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# ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

Paul N. Markham

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**Asbury Theological Seminary**  
**ST501X – Method and Praxis in Theology (Summer 2008)**  
**3 units of credit**

Paul N. Markham, PhD  
Adjunct Professor of Philosophical Theology  
Email: [paul.markham@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:paul.markham@asburyseminary.edu)  
Phone: 270.792.4542  
Online office hours: TBA

**This is a DRAFT syllabus – Rev. 23 May 2007**

## **Prerequisites**

There are no academic prerequisites for this course. The only technological requirement is familiarity with the Moodle online course environment.

## **Course Description**

This is an introductory course relating method to practice in theology. This course will involve an examination of different ways in which the Christian tradition has understood the sources, norms, and criteria for the development of church doctrine. Special attention is given to a critical analysis of contemporary theological methods and the influence of post-modern science. The connection between theological method and Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of divine revelation, will serve as the foundation for developing an Evangelical/Wesleyan theology in the postmodern world. This class is designed for beginning students, and it serves as preparatory study for all course offerings in theology and doctrine.

## **Course Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek/Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology.
2. Sketch, in broad terms, the development of the canonical heritage of the Church and draw out the appropriate theological implications.
3. Describe, again in broad detail, the manner in which the Church has undertaken doctrinal development.

4. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy.
5. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith.
6. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern).
7. Identify the key points in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism.
8. Articulate the significance of narrational methods for grasping the biblical story in its fullness.
9. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method.
10. Articulate the relation between various methods and Wesley's methodological commitment to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
11. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Method and Praxis in Theology! The goal of this brief welcome is to introduce myself, the class, and what we hope to accomplish through our time together.

I grew up on a dairy farm in Simpson County, Kentucky. After high school, I completed a mechanical engineering degree from Western Kentucky University (WKU) and began working in manufacturing. After a season in the automotive industry (about 4 years), I began graduate work at Asbury where I completed the Master of Arts in Theological Studies. Shortly after my time at Asbury, I began work on a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology at Durham University, UK. Since completing the Ph.D. I have been a visiting scholar in Human and Organizational Development at Vanderbilt University. In addition to my appointment at Asbury, I am an Assistant Professor of Community Studies and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy and Religion at WKU.

My journey in church service began my senior year of high school and since then I have served in a number of congregations. I am currently seeking ordination as a Deacon in the United Methodist Church.

My interest in religion has long existed at the intersections between theology and other forms of understanding and discourse – theology and science for instance. In addition to teaching, my current research focus deals with the ways in which churches serve as agents of positive community building and development. Practically, I spend much of my time with faith-based groups working through ways that they can impact their respective communities through collaborative partnerships and renewed theological commitments.

My philosophy of teaching is community-oriented in that I believe that we will all have much to offer one another. Not only will we be discussing important academic aspects of theology, but we will hopefully discover ways in which this valuable knowledge bears on practical issues, especially for those of you pursuing professional ministry.

Throughout this class, we will discuss a broad range of issues ranging from the Eastern Fathers to the “emerging church” conversation. In line with the spirit of Asbury, this course will be challenging and no doubt the material will stretch your critical thinking and writing abilities. In the end, our aim is to all be more developed theological practitioners.

## **Expectations and Course Requirements**

### **What I am expecting from you:**

Extended Learning courses are NOT independent study courses. You may feel “alone”, but you are not. Our learning in this course will occur as a team. Your participation within the virtual environment is very important and will be monitored. As the professor, I will facilitate the dissemination of course information, evaluate your responses/assignments, and offer appropriate feedback.

The following points are important regarding your participation in this course:

1. You are expected to stay current with your assignments and be actively involved in the virtual classroom. The specific details of your assignments and the relative evaluation standards will be clearly identified for each module.
2. Although you may send specific questions to me via the “To Professor” link (reserved for private issues), please send all class-related questions and or responses to the “Discussion Forum” unless otherwise instructed.
3. Each module is the equivalent of TWO three-hour on-campus lecture. As the class takes 13 weeks to complete, the necessary time you need to set aside for the course is approximately 16 hours per module (two week modules). As stated above, apart from reading the material and preparing your

assignments, spending time in the virtual classroom discussion is vital for the overall success of the course.

4. If you have an emergency situation that prevents you from participating in the online activities, please let me know as soon as possible so your assignments can be rescheduled. Please note that job related activities are NOT considered an emergency. E.g. if your pastoral duties require you to attend special functions, etc. you must plan in such a way as to meet the assignment due dates. If you encounter serious problems and cannot finish your assignment(s) please remember what qualifies for an "unavoidable emergency" per your student handbook – "A grade of 'I' denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an *unavoidable emergency*, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment".
5. Send longer assignments as file attachments. For regular discussions and interaction in the Discussion Forum please limit your message to 600 words.
6. Evaluation of your participation in class will be a consideration of both quantity AND quality. That is to say, not all postings will be equally weighed, so be sure to consider the content of your responses before you submit - in other words, messages such as "I don't agree" or "Right On!" will probably not count very much. In order to maximize your discussion participation credit, make sure that your responses are thoughtful and concise.

## **Assessment and Grading**

Fifty-percent of the grade will be constituted by the assignments for each module and by the level of interaction in the Discussion Forum. The final paper that will conclude the course will count for the remaining fifty-percent of your grade.

More specific assessment details will be provided with each module depending on the nature and length of the assignment.

The standard for grading (per the seminary catalog) is as follows:

**A** – *Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives*

**B** – *Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives*

**C** – *Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives*

**D** – *Marginal work: minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives*

**F** – *Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives*

Please note that in order to get a grade of "A", you must produce exceptional work. This work usually possesses the following characteristics:

- Submissions are well researched and display a level of thought extending beyond what is required for the assignment
- Submissions are exceptionally articulated, well written and concise
- Submissions demonstrate profound interaction with the material and advance the present discussion on the subject matter

The following issues are factors that devalue the quality of assigned submissions (listed in order of their importance):

- Demonstrating faulty logic, incoherence, lack of discernment in evaluating the central argument, addressing a different question, etc.
- Demonstrating insufficient interaction with the material, insufficient research, pursuing a weak argument, presenting a poorly structured argument
- Committing grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, etc.

For writing standards, follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Particular attention should be given to the cogency of the argument, structure, use of language, and the proper use of reference resources.

## **How To Submit Work**

Your assignments should (unless otherwise specified) be submitted via the "To the Professor" link. The assignments for each Module will generally be due by the end of each Module. More specific instructions regarding both class participation and assignments will be given in each Module.

## **Required Reading**

Brown, Warren S., "Resonance: A Model for Relating Science, Psychology, and Faith", in *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23 no. 2 (2004), pp.110-120.

Kant, I. (1784). *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* University of Pennsylvania [On-line]. Available: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/kant.html>

Lindbeck, George A., *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996).

Murphy, Nancey. (2006). Anglo-American Postmodernity and the End of the Theology-Science Dialogue?. Unpublished Work. Link to Word document at <http://www.faith.ucr.edu/events.html>

Peacocke, Arthur, *Paths From Science Towards God: The End of all our Exploring*, (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2001).

Peterson, Gregory R., "Theology: Reduction or Autonomy?", in *Zygon* 36 no. 4 (2001), pp.597-614.

Smith, James K. A., *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Thielicke, Helmut, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980).

Course Reading Packet (Available at Seminary Bookstore). COURSE PACKET INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

Abraham, William J., *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 27-56.

Allen, Diogenes, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), pp. 1-14.

Clough, David, "Theology Through Social and Political Action", in Marsh, Clive, Beck, Brian, Shier-Jones, Angela, and Wareing, Helen (eds.), *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 41-47.

Dayton, Donald W., "The Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Tradition", in Johnston, Robert K. (ed.), *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 121-136.

Friesen, Dwight J., "Orthoparadoxy: Emerging Hope for Embracing Difference", in Pagitt, Doug and Jones, Tony (eds.), *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), pp. 201-212.

Green, Joel B. and Turner, Max (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 23-43.

Jones, L. Gregory, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices and the Ends of Theological Education", in Volf, Miroslav and Bass, Dorothy C. (eds.), *Practicing Theology*:

*Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 185-205.

MacIntyre, Alasdair, "Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science", in Hauerwas, Stanley and Jones, L. Gregory (eds.), *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), pp. 138-157.

Maddox, Randy L., *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), pp. 26-47.

Marsh, Clive, "Appealing to 'Experience'", in Marsh, Clive, Beck, Brian, Shier-Jones, Angela, and Wareing, Helen (eds.), *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 118-130.

McFague, Sallie and Tanner, Kathryn, "Is God in Charge?", in Placher, William (ed.), *Essentials of Christian Theology*, Ch. 3 Placher, William (ed.), *Essentials of Christian Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 93-132.

McLaren, Brian, "Church Emerging: or why I still use the word postmodern but with mixed feelings", in Pagitt, Doug and Jones, Tony (eds.), *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), pp. 141-151.

Murphy, Nancey & Kallenberg, Brad J., "Anglo-American Postmodernity: A Theology of communal Practice", in Vanhoozer, Kevin J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 26-41.

Murphy, Nancey, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision" in Hauerwas, Stanley, Murphy, Nancey, and Nation, Mark Thiessen (eds.), *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 245-272.

Tilley, Terrence W., "In Favor of a 'Practical Theory of Religion'", in Hauerwas, Stanley, Murphy, Nancey, and Nation, Mark Thiessen (eds.), *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 49-76.

Volf, Miroslav, "Theology for a Way of Life", Volf, Miroslav and Bass, Dorothy C. (eds.), *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 245-263.

Wilkinson, David, "The Activity of God in Methodist Perspective", in Marsh, Clive, Beck, Brian, Shier-Jones, Angela, and Wareing, Helen (eds.), *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 142-154.



Wood, Laurence, *God and History*, (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2005), pp. 93-102.

Wood, Laurence, *God and History*, (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2005), pp. 233-258.

Wood, Laurence, *God and History*, (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2005), pp. 259-308.

Wood, Laurence, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2005), pp. 7-90.

Wood, Laurence, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2005), pp. 153-196.

## **Recommended Reading**

Brown, Colin, *Christianity and Western Thought; Volume 1: From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

Cobb, John B., 'The Christian Reason for Being Progressive', in *Theology Today* 51 no. 4 (1995), pp.548-562.

Grenz, Stanley J. and Olson, Roger E., *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

Hauerwas, Stanley, "Knowing How to Go On When You Do Not Know Where You Are: A Response to John Cobb, Jr.", in *Theology Today* 51 no. 4 (1995), pp.563-569.

Kant, I. (1793). Preface (1st edition) - Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone [On-line]. Available: <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/rbbr/toc.html>

Lossky, Vladimir, "Theology and Mysticism in the Tradition of the Eastern Church", in Lossky, Vladimir (ed.), *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1957), pp. 7-22.

MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

Maddox, Randy L., "Reading Wesley as a Theologian", in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30 (1995), pp.7-54.

Markham, Paul N., *Rewired: Exploring Religious Conversion*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

Murphy, Nancey & McClendon, James, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies", in *Modern Theology* 51 (1989), pp. 191-214.

Murphy, Nancey, Kallenberg, Brad J., and Nation, Mark Theissen (eds.), *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

Polanyi, Michael, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

Ricoeur, Paul, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation", in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980). Available online at: <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1941&C=1772>

Schwobel, Christoph, *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

Wisse, M. (2002). Narrative Theology and the Dogmatic Use of the Bible. Unpublished Work. Available online at: <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000226/article.pdf>

Zizioulas, John D., "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution", in Schwobel, Christoph (ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), pp. 44-60.

Any additional materials (articles, reviews, book selections) will be made available during the course.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Module 1 -- 2-8 June**

Introduction to Theology

Required Reading: Thielicke, *A Little Exercise*, whole book; Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, introduction.

### **Module 2 -- 9-22 June**

## Foundationalism and the Emergence of Modern Theology

Required Reading: Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, Introduction; Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, Ch. 2; Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 1; Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*; Wood, *God and History*, Ch. 7; Dayton, "The Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Tradition", in Johnston, *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, Ch. 7; Green, *Between Two Horizons*, Ch. 2; Marsh, "Appealing to 'Experience'", in *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, Ch. 11; Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, Ch. 1.

Recommended Reading: Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, Chs. 2-5; Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone; Yoder, "The Use of the Bible in Theology", in Johnston, *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, Ch. 6.

### **Module 3 -- 23 June – 6 July**

#### Religious Language and the "Meaning" of God

Required Reading: Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 2; Murphy, "Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision" in Hauerwas, *Theology Without Foundations*, Ch. 12; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, whole book; Peterson, "Reduction or Autonomy?", full article.

Recommended Reading: Lash, "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy", in Hauerwas, *Why Narrative*; Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, Ch. 4; Wood, *Theology as History*, Chs. 1-2.

### **Module 4 -- 7-20 July**

#### The Question of Divine Action

Required Reading: Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 3; Wilkinson, "The Activity of God in Methodist Perspective", in Marsh, *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, Ch. 13; McFague & Tanner, "Is God in Charge?", in Placher, *Essentials of Christian Theology*, Ch. 3; Wood, *God and History*, Ch. 15.

Recommended Reading: None

### **Module 5 -- 21 July – 3 August**

#### Theological Methodology after Modernity

Required Reading: Murphy, *After Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 4; Murphy & Kallenberg, "Anglo-American Postmodernity"; McLaren, Brian, "Church

Emerging", in Pagitt and Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, Ch. 12; Wood, *Theology as History*, Ch. 4; Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*, whole book.

Recommended Reading: Murphy and McClendon, "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies", entire article; Cobb, "The Christian Reason for Being Progressive", entire article; Hauerwas, "Knowing How to Go On When You Do Not Know Where You Are", entire article; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, whole book.

## **Module 6 -- 4-17 August**

*Doing* Theology in a Postmodern World

Required Reading: Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 5, Wood, *Theology as History*, Chs. 8-9; Tilley, "In Favor of a 'Practical Theory of Religion'", in Hauerwas, *Theology Without Foundations*, Ch. 3; MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crisis", in Hauerwas, *Why Narrative*; Friesen, "Orthoparadoxy", in Pagitt and Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, Ch. 17; Jones, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices", in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*; Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life", in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*; Clough, "Theology Through Social and Political Action", in Marsh, *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, Ch. 4.

Recommended Reading: Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, whole book; Murphy, et al., *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, whole book.

## **Module 7 -- 18-29 August**

Theology at the Intersections

Required Reading: Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism & Fundamentalism*, Ch. 6; Brown, "Resonance", entire article; Murphy, "Anglo-American Postmodernity and the End of the Theology-Science Dialogue?", entire article; Wood, *God and History*, Ch. 16; Peacocke, *Paths From Science Towards God*, Chs. 1-5.

Recommended Reading: Markham, *Rewired*, whole book.

## **ExL Contact Information**

For **general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program**, contact Dale Hale:

[ExL\\_Office@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu)

Phone: (859) 858-2393

For **technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media** contact Information Commons:

[Info\\_Commons@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu)

Phone: (859) 858-2233

Toll-free: (866) 454-2733

## **Accessing Information Commons Materials:**

### **1. General Questions:**

The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here: <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/hours.shtml>.

### **2. Materials Requests:**

To search the library catalog for available materials, click here:

<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml>

ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

### **3. Research Questions:**

ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

### **4. Online Databases:**

To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml> and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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