

RTS

O R L A N D O



HYBRID COURSE SYLLABUS

02ST5250/01 ST: Ecclesiology and Sacraments

Dr. Mark I. McDowell

Winter 2026

PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME: Mark McDowell, Ph.D.

EMAIL: mmcdowell@rts.edu

PHONE: 214.295.8599

COURSE DATES

COURSE DATES: 28th November – 13th February, 2026

ONLINE DATES: 1st December, 2025 – 9th January, 2026

IN CLASS DATES: 12th January – 16th January, 2026

COURSE COMPLETION DATE: 13th February, 2026

COURSE OVERVIEW

DESCRIPTION:

Systematic Theology III explores the doctrines of Scripture from a systematic perspective. Topics include ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church) and the sacraments (the doctrines of baptism and the Lord's Supper).

In this class we will consider questions regarding the nature of the Church, how the Church is an essential part of God's saving work in the world, the principles of how the Church is ordered, and how those principles unfold in the sacraments specifically and ministry generally. My goal as you instructor is for you to understand both the logic and the beauty of the Church and how God's manifold wisdom is displayed through it in the life of the local church.

GOALS:

- *Comprehension*
 - To increase your knowledge of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the Church
 - To increase your knowledge of the sacraments, with specific reference to the doctrines of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- *Competence*
 - To sharpen your ability to read, think, and write about systematic theology with clarity and perception
 - To sharpen your ability to think synthetically about how various theological topics relate to one another
- *Character*
 - To grow in your faith, growing in confidence in the ordinary means of grace and the Spirit's work in the Church
 - To grow in your hope, more perceptively longing for Christ as the Gospel is proclaimed in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper
 - To grow in your love, better appreciating God's faithfulness as demonstrated in His work in the Church

COURSE DETAILS

1. GRADING SCHEDULE.

Late work will be penalized 1 letter grade per day, unless prior permission for late submission was granted.

The published RTS grading scale is used in this course. See the Catalog, page 48.

Final grades will be calculated off of the following weights: Westminster Catechism Memorization - 10%; Reading Briefs and Discussion Posts - 50%; Final Research Paper - 40%.

2. ATTENDANCE AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS.

Attendance and prepared participation is required. If class is not attended, the student's final grade will be affected. Late assignments are reduced 1 letter grade per day.

3. SPECIAL NEEDS.

In order to ensure full class participation, any student with a disabling condition requiring special accommodations (e.g. tape recorders, special adaptive equipment) is strongly encouraged to contact the instructor before the beginning of the course.

4. ACADEMIC HONESTY (QUOTED AND ADAPTED FROM DR. TIMOTHY PHILLIPS OF WHEATON COLLEGE).

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.

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.

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.

Cheating or plagiarism results in the immediate failure of the entire course. Further disciplinary action may be taken as well.

5. OFFICE HOURS:

While the nature of the Hybrid class limits the ability for our interaction with one another, it is my desire to be available to you and to answer your questions. I welcome interaction on Canvas once the online portion of the class begins, and the teaching assistant and I will do our best to answer your questions. These questions will also be helpful for me as I prepare lectures for the week in January so that I can craft our time together to focus on important and relevant topics.

Once our week together begins, I am hoping to be present and on campus for much of our time together. While I understand that these weeks are quite full for you and you may not have much bandwidth for further discussion, I am nonetheless happy to make time for further discussion and questions outside of our time together. In particular, I hope to be present (with a few exceptions for other obligations) for common meals and would love to gather with groups of you. In particular, this may allow for conversation about the pastoral application of the doctrines we will be discussing together. This will allow discussion about the ecclesial application of the ideas we'll discuss, which may be one of the ways I, as a full-time pastor, may be most helpful to you. Also somewhat selfishly, I have no doubt that your questions and our conversations will sharpen my own thinking and practice as well. Gathering in groups gives us the further benefit of allowing us to continue to learn the various voices and perspectives that might be present in a group. I will also have limited availability for personal appointments - please contact me directly if you desire this.

6. DISCLAIMER.

This syllabus is intended to reflect accurately the learning objectives, instructional format and other information necessary for students to appraise the course. However, the instructor reserves the right to modify any portion of this syllabus as may become necessary.

7. SUPPORT:

Canvas allows you to interact with Dr. Sherrard or his teaching assistant via the Inbox function.

Canvas also allows for interaction with classmates. You can interact with classmates via the Student to Student forum or Conferences.

See FAQ on the Home Page or at Modules > Course Resources for instructions on various Canvas features.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

LECTURES

During the initial weeks of study online, students will listen to recorded lectures (Accessible via the RTS Mobile App or through RTS Global's online postings). The weekly lectures will be specified on Canvas.

READING

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. (The previous is adapted from Michael R. Allan.)

The following books are required:

Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (eds.), *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), pages 311-338, 339-362. ISBN 9780801048944.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 Edition). We will read select portions: bk. 4, chs. 1-4, 8-10, 12, 14-17.

The ideal edition is published by Westminster John Knox Press, edited by John T. McNeill, and translated by Ford Lewis Battles (ISBN 9780664220280). You only need volume 2 of this 2 volume set. The translation by Henry Beveridge is also acceptable and published by Hendrickson (ISBN 978-1598561685).

Do not purchase abridged versions or editions from years other than the 1559 edition. They will not have anything like the same text.

Howard Griffith, *Spreading the Feast: Instruction and Meditations for Ministry at the Lord's Table* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2015). ISBN 9781629951768.

Gregg Strawbridge, ed., *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), pages 1-285. ISBN 9780875525549.

Johannes Polyander, “On the Civil Magistrate,” Disputation 50 in *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, vol. 3, ed Harm Goris (Leiden: Brill, 2020). Available from professor.

Supplementary PDF readings will be available on Canvas and will be required (as noted).

READING BRIEFS

Students will brief one chapter from each week's reading (as specified by the instructor). Students are expected to prepare a brief on particular chapters read (as specified on Canvas). The purpose of the brief is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of that chapter, 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 chapter (so long as page numbers are referenced). Briefs should be no more than 350 words.

The purpose of the brief is to force you to *slow down your reading* and to trace the argument of a particular essay or section of a longer text. In the act of re-articulating and responding to a text, your own comprehension of it will expand. This is a form of a practice that has been a part of the training of ministers of the Gospel in the Church for centuries. The goal is not to “master” the text by summarizing it, but to begin to apprentice ourselves to those who are ahead of us in the faith - how they read Scripture and how they reason.

Briefs will be submitted on the discussion board.

RESEARCH PAPERS

Students will write a research paper on one topic discussed in class readings or lectures. The student will demonstrate familiarity with major literature and will show competence in dealing fairly with that material. The paper should be 3000-3500 words. It will be submitted on Canvas by February 12.

Final papers will be docked for poor grammar and style. Edit carefully. Read and re-read what you have written. Ministry involves communication, so you should hone your speech even as you learn theological substance.

I highly recommend that you read your paper backwards, sentence by sentence. This will force you to see that each sentence has a subject and predicate, that they agree, etc.

Do not go over the word limit for any written assignments. I assign a particular length to be followed by all. A good thinker will have more information than can be said in the limit, but a good writer will be able to distill and shorten. I will stop reading your work when it reaches the word limit. If you keep going, I will toss this out and read your paper as if it has no conclusion (something which will certainly lower your grade).

DISCUSSION POSTS AND REPLIES

Students will post a common place reflection from that week's lecture each week. The post may be a single paragraph, including a quote or paraphrase, that reflects on something of significance to the student. The student will then respond to a follow up question.

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM MEMORIZATION

Reformed Theological Seminary requires students to memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism as a part of its curriculum. Whereas before that requirement was a single unit, it is now being distributed throughout the entire curriculum. **For Systematic Theology 3, you will memorize WSC 91-97.** You will be assessed through an online tool that will be made available on the class's Canvas page. More specific instructions will be found on the Canvas page. You will need to complete this by **February 6th**.

COURSE SCHEDULE

INITIAL ONLINE SCHEDULE

Week of 1st December

- Lecture Topic: Introduction to Ecclesiology
- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+sn5y7sv
- To be read: Michael Allen and Scott Swain (ed.), *Christian Dogmatics*, chs. 14, 16; Calvin, *Institutes*, book IV, chs.1-4
- Brief Allen and Swain, chapter 14
- Discussion Post: Personal Introduction & Reply

Week of 8th December

- Lecture Topic: Principles of Ecclesiology
- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+8q7k6vm
- To be read: Calvin, *Institutes*, book IV, chs. 8-10; Polyander, "On the Civil Magistrate"
- Brief Calvin, book IV, ch. 8
- Discussion Post & Reply

Week of 15th December

- Lecture Topic: Principles of Ecclesiology, Continued
- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+c3j2vbm
- To be read: Allen and Swain, chapter 15; Calvin, *Institutes*, book IV, ch. 12
- Brief Calvin, book IV, ch. 12
- Discussion Post & Reply

Week of 22nd December

Lecture Topic: Introduction to the Sacraments

- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+374v2q2
- To be read: Calvin, *Institutes*, book IV, chs. 15-16; Strawbridge, chs. 1-5
- Brief Calvin, book IV, ch. 15
- Discussion Post & Reply

Week of 29th December

- Lecture Topic: Baptism
- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+6ghkhcb
- To be read: Strawbridge, chs. 6-13
- Brief Strawbridge, ch. 10
- Discussion Post & Reply

Week of 5th January

Lecture Topic: The Lord's Supper

- To be listened: https://subsplash.com/reformtheosem_copy/learn-about-rts/mi/+wn9bh46
- To be read: Calvin, *Institutes*, book IV., ch. 17; Griffith, *Spreading the Feast*
- Brief Griffith, ch. 1 (“Theology”)
- Discussion Post & Reply

HYBRID WEEK SCHEDULE

Class meets January 9-13 from 1:00-4:00 p.m. We will take short breaks roughly every hour.

Monday, January 12

Topic: The Doctrine of the Church: Its Marks, Its Notes, and Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Considerations

Tuesday, January 13

Topic: The Doctrine of the Church: Order and Government, Church and State

Wednesday, January 14

Topic: Baptism

Thursday, January 15

Topic: The Lord's Supper

Friday, January 16

Topic: The Church's Mission and its Ministry

FURTHER READING

Explore the relevant sections on the Church and the Sacraments in classical systematic theologies (e.g. Calvin, Turretin, Bavinck, à Brakel, Bannerman, Hodge, Barth, Berkouwer). Earlier catechetical or theological treatises may not be systematic theologies per se, but they provide a foundation for such later volumes: see for example Cyprian of Carthage's writing on the church or the Anti-Donatist writings of Augustine. See Introduction to Dogmatic Literature document (available in course resources section on Canvas) for further annotated bibliography.

Explore the relevant sections on Church and Sacraments in the numerous confessional document written during the Reformation era. James T. Dennison, Jr.'s *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* is an excellent compilation of these documents, and it contains over 100 confessional documents written between 1523 and 1693.

Explore the relevant exegetical or homiletical discussions of key texts for each of these doctrinal topics as they have been explored through the Christian tradition (e.g. commentary or homilies developed on 1 Corinthians or 1 Peter [doctrine of the Church], 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, John 6, or the Last

Supper accounts of the Gospels [the Lords' Supper], Genesis 17 or Acts 2:30 [for infant baptism]. Pay special attention to classical exegesis and/or to contemporary engagement that involves what is often referred to as theological interpretation of Scripture or theological exegesis (including but going beyond bare historical and linguistic analysis).

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: 02ST5250

Professor: Sherrard

Campus: Orlando

Date: Winter 2023

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <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.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	1. Students submit 3000-3500 page research paper. 2. Students engage with the articulation of the authors of the Great Tradition.
Scripture	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.)	Moderate	Students will learn the biblical basis of the doctrine of the Church and the sacraments.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Students will engage with specifically Reformed doctrines of ecclesiology, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Students will consider wise pastoral application of the doctrines that are taught in the class.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Students will consider how Reformed ecclesiology forms mission and cultural engagement.

Winsomely Reformed	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.)	Moderate	Students will engage with other ecclesiological (church government, leadership) and sacramental (credo-baptist, memorialist, etc.) positions.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	There will be some consideration of how Reformed ecclesiology is taught in the congregational context.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Moderate	There will be consideration of how a Reformed understanding of ecclesiology and the sacraments leads to certain decisions in worship forms, leadership, and planning.
Shepherd	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	There will be consideration of how students can apply the principles of Reformed ecclesiology in the shepherding of the local congregation.
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Minimal	There will be discussion of the nature of the mission of the Church.