

TH 6307: CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Spring 2020
Mondays 4:00–6:40

Instructor: Dr. K. Stanglin
Office phone: 476-2772
Email: stanglin@austingrad.edu

Course Description (from catalogue):

Survey and evaluation of influential approaches to theology and ethics in the history of Christian theology, including Eastern Orthodox, Augustinian, Lutheran, Reformed, and Arminian traditions.

Core Values:

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.” Prov. 1:5

“Nil sine magno vita labore dedit mortalibus.” Horace, *Satires* I.ix.59

“Not merely the most important but also the most relevant and beautiful problems in dogmatics begin at the very point where the fable of ‘unprofitable scholasticism’ and the slogan about the ‘Greek thinking of the fathers’ persuade us that we ought to stop.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1:xiv

Course Objectives:

1. Identify and describe the major historical-doctrinal controversies that led to the divisions in the Christian church.
2. Understand the distinct theological perspectives of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Union Churches, and Evangelical and Free Churches.
3. Irenically and critically evaluate various theological claims based on Scripture, tradition, and coherence.
4. Learn more about your own theological tradition and its larger context.
5. Discern and then learn from the best of what other theological traditions have to offer.

Course Textbooks:

Required Texts

Ted A. Campbell. *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. (CC)

Robert L. Plummer, ed. *Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

All required readings online or on reserve must be printed and brought to class meetings, along with the required textbooks and the Bible.

Recommended Texts

E. A. Livingstone, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Philip Schaff. *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*. 3 vols., 6th ed. 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. [on reserve]

Keith D. Stanglin. *The Reformation to the Modern Church: A Reader in Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. [on reserve]

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend classes regularly and be on time. In the event of illness, family emergency, or an extenuating circumstance, it is the responsibility of the student to **notify the instructor as soon as possible** of the reason for the absence.

Course Requirements:

1. Reading of assigned texts and class participation (25 pts.). All assigned readings must be completed prior to the respective class meetings (see Reading Guidelines and Schedule below). Many readings will be available online. Print, read, and bring them to class with you. The lectures, which will not recapitulate the textbooks, will assume that you have read the assignments and know the material. Be prepared to take notes, discuss, and answer questions about the reading material in class.
2. Reflection papers (25 pts. each; 75 total). Students must submit three reflection papers on the readings marked in the schedule (below). Each paper should be at least 800 words in length. It should answer questions such as: What point(s) is the author(s) trying to get across? What doctrinal reflections or ethical instructions stand out to you? What do you agree/disagree with? What principles do you think would be good to put into practice? Specific allusions or quotations should be cited parenthetically in your text. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day marked in the schedule.
3. Book review essay (100 pts.). Read *Journeys of Faith* and write an original review essay. Carefully engage the book's ideas with outside research and the knowledge that you have gained from reading CC. Look for the big ideas that divide churches, and focus on the interesting and debatable points.

Additional guidelines for the book review essay:

- i. Not optional. A course grade of "F" will be assigned to anyone not turning in a book review.
- ii. The book review essay should be 6-8 pages (double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman), not including cover page and bibliography, and should use footnotes with proper Turabian style.

iii. Book review essays are due at the beginning of class on Week 9. Late papers will be penalized 10%, and an additional 10% every second day thereafter. Papers will not be accepted after class on Week 11.

4. Mid-term exam (75 pts.). A mid-term exam on Week 8 will assess your grasp of the reading and lecture material thus far.

5. “Traditions” paper and presentation (100 pts.). Write a paper (at least 1,500 words) that summarizes what you have learned from the lectures and readings about a) your own faith tradition and b) that of others.

a) The first part of the paper will describe what you have learned about your own tradition. Describe at least **one positive** feature that you have learned about or that has been reinforced in this study, and at least **one aspect of critique** that needs improvement.

b) The second part of the paper will describe what you have learned about another faith tradition with which you were not very familiar before this course. Focus on its positive aspects, and include at least **one feature** that could help improve the theology, ethics, or worship in your own tradition.

No specific outside research and footnotes are *required*, but your knowledge of the readings and lectures should be evident in the paper and presentation. This paper is not an autobiography of your own faith journey. You may include, at most, one paragraph situating yourself ecclesiastically, or raise the topic as relevant to the assignment. Rather than autobiography, the goal of this assignment is to show your grasp of your own faith tradition and the benefit of mutual understanding and dialogue with others.

On the final day of class, you will turn in your paper and give a polished, five-minute presentation of the material to the rest of the class, summing up parts a) and b) of the paper.

6. Final exam (100 pts.). A comprehensive exam will consist of objective questions as well as essays.

Grading Scale (475 pts. total):

90-100% = A 80-89 = B (“Good”) 70-79 = C (“Average”) 60-69 = D 0-59 = F

Reading Guidelines:

The readings from Campbell are indicated by “CC,” followed by page numbers; those marked “Stanglin” are followed by the selection number. Most of the other readings are available online (some in several places). These public domain translations tend to be older, stilted English, so I have also included print editions of newer translations with most of them. Readings marked “Schaff” come from *Creeeds of Christendom*, which is available online at www.ccel.org. Although I have not required these textbooks, I recommend purchasing Schaff’s three volumes, Livingstone’s *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, and Stanglin’s *The Reformation to the Modern Church*.

Campbell (CC), our main secondary source, is an excellent introduction to comparative theology. It compares and contrasts the doctrines of the most significant Christian denominations, focusing on their respective creedal and confessional statements. It would be most beneficial to

read CC in its entirety before the second class meeting. The schedule below indicates which page numbers you should review before each class meeting.

Primary sources also comprise many of the course readings. The assumption behind this choice is that there is no better way to understand the major figures under discussion than to read large chunks of their own writings. Here are some general methodological guidelines. 1) The reader should primarily be attentive to the thesis or central idea of each reading selection. What main point is the author trying to get across? 2) The reader should discern how the author proceeds to support the thesis. How does the author support his case? What are his arguments? If it is readily available in the editorial note or introduction, the reader should keep in mind the occasion for writing and the intended audience, which help to illuminate the main idea and method of argumentation. 3) The reader should always be on the lookout for any relevant presuppositions, beliefs, values, and themes that illustrate the author's *Sitz im Leben* and that connect with his larger corpus and that of his contemporaries. 4) Finally, look for threads of influence that precede the author and for the seeds of theological trajectories that follow him. Whom does the author quote or seem to follow, and who later appeals to the author and seems to follow him?

In other words, as in biblical studies, the best way to understand an author is to put one's exegetical skills to work. At the very least, this kind of reading will require annotating one's textbooks and photocopies, and perhaps taking separate notes on the readings.

The goals for reading are threefold. As already stated, the primary proximate goal of the reading is to begin to **understand** the authors on their own terms before making any judgments about their orthodoxy or heterodoxy. As Herbert Butterfield wrote, "Real historical understanding is not achieved by the subordination of the past to the present, but rather by our making the past our present and attempting to see life with the eyes of another century than our own." Similarly, Etienne Gilson said, "It takes much more cleverness to understand a philosophy than to refute it." Moreover, an understanding of the reading selections will increase the student's grasp of the class lectures, and vice versa. Accurate, descriptive understanding is requisite for and leads to fair **evaluation**, which is the remote goal of the reading component. After understanding and basic evaluation, the question of how the material can **inform our own faith and practice** in a positive way should be addressed as the ultimate goal. What can be gained from this historical perspective or tradition? What have we learned about ourselves in the process? How does this material impact the theology, ethics, and controversies of the present day and help the church move forward? Based on our understanding and evaluation, how can we be more faithful disciples, both individually and corporately, leading us to the eternal enjoyment of God?

The more proximate the goal, the more attention will be given to it during class meetings. Nevertheless, each of the three goals, though distinct, should never be pursued in isolation from the others.

Note well that getting a good grade was not listed as a goal for the reading. In an academic institution, however, grades must be assigned, and a good grade, though not a goal *per se*, should rightly flow from and reflect the student's clear understanding of the readings (as well as the lecture material). In light of this necessity, the professor's assessment of a student's grasp of the readings will be based both on classroom discussion, where students will be required to participate in conversations based on the readings, and on the two examinations.

Course Schedule:

Wk. 1, 1/20- READING BREAK. NO CLASS. Begin and get ahead on the course readings.

Wk. 2, 1/27- The Relevance of Theology; The Origin of Creeds and Confessions

CC, 1-33

Apostles' and Old Roman Creeds, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:45-8.

Wk. 3, 2/3- History of Christianity: Unity and Diversity; Understanding and Assessing

CC, 33-63

Wk. 4, 2/10- Eastern Orthodoxy; Roman Catholicism

Confession of Dositheus: <http://www.crivoice.org/creeddositheus.html> (Graduate reflection paper.)

Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, xiii-xx, 1-15 [on reserve]

Wk. 5, 2/17- RC/EO Religious Authority; God and Christ

Stanglin 96

Nicaea I, Constantinople I, and Chalcedon, in Schaff, 1:28-9; 2:58-9.

Wk. 6, 2/24- RC/EO Human Nature and Salvation

CC, 65-113

Council of Orange, at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/orange.txt> [on reserve]

***Rule of St. Benedict (Graduate reflection paper.)

Wk. 7, 3/2- RC/EO Ecclesiology

Stanglin 1, 45

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia.ii, "The Existence of God," at

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa-IIae.xi, articles 3-4, at

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3011.htm> , or in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th

ed., 141-2. *Summa theologiae* IIIa.i, articles 1-3, at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4001.htm> , or in Bettenson, 149-54.

Wk. 8, 3/9- Mid-term Exam

3/16- SPRING BREAK!

Wk. 9, 3/23- Protestant Denominations; Religious Authority

CC, 115-83

Stanglin 14-15, 54, 106

Wk. 10, 3/30- Calvinism (Reformed) and Arminianism; Open Theism

WS, 28

Stanglin 27, 49, 51, 58

Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 42-66 [on reserve]

Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*, 176-88 [on reserve]

Stanglin, "Arminius, Remonstrant, and Wesleyan Theologies" [on reserve]

Wk. 11, 4/6- Evangelical and Free Churches; Protestant Human Nature and Salvation

CC, 185-256

Stanglin, 39, 75-78

Mark Noll, "Pietism," available at <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txc/pietism.htm>

Methodist Articles of Religion (1784), in Schaff 3:807-13, available at

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.v.vi.html>

Assemblies of God, "Statement of Fundamental Truths," available at

<https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths> (Graduate reflection paper.)

Wk. 12, 4/13- Protestant Ecclesiology

Stanglin 17

Stanglin, "Visible Signs of Invisible Grace" [on reserve]

Wk. 13, 4/20- Modern Protestantism

Stanglin 85-86, 90

Wk. 14, 4/27- Stone-Campbell Movement

CC, 257-94

Blowers, "Creeds and Confessions," in *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 252-6 [on reserve]

Wk. 15, 5/4- Ecumenism; Student Presentations

Stanglin 112

Dulles, "Saving Ecumenism from Itself," at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/12/saving-ecumenism-from-itself>

May 11: Final Exam

Due Dates:

Feb. 10, 24; April 6 Graduate reflection papers

March 9	Mid-term exam
March 23	Book review
May 4	“Traditions” paper and presentation
May 11	Final exam

TRADITIONS IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS
A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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