

Asbury Theological Seminary ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange

Syllabi

eCommons

1-1-2003

ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

Charles E. Gutenson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi>

Recommended Citation

Gutenson, Charles E., "ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology" (2003). *Syllabi*. Book 2095.
<http://place.asburyseminary.edu/syllabi/2095>

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the eCommons at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. For more information, please contact thad.horner@asburyseminary.edu.

ST 501X

METHOD AND PRAXIS IN THEOLOGY

Sp. 2003

Professor Charles (Chuck) Gutenson

Office AD 408

I. Introduction

Perhaps the most frequent question that I get with regard to this class is: “Theological method, what in the world is that?” However, if one engages in reflection about God, and of course all of you have or you would not be here, then one engages in theology. After all, “theology” is merely the attempt to understand all about God that one can. And if one engages in theology, one inevitably utilizes a method for that engagement. Upon beginning theological engagement, one of the first questions that you have to ask is: “where are the authoritative sources for information about God?” No matter how you answer this question, the question itself is a methodological one, as are questions concerning the purpose and nature of theological inquiry. So, even if one merely says, “I just believe what the Bible says”, one has made a methodological statement about the sources that are to be taken as authoritative for inquiries related to the life of faith.

Notice in the last sentence, I wrote “related to the life of faith.” You should know in advance that I see the tendency to strongly distinguish between “theory” and “practice” as a false dichotomy. Therefore to say that systematic theology is a purely theoretical discipline while, say, pastoral counseling is a purely practical discipline is to fail to recognize the extent to which the sort of pastoral counseling God calls us to must be undergirded by sound theology. All of our work as pastors, teachers, counselors, evangelists, etc. is profoundly influenced by the way we understand God, the created order, human nature, fallenness, etc. Consequently, I will be encouraging you throughout this semester, as the course title suggests, to see the profound inter-connections between method and practice.

There are two additional comments that are necessary before we begin our study together. First, as you may have noticed, this course is foundational for all other theology and doctrine courses. Being able to think theologically--to be able to make appropriate extrapolations from the biblical witness and to see the implications of theological study for your own explicit ministry--is perhaps the most important thing we can teach you here at Asbury. This is not to say, of course, that this course is the only “really important” class, but it is to say that what you will learn in this class has implications for all the other work you will do here.

Second, this will be a rather difficult course. This should serve as an advisement, not as a warning. In other words, expect the material to be difficult and expect the readings to stretch you. As a consequence, it will be imperative that you keep up with the readings, that you attend all classes except for serious emergencies, and that you be prepared to ask questions about all that is unclear in what you read.

Let me conclude by saying that I am delighted to work with each of you this semester, and that I am very excited about the potential this course of study has for your ministries. Let the fun begin!

II. 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.

Wesley once said to his preachers that the study of logic was the single, most important study next to the Bible, if they were going to be effective in ministry. This class is similar to a course in logic, in the sense that Wesley means, in that is foundational to thinking theologically. If the Bible is to be understood in a thoughtful and practical way, theological method is helpful because it is like a tool that enables the Scriptures to be user-friendly as we study and interpret them for our day.

III. 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 narratival 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.

The readings assigned throughout the semester will deal with the matters represented in these learning objectives, though on occasion the lectures will draw in important components that extend beyond the direct scope of the readings. Additionally, please review the bibliography at the end of the syllabus for further readings on the topics we will be discussing in class.

IV. Modules/Lectures/Schedule (Please note that there may be some variation from the posted schedule, as all classes have their own specific areas wherein additional time may be required.)

Module 1; Lectures 1,2, and 3: Getting Started.

Readings: Who Needs Theology? Grenz and Olson

Topics: Syllabus review, Initially framing the issues, Terminological discussion, Getting a grasp on what theology is and how it fits into the "big picture."

Module 2; Lecture 4: The Influence of the Early Greeks

Readings: Early Greek Philosophy and the Church Fathers--essay by Wood.

Topics: The relationship between philosophy and theology, How did Greek philosophy influence early church developments?, Identify key categories at play.

Module 3; Lecture 5 and 6: The Canonical Heritage

Readings: Selection from Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology by Abraham, chapters 1,2, and 5.

Topics: What is the canonical heritage of the church?, Of what is it comprised?, Examine its development, Consider its role in the ongoing task of theology.

Module 4; Lectures 7, and 8: Doctrinal Development

Readings: The Genesis of Doctrine by McGrath, first half of text.

Topics: The relation between doctrine and theology, Various ways of construing doctrine, History and its various conceptualizations, The role of Tradition.

Module 5; Lecture 9 and 10: Into the Gritty Details: Modernism to Post-modernism and All That Implies

Readings: Selections from: God--The World's Future by Ted Peters.

Topics: Ontology to epistemology and epistemology to hermeneutics--implications for theology, Christianity's symbols--what does it mean to speak of symbols and how are they deployed? World construction? What's that?

Module 6, Lectures 11 and 12: A Commitment to the Rational: W. Pannenberg

Readings: Selections from The Being and Nature of God in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg by Gutenson

Topics: Laying a foundation for the modern deployment of theological method, Examination of the intersection of philosophy and theology in the work of one contemporary theologian, Consideration of what it means to be a "rationalist".

Module 7; Lectures 13, 14, and 15. Post-foundationalism---or, Epistemic Modesty.

Readings: Beyond Foundationalism--Grenz and Olson.

Topics: Into the details of what constitutes a foundationalist epistemology and why this is problematic for theological method. What is post-foundationalism and what solutions does it offer? How does the Holy Spirit fit into theological method.

Module 8; Lectures 16, 17, and 18. Fundamentalism and Liberalism--do these terms really help?

Readings: Beyond Fundamentalism and Liberalism by Murphy.

Topics: How ought the terms “fundamentalism” and “liberalism” to be understood? Where do they share similarities and where are they truly different? Clarification of certain terms and concepts.

Module 9; Lectures 19 and 20: The Greatest Story Ever Told and How We Forgot It's a Story

Readings: Selections from Theology Narrative--A Critical Introduction by Goldberg.

Topics: Identification of the content of a narrational theology, Why is the concept of narrative so important to an appropriate grasp of salvation history?, Identification of the philosophical underpinnings which justify this way of conceiving the Scriptures.

Module 10; Lectures 21 and 22: The Cultural Implications for Theological Method, part 1

Readings: Selections-- Recovering the Scandal of the Cross by Green and Baker.

Topics: Consideration of the manner in which one's cultural situatedness impacts one's theological method, Examination of the influence of oriental understandings of punishment on an articulation of the doctrine of atonement.

Module 11; Lectures 23 and 24: The Cultural Implications for Theological Method, part 2

Readings: Selections from Stoney the Road We Trod by Felder

Topics: Consideration of the manner in which racial considerations impact one's theological method, Examination of the influence of the African-American experience on one's articulation of the concepts of liberation and salvation.

Module 12; Lectures 25 and 26: Wesley and Theological Method.

Readings: Selections to be determined.

Topics: Summary and examination of the question: what methods would be adequate from a Wesleyan perspective?

V. Required Readings

As you can see from the individual modules, most of the readings for this class are selections from a variety of different works. You will find two copies of each of these readings on the reserve shelf under this class number and my name. So, you merely need ask for "Gutenson's materials for ST501". Please do not mark on the copies and be sure to return them to the folder in a timely fashion to make sure they can be available for all your classmates. I am checking into making them available electronically and will advise you once this is complete. Since our first few lectures utilize one of the three assigned texts, you may want to work ahead in order to make sure all will have access to the material once we get into those readings.

Texts required are as follows and should be readily available in the ATS bookstore:

Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God by Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, IVP, 1996.

The Genesis of Doctrine--A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism by Alister E. McGrath, Eerdmans, 1997.

Beyond Foundationalism, Grenz and Olson,

Beyond Fundamentalism and Liberalism, Murphy,

Please see the last section of this syllabus for a bibliography of other titles and authors you may wish to consider relative to theological method.

VI. Assessments

Following are the assignments which will be utilized in order to determine a grade for this course. See Attachment 1 for my grading methodology/policy.

1. Value: 10 points. Regular interaction on the discussion icon for ST501X.
2. Value: 10 points. Product: Completion of all assigned readings. Given the importance of obtaining some degree of understanding with regard to all of the material we will cover this semester, each student will be given up to 10 points for completion of the assigned readings. Points will be pro-rated if less than 100% is completed. You are all on the "honor" system for reporting your reading (not what your eyes have merely passed over) by the end of the semester--if God can trust you with his church, I can trust you with honest reporting. **Please note: if I do not receive any reading report, 0 points will be given for this assignment.**

3. Value: 15 points. Product: Successful completion of the final exam. At the assigned time for this class period, I will give a final exam which will cover all of the material covered for this semester. Expect it to be somewhat difficult, as I will peg all scores to the overall average. There will be a combination of various forms of objective questions as well as a few short answer questions from which you will select a subset to answer.

4. Value: 20 points total, 5 points each. Product: Each student is to provide four two-page interactive pieces that are to be done with regard to four of the readings from four separate modules that we cover during the semester. See Attachment 2 for the outline to be used for these pieces. You may select the modules/readings.

5. Value 45 points. Product: A 12 (+/- 2) page paper on the current state of your own theological method. Note that this is the major assignment for the semester and that it counts nearly one-half of your final grade. You will want to start early in beginning to formulate your position with regard to the various methodological issues we consider during the semester. See Attachment 3 for the format and content for this paper.

VII. Bibliography

- K. Barth--Church Dogmatics, vol. 1 (first half)
- W. Pannenberg--Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (chapters 1-4)
- K. Rahner--The Foundations of the Christian Faith
- F.D.E. Schleiermacher--The Christian Faith (only the introduction)
- P. Tillich--Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (first half)

Attachment One

GRADING PROCEDURES

I am including this document with the class syllabus in order to provide clarification regarding the manner in which grades for this class will be determined, including the level of work which corresponds to various grades.

First, in accordance with the seminary catalog, please note that a grade of B is given for work which satisfactorily meets the parameters of a given assignment. More specifically, let us assume that in response to a particular assignment a paper is handed in which satisfactorily answers the questions raised by the assignment and which does so in a clear and articulate fashion and which, further, has relatively few errors in spelling or grammar. Such a paper would receive a grade of B. Please note that this means that I might return a paper with a letter of B assigned which has few or no errors marked and which has an ending comment such as “good, solid work”. In other words, the starting point for a relatively error-free paper is a grade of B.

Obviously, in the course of examining the response to a particular assignment, there are specific aspects of the work which I consider in determining whether a higher or lower grade is appropriate. First, I consider the standards identified by the seminary for the relationship between assignments and their responses. Those standards are summarized below:

- A Exceptional work; outstanding or surpassing achievement of course objectives.
- B Good work; substantial achievement of course objectives.
- C Acceptable work; essential achievement of course objectives.
- D Marginal work; minimal or inadequate achievement of course objectives.
- F Unacceptable work; failure of course objectives.

(Specific descriptions of “-” and “+” grades are not given, but may be judged to fall appropriately between the descriptions given above.)

While I cannot, for a number of reasons, give a precise indication of the number of points that would be deducted for specific ways in which a paper might be lacking, the following list summarizes certain things which might potentially result in a reduction in total score.

- +Misspellings
 - +“Stream of consciousness” writing
- +Incomplete sentences
 - +Answering a different question
- +Grammatical errors
 - +Presentation of a weak conclusion
- +Punctuation errors
 - +Presentation of a weak argument
- +Poor overall structure
 - +Faulty logic

- +Awkward constructions
- +Failure to interact critically with the material (if part of the assignment)

Similarly, I cannot give a precise indication of the number of points that would be added to a paper for going beyond “good, solid work”. However, following is a list of the sorts of things that would evidence going beyond the basic assignment and would, therefore, warrant a higher total score for the response.

- +Writing that is particularly articulate and/or worded with exceptional clarity and concision.
- +Particularly insightful interaction with the material, including exceptional criticisms or the recognition of the more profound implications of certain positions.
- +Presentation which moves beyond mere repetition of the arguments of others.
- +Evidence of research that goes beyond what is required for the assignment.
- +Conclusions which effectively summarize criticisms and which proposes solutions.
- +Critical interaction which probes deeply into the arguments at hand.

Some assignments lend themselves better to scoring by numerical assessment rather than by assigning a letter grade initially. Of course, these numerical scorings must be converted to letter grades for recording at the end of the semester. I offer the following breakdown of my numerical scoring system to allow you to track their correspondence to letter grades as you wish.

A = 95-100	B = 83.4-86.6
C = 73.4-76.6	
A- = 90-94.9	B- = 80-83.3
C- = 70-73.3	
	B+ = 86.7-89.9
	C+ = 76.6-79.9
	D = 60-69.9
	F = less than 60

With these guidelines in place, I commit to give my best effort to assessing your work in accordance with these standards and in a fair and impartial fashion. In the course of the semester, if you should have any questions about the grade assigned for any particular assignment, please do not hesitate to contact me for further discussion.

Attachment Two Interactive Papers

These short papers (two pages) are comprised of three parts: an abstract, the highlight, and the effect. Following is a description of the content, length, etc. for each of these parts.

Abstract: The abstract is a one page summary of the content of the reading you have selected. You might want to take a look at several short book reviews as contained in any one of a variety of theological journals. In these reviews, the authors are able to summarize an entire book in only a page or two. The primary difference between such a book review and your abstract is that book reviews generally contain critical interaction with the book in question, and in your abstract I am only looking to see that you understand the material and that you can report it articulately.

Highlight: The highlight is up to one-half of a page and it deals with that aspect of the selected reading which you found most striking. It may be that you found the point in question striking either for a positive or a negative reason. So, report the highlighted point, and give the reason(s) that you found it so.

Effect: Well, as I am sure you all agree, we do not engage in the study of theology merely in order to know more in the abstract sense. Rather, our goal is to develop spiritually and to become better able to serve in the roles to which God has called us. Consequently, I am interested here in hearing how you expect your ministry to be different as a consequence of reading this piece. Questions to consider are: how will this effect my ministry? what will I see differently as a consequence of this reading? Etc.

Other: You should exercise your normal cautions with regard to grammar, spelling, coherence of presentation, etc.

Attachment 3 Term Paper

The term paper (12 pages, +/- 2), as noted in the syllabus, counts nearly one-half of your grade for this course. The important considerations for the development and writing of your paper are outlined in the following.

Purpose: To develop a formal statement of your own theological method as of the completion of this course of study. This may serve as a document which you could update from time-to-time as you theology develops through the time you are engaged in theological study.

Format: This paper is to be constructive in nature. In other words, this paper is not primarily a critique of some other persons method nor is it merely a reporting of the theological method of others. Rather, you are engaged in constructing a positive statement of your own theological method. You may, of course, interact with the thought of other theologians, for example, to the extent you appropriate the work of others. Please note that you are to provide the rationale for the various aspects of the method that you embrace. The work of the theologians we will study this semester will provide a model of what it means to engage in the development of supporting rationale.

Questions: Questions that you might consider in the course of developing your method are:

What are the sources for theology?

What are to be taken as the norms for theological discourse?

What are the tasks and the purposes for systematic theology?

What warrants/justifies the claims that you develop in your paper?

How does your theological method impinge upon your various roles as pastor/teacher/etc.?

This paper is not:

-a “stream of consciousness” paper. This means please organize carefully.

-an “op-ed” piece. In other words, this is not merely an opinion piece. You must document your work, research appropriately, etc.

-a critical examination of the work of others.

Issues to keep in mind:

I will be expecting the paper to be clearly and articulately written. All of your research must be well documented. Please use the school’s accepted style manual. It is important that you make sure your argument is coherently constructed--which almost certainly means that you need to develop an outline, etc. to track the various steps of your argument. Likewise, it is important that you

demonstrate a keen awareness of the relevant issues for method, particular as relate to your own position.