughts on paper, craftsmanship in writing, and organization of all written work.

Disability Accommodation Policy. If you require a special adaptation or accommodation to participate fully in this course, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss your request. You must provide a letter from the Dean of Students that verifies your disabled status. Last minute special requests will be subject to the same late assignment policy as other students.

Access to Research Database. RTS provides MAC students with access to the Ebscohost Psychology & Behavioral Science Collection of full text journal articles. You can access this collection from computers in the library, or from your home computer by following the link below and logging in with a username and password to be provided in class. <http://search.ebscohost.com/>

Late work. All assignments are due as scheduled regardless of attendance, unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Assignments turned in late will be deducted 1/3 letter grade for each late day.

Anonymity. All written assignments and exams should be identified by the last six digits of your Self-Service id number and NOT by your name. Anonymity permits more objectivity in grading.

Return of work. All work returned to students will be available in the MAC Office. Any work not collected by the first full week of the next semester or term will be shredded.

Grading Scale (per the RTS catalog):

A (97-100)	B- (86-87)	D+ (75-77)
A- (94-96)	C+ (83-85)	D (72-74)
B+ (91-93)	C (80-82)	D- (70-71)
B (88-90)	C- (78-79)	F (Below 70)

Attendance Policy. Regular attendance is expected and required. Excessive absences (more than 3 class meetings) will result in the loss of points equal to one letter grade per absence. If serious illness or an emergency prevents a student from attending any class, please notify the instructor before the class begins. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain any materials handed out or presented during the missed class from a classmate.

Class Participation. Students are expected to participate in all components of the class. Each student is expected to read all of the assigned materials in advance for each class. Contributions should reflect knowledge of the reading assignments.

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

Computers, tablets, and smart-phones are not allowed to be used during class (unless special accommodation is sought and granted). 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. Computers must be used, of course, for the online requirements of the class (submission of assignments, quizzes, etc.).

Course Objectives Related to MAC* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST5355 Systematic Theology Foundations * Professor: Ligon Duncan * Campus: Jackson * Date: Fall 2025

<u>MAC* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u> Strong Moderate Minimal None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<i>In order to measure the success of the MAC 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 MAC outcomes.</i>			
Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice	Understands and applies the basic knowledge needed to be an effective counselor including: the history and philosophy of counseling, ethical standards of practice, personal career development, advocacy for clients, consultation & collaboration, and a Reformed, biblical and theological framework for counseling.	<i>Moderate:</i>	<i>This course equips students with the theological framework necessary to function effectively as Christian counselors trained in the Reformed tradition.</i>
Social & Cultural Diversity	Understands and demonstrates how living in a cultural/global society affects clients who are seeking counseling and clinical mental health services, as well as the effects of sin such as racism, discrimination, sexism, and oppression on one's own life and career and those of the client.	<i>Moderate:</i>	<i>The doctrine of sin is a major topic in this course. Our discussion in this course will focus on equipping Christian counselors to think biblically about sin—especially its universality (in counselor and client) and various effects (individually and corporately)—and its implications for the practice of counseling.</i>
Human Growth & Development	Understands and applies knowledge of various theories of individual and family development, and factors affecting human development.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Career Development	Understands and applies theories and models of career development, counseling, and decision making.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Counseling & Helping Relationships	Understands and applies theories and models of counseling, strategies for understanding and practicing consultation, and developing relevant counseling treatment and intervention plans.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Group Counseling & Group Work	Understands and applies theories and models of group counseling and group work, dynamics of the group process and development, and therapeutic factors that contribute to group effectiveness.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Assessment & Testing	Understands and applies clinical knowledge effectively, including various models and approaches to clinical evaluation and their appropriate uses.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Research & Program Evaluation	Demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate research through a biblical worldview and integrate it into counseling practice. Understands the process of program evaluation and its integration into the practice of counseling and clinical mental health counseling.	<i>Significant:</i>	<i>This course equips students with the theological framework on which a Reformed biblical worldview rests, devoting significant attention throughout to the proper use of various kinds of sources under the Reformed category of common grace.</i>
Clinical Mental Health Counseling	Demonstrates the knowledge and skills necessary to address a wide variety of circumstances within the context of clinical mental health counseling.	<i>Minimal</i>	
Integration (Biblical/Theological)	Knowledge of and integration of Reformed, biblical and theological concepts with counseling practices.	<i>Significant:</i>	<i>This course equips students with the basic biblical and theological concepts students need to practice an integrated and distinctly Christian counseling ministry.</i>
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the triune God.	<i>Significant:</i>	<i>This course is taught from the perspective that theology, as a knowledge of God, must be approached as a spiritual devotion of love to God, and strives to stir the students to love God through a knowledge of God and his world.</i>