

H-704/T-862: "Leaders of the Western Church: John Calvin"
Christian Theological Seminary
Fall, 2006

Contact Information

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Course Description

This course is a seminar dealing primarily with the life and thought of John Calvin (1509-1564) but secondarily with the impact that Calvin has had on the trajectories of Western Christianity. Thus, both the historical context of the Reformation era and the theological content of Calvin's writings will be considered. In general, the course pursues a systematic study of Calvin's pivotal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Other samples of Calvin's writings -- his theological treatises, sermons, and commentaries -- will also be considered, though not exhaustively. For students seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA), this course meets the requirement for Reformed history and theology.

Learning Objectives

Objective	Measure
Acquire an understanding of some major themes of Calvin's theology in its historical context	Reading the biography and selections from Calvin's works; class discussions; reflection papers
Improve skills of critical analysis of Calvin's theology in light of both historical and contemporary issues	Reading the secondary articles; class discussions; secondary book review; reflection papers
Develop further the ability to engage in thoughtful, informed, and respectful theological dialogue with others	Class discussions
Appreciate the continuing relevance of Calvin's theology for persons of faith today	Reading the secondary articles; class discussions; reflection papers

Course Requirements

1. Class Attendance, Preparation, and Participation (20%): Because this course will be conducted in seminar format, this element is critical to its success. This means that you will be expected to:
 - Read the assigned materials carefully and completely prior to coming to class;
 - Arrive on time for class and remain for the entire class session;
 - Inform the instructor ahead of time if missing class is absolutely necessary;
 - Remain attentive during all classroom activities;
 - Listen closely and respond respectfully to both the instructor and fellow students;
 - Submit all work for the course on time as required by the due dates; and
 - Contribute substantively and insightfully to class discussions.

You should expect this portion of your grade to be reduced significantly if you miss or are regularly late to class, appear not to have completed the readings, or fail to contribute to the class discussion. Consistent with Seminary attendance policies, students who miss three or more class sessions – for whatever reason – will not receive credit for the course.

2. Reflection Papers (60%): You will be expected to write two reflection papers (7-8 pp. apiece), and each is worth 30% of your final grade. A list of possible topics for these reflection papers will be distributed early in the semester, along with detailed instructions and due dates. In these papers you will be asked to demonstrate a clear understanding of a particular issue in Calvin's theology, reflect critically on that issue from your theological perspective, and apply those insights to a specific issue that you might face in parish ministry. As you prepare these papers, you are encouraged also to review a document entitled "Grading Criteria for Written Work." I will be happy to provide you with a copy.
3. Secondary Book Review (20%): You will be expected to choose a secondary work on Calvin from the list provided below. On the date assigned in the course calendar, you will make a brief oral presentation (no more than 15 minutes in length) explaining the book's main claim, describing the author's argument, and locating the contribution of the book to the course material under consideration for the day. You should prepare a brief summary (1-2 pp.) of your presentation and bring enough copies to distribute to all students in the class. If you need assistance accessing a copy machine, I will be glad to assist you. For further instructions about this assignment, review the document entitled "Writing a Critical Book Review." I will be happy to provide you with a copy.

If you have a certified learning disability or physical or emotional challenges, you are required to inform me within the first week of the course concerning any special accommodations that you require. All efforts, consistent with the overall learning objectives of the course will be made to meet these learning needs.

You are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity and honest in all of your work for this course. Accordingly, no plagiarism, fabrication, or cheating of any kind will be tolerated. I will report all incidents of academic dishonest to the Dean of the Seminary, who will follow the disciplinary procedures outlined in the academic catalog. In cases where it has been proven that you have plagiarized, fabricated, or cheated in any way, you will fail this course.

An Important Note about Grades

You should know that I am stridently opposed to all forms of grade inflation. If you complete the basic requirements of the course satisfactorily, you can expect to receive an average final grade (C-range). If you fail to meet the basic requirements in some way, you can expect your final grade to be lower than that (D-range). Because it is not an entitlement, an above average grade (B-range) must be earned by consistent effort and solid performance on all assigned work in the course. An exceptional grade (A-range) is just that: an exception to the rule. You will earn an exceptional grade only if you consistently perform above and beyond in all aspects of the course. I invite students who wish to earn above average or exceptional grades to consult with me about strategies for doing so.

This is the grading scale that I will use in this course:

A	94-100%	B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%
A-	90-93%	B	84-86%	C	74-76%	D	64-66%
		B-	80-83%	C-	70-73%	D-	60-63%
						F	59 and below

A Note to Students in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

This course is not intended *principally* to prepare you for your ordination examination in Theological Competence. Nonetheless, some awareness of the requirements of this examination may help you as you engage in the study of Calvin this semester and consider the enduring importance of his theology for the ministry of the church. The *Book of Order* describes the Theological Competence examination in this way: "This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the classical theological disciplines and of the confessional documents of the church in relating the gospel to the faith of the church in the contemporary world" [G-14.0310d.(3)].

Colleagues at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary additionally offer the following advice about the examination. Generally speaking, “This test examines the way you, as a pastor, use theological insights in a practical situation. What are you going to do with all this theological knowledge that you learned in seminary when you get out into the ‘real’ world?”

The examination consists of three sections, and students have one hour to write responses in each one:

- I. Confessional Heritage – Measures your ability to interpret the historic confessions of the Reformed tradition;
- II. Christian Doctrine – Measures your ability to draw out of those historic confessions doctrinal principles that are relevant for the contemporary situation; and
- III. Application to the Ministry – Measures your ability to apply those doctrinal principles to some practical issue in the life of the church.

Though divided into parts, the examination is intended to be an integrated whole; your reflections in one section should lead naturally into your reflections in the others. Above all, your responses should provide evidence of your ability to be *pastoral* in your application of theological principles.¹

For more information about this examination, consult with representatives from your specific judicatory.

Required Textbooks

The following books, in whole or in part, are required reading for this course:

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed. (Westminster Press, 1960);
2. John Dillenberger, *John Calvin: Selections from his Writings* (Scholars Press, 1970); and,
3. Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in Shaping Western Culture* (Blackwell, 1993)

These books are available for purchase in the Seminary bookstore, and copies have been placed on reserve in the Seminary library for the duration of the semester. Additional readings listed on the schedule below will be distributed in handout form throughout the semester; they are indicated by an (H).

¹ http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/TheologicalCompetenceExam.asp (retrieved May 10, 2006).

Course Schedule

Date	Reading	Topics
Sep 6	McGrath (read entire biography)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Introduction • Lecture and Discussion: "Calvin in Historical Context"
Sep 13	<i>Institutes</i> I.i-vii (pp. 35-81) Troeltsch, "Renaissance and Reformation" (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of God in Creation & Scripture • Renaissance Humanism
Sep 20	<i>Institutes</i> I.viii-xii (pp. 81-120) Dillenberger, pp. 81-118	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Necessity of Scripture • Calvin and the Roman Church • Student Report on <u>Forstman</u>
Sep 27	<i>Institutes</i> I.xiii-xiv and I. xvi-xvii (pp. 120-182 and 197-228) MacHaffie, <i>Readings in HerStory</i> #28 and #31 (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triune God and Providence • Calvin and Women • Student Report on <u>Douglass</u>
Oct 4	<i>Institutes</i> II.i-iii (pp. 241-309) Second Helvetic Confession (H) Thirty-Nine Articles (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Sinfulness • Calvin and English Reforms • Student Report on <u>Engel</u>
Oct 11	<i>Institutes</i> II.vii-viii (1-12) and II.ix-xi (pp. 348-379 and 423-464)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Law and the Gospel • Calvin and Luther • Student Report on <u>Zachman</u>
Oct 18	No Class - Reading Week	
Oct 25	<i>Institutes</i> II.xii-xvii (pp. 464-534) Westminster Confession of Faith (H) Canons of the Synod of Dort (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Threefold Office of Christ • Scholastic Calvinism • Student Report on <u>Muller</u>
Nov 1	<i>Institutes</i> III.i-iii (pp. 537-621) Dillenberger, pp. 560-573 Rice, "The Experience of God in Reformed Theology" (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repentance and Faith • Reformed Spirituality • Student Report on <u>Jones</u>
Nov 8	<i>Institutes</i> III.xi-xii (pp. 725-762) Dillenberger, pp. 229-265	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justification by Faith • Life in Calvin's Geneva • Student Report on <u>Monter</u>
Nov 15	<i>Institutes</i> III.xix and III.xxi-xxii (pp. 833-896 and 920-947) Prichard, "Health, Education, and Welfare in the Reformation: Who Cared?" (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grace and Election • Calvin and Social Responsibility • Student Report on <u>Innes</u>

Nov 22	No Class - Thanksgiving Break	
Nov 29	<i>Institutes</i> IV.i-iii (pp. 1011-1068) Walker, "Capitalism and the Reformation" (H)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church • The Protestant Ethic • Student Report on <u>Weber</u>
Dec 6	<i>Institutes</i> IV.xiv-xvii (pp. 1276-1428)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sacraments • Student Report on <u>Davis</u>
Dec 13	<i>Institutes</i> IV.xx (pp. 1485-1521)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Government • Student Report on <u>Leith</u>

Secondary Sources for Student Reports

Each of the following texts is available in the Seminary library, and most are available for purchase through an online bookseller. The Seminary bookstore may have some in stock as well.

Thomas Davis, *The Clearest Promises of God: The Development of Calvin's Eucharistic Teaching* (AMS Press, 1995) BX9423.C5D38

Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (Westminster, 1995) BT810.2.D68

Mary Potter Engle, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Scholar's Press, 1988) BT701.2.E54

H. Jackson Forstman, *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority* (Stanford, 1962) BX9418.F6

William Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Pickwick Publishers, 1983) HV355.G4I56

Serene Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (Westminster, 1995) BX9418.J72 1995

John Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Westminster, 1989) BX9418.L43

E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (Wiley, 1967) DQ449.5.M6

Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Baker House, 1987) BT27.M85

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Scribner, 1958) BR115.E3W4

Randall Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Fortress, 1993) BR333.2.Z33

Other Suggested Reading

These additional works may be helpful especially to students in the Presbyterian Church (USA) as they prepare for their Theological Competence examination.

Book of Confessions: Study Edition (Geneva Press, 1999)

Edward J. Dowey, *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to the Book of Confessions* (Westminster Press, 1968)

Donald McKim and David Wright, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1992)

John Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*. (John Knox Press, 1981)

Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Westminster John Know Press, 1994)

Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions* (Westminster Press, 1985)

John Mulder, *Sealed in Chris:: The Symbolism of the Seal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (Presbyterian Publishing House, 1991)

William Placher, *Belonging to God: A Commentary on A Brief Statement of Faith*. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1992)