That is why we have first had to set Jesus against man and his cosmos as the poor man who if He blessed and befriended any, blessed and befriended the poor and not the rich, the incomparable revolutionary who laid the axe at the root of the trees,...

But again, we do not really know Jesus (the Jesus of the New Testament) if we do not know Him as this poor man, as this (if we may risk the dangerous word) partisan of the poor, and finally as this revolutionary.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2:179-80*

Are you ready to organize a movement? If your just confession of Christ dead and resurrected for us such as it is witnessed in Holy Scripture includes this and expresses it, then your confession is a good and precious one that will bear its fruits; if it does not include this and does not express it, such confession is no good despite its justness; on the contrary, it is a dead, cheap confession that strains off the midge and gulps down the camel just like the Pharisees of Jesus’ times.

Karl Barth, to George Casalis

**BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is a one-semester introduction to systematic theology. Because the course occurs within students’ first year of their Masters degree program, and in the first semester of that year (!), I have organized the course to be more “an introduction to the study of systematic theology,” and less a survey of the whole of systematic theology.

---

Thus I do not take up what is a well-known format for teaching this Systematic Theology, i.e. journeying through each of the major *loci* or doctrines of traditional Christian theology, and trying to introduce them all (or, as many of them as possible). I will give introductory summary attention, in lectures, to the *loci* in the week on “Creed and Empire,” and in the two weeks devoted to Calvin’s *Institutes*.

Instead, in this course, as the organizational “Agenda” of the course shows, I am introducing course members to several different senses of the term, “systematic,” in theology. Then, throughout, I am limiting the scope of the course, for the most part, to two issues. The first is a cultural-political issue pertinent to the entire history of the church and into the present – *empire and the imperial*. (Recall, “the imperial” entails not just a national and international politics, but has also spheres that are interpersonal, psychological and domestic.) The second issue is a key, if not the key, area of doctrine in Christian theology, *Christology*.

The course will incorporate some necessary learning (and memorization) of key traits of the major ecumenical councils, and of the key theological moves made by John Calvin, who will remain the single most read theologian of this course (nearly all within a two-week period). But don’t be deceived, the course will equip you to read Calvin within a matrix that I propose to be broad, diverse and liberating.

The conceptual structure for the ten weeks of the course unfolds as follows, under three parts, “Ancient,” “Pre-Modern,” “Modernity/Coloniality.” See, again, the Agenda below for the dates and the readings assigned within this outline.

**ANCIENT**
1. Gospel Ideals and Visions – What’s It All About?
2. Systematics I – Narratives and Christian Movements

**PRE-MODERN**
3. Systematics II – Creed and Empire
4. Systematics III – Summa and Christendom

**MODERNITY/COLONIALITY**
5. Systematics IV – *Institutes* & Renaissance/Reformation
6. *Institutes* & Renaissance/Reformation (continued)
7. Systematics V – Liberal Theology and Enlightenment
8. Systematics VI – Evangelical Theology and U.S. Modern Subject
10. Systematics VIII – Postcolonial Theologies and Liberation

**ON PROMOTING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION & DIALOGUE**

Since one of the chief purposes of the course is to promote the capacity of its members to engage in theological reflection, students may be challenged by the diverse readings assigned. You are free to disagree with what you read, as do the instructors for this course, in different respects. Nevertheless, do give patient attention even to those texts. You may also be challenged in your discussion groups by
instructors and by one another, both because your views vary from one another’s and because you need to challenge one another to provide good arguments for your positions. All views of all participants are to be treated with openness and respect.

In the spirit of such a class with these values, I call your attention especially to the following important points:

(1) Inclusive language with respect to human beings is expected, and inclusive language in respect to God is encouraged.

(2) Be aware that some offensive terms have a history of abuse toward groups who traditionally have occupied “minoritized” positions in official Western settings. These terms just should not be used – even for allegedly “intellectual” or supposedly “neutral” purposes. (Thus, the “n---- word” for people of color or anyone else, or the” b---- word” for women or anyone else, and other similar words, are to be avoided. They “perform” abuse whatever may be your intentions. They just should not happen.)

(3) Your instructors are committed to doing everything they can to respond to, and interact creatively with, class members with special needs. Usually the registrar and/or the Dean of Students will be in touch with instructional staff about these matters.

(4) Our environment for reflection is not promoted if attendees in lectures surf the internet, or engage in checking email and/or facebooking. I have not yet decided, like many other colleagues I know, to disallow all computers from the lecture hall, so please honor my request here that you use your computers in class only to take and process your notes on the lectures. Thank you! Mark Taylor.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular class attendance, at lectures and precepts [10 percent of the final course grade, but with absences, everything else falls apart!]

2. Participation in all assigned precepts, with an agreement to serve once as the “Initial Respondent” to the focus question of the week (to be distributed). I am going to try to set up Blackboard groups for each precept, by the end of the second week. [Precept work is 15 percent of the final course grade].

3. Submission by Tuesday, Nov. 22, right before Thanksgiving break of your Ecumenical Councils Template. The Template will be distributed at the beginning of the second week of the class, and help you organize and retain key points relative to the seven ecumenical councils: matters of historical context, key content, and theological significance. [20 percent of the final course grade]
4. Submission of a completed Theological Vocabulary List on the day of the final exam in December. This vocabulary list will be distributed to you just prior to the Fall Reading Period break, Oct. 20, and its terms will be basic ones used in the history of Christian theology, from the early readings to the present. [25 percent of the final course grade]

5. Final Exam, to be written at the final exam period that will be scheduled by the Office of the registrar for the week of December 12, 2011. This exam, a three-hour exam, will have two parts. Part I will be focused on Calvin’s theology, giving you a choice of essay questions enabling you to write on some aspect of his theology and to develop your critical perspective on his work. Part II will be focused on key issues in modern/contemporary theologies, as introduced in the latter part of the course, beginning with the week of Nov. 15-18. A study guide for both parts of this final exam will be provided by the instructors, about three weeks before the final. [30 percent of the final course grade]

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

As goals for this course, the following five statements point to specific aims of theological reflection that we hope course members will begin to embrace in this course and then throughout their theological education beyond this place. As outcomes, the five statements are worded so that they also point to the actual achievements we hope to see in students by end of term, and progress toward which we will be evaluating. Below, in each statement, the underscored phrase names the kind of theological reflection or “goal” areas; the phrases following name the specific achievements we will look for at end of course, or the “outcomes.”

1. Gospel-Doctrine Interplay. A lively and critical sensibility for how the visions and values of the gospel interplay with doctrines, these latter understood as the key elaborations by theologians of what Christians believe, teach and confess.

2. Historical Sense in Theology. A historical sense of what “systematic theology” is, and of the various forms it has taken by different Christian communities.

3. Contemporary Difference(s). A contemporary astuteness about how differently systematic theology is undertaken in various communities, and especially when undertaken by those long excluded from, or repressed by, mainstream (“Eurocentered/male-stream”) Christian theological traditions.

4. Calvin’s Theology. A working and growing understanding of John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion, as it has informed key aspects of both a general “Reformed tradition,” and also important cultural politics of U.S. religious and cultural life.

5. Creedal Sense. An ability to identify the historical and theological crises and responses at work in the important, first seven “ecumenical councils” of the church.
TEXTS

Below are listed the texts that have been ordered and are available in the seminary’s Cokesbury Store. The ones with an asterisk are the ones you will most probably want to purchase and from which the most reading is included. Beyond those marked with an asterisk, I suggest you do not make any purchases until after the first class when I will make some comment on the texts.

Additional essays, selected from various sources, are also assigned. Full citations for these are given in the agenda under the week for which they are assigned. Available through E-reserve..


*KWOK, Pui-lan. Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology. WJK Press, 2005. (Dr. Pui-lan Kwok is this year’s President of the American Academy of Religion)

AGENDA

ANCIENT

SEPT 20, 22, 23

1. GOSPEL IDEALS AND VISIONS – WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?

Themes (92 total reading pages)

- Hellenistic milieu’s poly-religiosity
- Historical matrices of pre-systematic imagery
- The Jesus movement – a theology?
- Gospel & Doctrinal Traditions

Traditions


Miles, “Prelude: Flesh and Word,” pages 1-9

“Christians in the Roman Empire,” pages 10-27.

Gospel Undercurrents


2. **SYSTEMATICS I:**
   **NARRATIVES AND CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT(S)**

**Themes (116 pp)**

- Images/icons/texts
- Rules.canons/authority
- Interpretation & authority of scripture

**Traditions**


“Constructing Christian Churches” [authority and heresy], 47-64.


**Gospel Undercurrents**


3. SYSTEMATICS II: CREED AND EMPIRE

Themes (115 pp)

- Conciliar and imperial power
- Bishops and emperors
- The Seven Councils & Theology

Traditions


Recommended:


Gospel Undercurrents


4. SYSTEMATICS III: SUMMAE & CHRISTENDOM

Themes (108 pp.)

- On summas and systems
- Thomas Aquinas’ Summa
- Christendom, Race and Coloniality

Traditions

Miles, “Fleshing Out the Word: Medieval Christianity East and West,” 115-23.


“Incarnation and Hierarchy in the Medieval West” [Thomas Aquinas], 147-8, 164-74.


Gospel Undercurrents

“Resisting and Reframing the God-Human: Christology and Empire in the Middle Ages,” in Rieger, Christ and Empire, 119-47.

Miles, “Interlude,” 184-5.

MODERNITY/coloniality

OCT 18, 20, 21

5. SYSTEMATICS IV: INSTITUTES & RENAISSANCE/REFORMATION

Themes (121 pp.)

- Renaissance and Reformation (“magisterial” and “radical”)
- System and Structure in Reformed Theology
- Calvin’s Institutes

Traditions

Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion.

116-128 (‘How God is to be Distinguished…”);
255-281 (“Man Has Now Been Deprived…” through paragraph 21)
241-255 (“The Knowledge of God the Redeemer…”)
464-474 (“Christ Had to Become Man…”)
474-481 (“Christ Assumed…”)
503-528 (“How Christ Has Fulfilled…”)

Miles, “Calvin’s Theology,” 268-82

Gospel undercurrents

Donald H. Compier, “Jean Calvin (1509-1564),” in Empire and the Christian Tradition
NOV 1, 3, 4

6. INSTITUTES & RENAISSANCE/REFORMATION (CONTINUED)

Themes (125 pp.)

- John Calvin’s Geneva & Contemporary Christian Ethics
- Calvin’s Institutes (continued)

Traditions

Calvin, Institutes.

494-503 (“The Prophetic Office, Kingship and Priesthood…”)
528-534 (“Christ…and Salvation for Us,”)
537-542 (“The Way We Receive the Grace of Christ…the Spirit,”)
542-551 (“Faith: Its Definition…and Its Properties…”)
689-701 (“The Sum of the Christian Life…”)
701-712 (“Bearing the Cross…”)
712-719 (“Meditation on the Future Life”)
725-729 (“Justification by Faith…”)
743-746 (“Righteousness by faith…and by works,”)
920-932 (“Eternal Election…”)
947-964 (“Refutation of the False Accusations. . .”)

Gospel Undercurrents


7. SYSTEMATICS V: 
LIBERAL THEOLOGY AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Themes (98 pp)

• Modernity/Coloniality and Liberal Theology
• Types of Christian Theology

Traditions

Miles, “Prologue,” and “Descartes and the Method of Doubt,” 325-32

“Christianity in Seventeenth Century France” [Freethinkers, Jansenists, Pascal], 332-39.


Gospel Undercurrents


8. SYSTEMATICS VI:
EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY & THE U.S. MODERN SUBJECT

Themes (134)

- Fundamentalist/Modernism controversy
- Princeton Realism and Reformed Orthodoxy
- Today’s Postconservative Evangelicalism & the Christian Right

Traditions


Gospel Undercurrents (here, only one of the two essays, below, is required)


Thanksgiving/Fall Festivals Break
(no classes Nov. 22, 24, 25)
9. SYSTEMATICS VII:
THEOLOGIES OF DIFFERENCE & RECONCILIATION

Themes (129 pp)

- Postmodern and poststructuralist turns
- Theologies of reconciliation, love, otherness, difference, relationality

Traditions


Gospel Undercurrents


SYSTEMATICS VIII:
LIBERATION & POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGIES

Themes (79pp)

- The critiques of modernity/coloniality & Enlightenment
- 20th century liberation theologies

Traditions


Gospel Undercurrents


WEEK OF DECEMBER 12
FINAL EXAM