



**Supervised Reading Colloquium: Systematic Theology  
THSR9301  
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary  
Time: Friday, 1:00-3:00 PM  
(Sept 18, Oct 30, Nov 13, Dec 11)  
Location: TBD**



Flammarion engraving (1888)

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## I. MISSION AND RATIONALE

NOBTS and Leavell College prepare servants of Christ to walk with Him, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission.

In pursuit of this calling, the reading of and commentary upon texts is one of the main ways theology undertakes its responsibilities as an intellectual work. Chiefly such reading and commentary is directed with especial attentiveness to Holy Scripture, but also and derivatively to texts significant for the church's common reflection in the past or present. Particularly for those entering into any form of teaching ministry, developing the ability to read with charity and justice is a *sine qua non*. This course's purpose is to facilitate the acquisition and strengthening of these skills and virtues as an intellectual community centered on the commendation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, this course consists in a conversation (colloquy) on a shared text or set of texts, emphasizing the practice of careful reading and interpretation.

This term we will focus on three topics in contemporary discourse: the nature and tasks of theology, and the doctrines of creation and Christ.

## II. OUR CORE VALUES

*Doctrinal Integrity* – Knowing that the Bible is the Word of God, we believe it, teach it, proclaim it, and submit to it. The doctrinal statements used in our evaluations are our Articles of Religious Belief and the Baptist Faith and Message Statement.

*Spiritual Vitality* – We are a worshipping community, with both personal spirituality and gathering together as a Seminary for the praise and adoration of God and instruction in His Word.

*Mission Focus* – We are not here merely to get an education or to give one. We are here to change the world by fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

*Characteristic Excellence* – What we do, we do to the utmost of our abilities and resources as a testimony to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*Servant Leadership* – We follow the model of Jesus and exert leadership and influence through the nurture and encouragement of those around us.

The Core Value for this academic year is *Mission Focus*.

## III. EXPECTATIONS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

### 1. *Knowledge and Understanding*

- Students should demonstrate a flexible understanding of the texts discussed and the issues raised.

### 2. *Transferable skills*

- Students should show an improved capacity for attentive and reflective reading of ancient and modern texts.
- Students should demonstrate improved analytical and synthetical abilities with regard to arguments, concepts, and rhetoric.
- Students should demonstrate an ability to formulate arguments and articulate critical judgments orally.
- Students should demonstrate an ability to engage in and profit from group discussion.

## IV. COURSE GUIDELINES

a. ***Academic Misconduct.*** Viewing your education as something other than forming you in Christian virtue will tempt you towards any number of poor choices, like academic misconduct. It is your responsibility to know what academic misconduct includes (e.g., [plagiarism](#)). Students should familiarize themselves thoroughly with the school's policies, ignorance of which is no excuse. Any

help you receive on your assignments will count as misconduct (this includes especially using the services of research and writing companies like ‘Docent Research Group’).

b. **Technology.**<sup>1</sup> All computing devices are prohibited in the classroom (laptops, tablets, phones of any sort, recording devices, etc). This guideline might appear draconian and perverse, but it exists strictly for the benefit of everyone involved. Though many may feel that their use of technology makes them better, more efficient scholars, the [best research](#) says that [it does not](#). In fact, studies show that it significantly impairs your learning and [the learning of others around you](#). Taking notes by hand [improves recall](#) and apprehension, as does [reading on paper and not on screens](#). During class, phones will be completely silenced. Even then, if you are dependent on your smartphone, its mere presence – even if powered off – [has been proven to diminish your cognitive capacities](#). All that to say, we will use our short time together to practice a little asceticism (or luddism if you prefer).

\* In accordance with this stipulation, you are required to have physical copies of the course texts; e-books are not allowed.

\* The only exception to this policy is the technology required for distance learning. Even students participating online must follow all applicable guidelines.

c. **Assignments and Attendance.** Assignments and attendance are not optional: all assignments must be completed and any *unexcused* absence will forfeit a passing grade.

## V. COURSE TEXTS

### Series 1: Nature and Tasks of Theology

1a. Crisp, Oliver D. *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Baylor, 2019)

1b. Webster, John. *The Culture of Theology* (Baker, 2019)

1c. Westerholm, Martin. “Analytic Theology and Contemporary Inquiry,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 80.3 (2019): 230-254.

### Series 2: Creation

2a. Davison, Andrew. *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge, 2020).

2b. Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Oxford, 2011)

### Series 3: Christology

3a. Scheeben, Matthias Joseph. *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, Book Five, Soteriology, Part One, *The Person of Christ the Redeemer* (Emmaus Academic, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> I have adapted and expanded this section mostly from Prof. Alan Jacobs at Baylor University.

## VI. ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed on the basis of the following:

**a. Reading and Participation.** Centering as the course does on conversation around a common set of texts, students shall read all of the assigned reading in such a manner that they are prepared for and engaged in discussion intelligently.

**i. Instructions for Reading.** Among other matters, ask yourself the following questions as you take notes and prepare for class discussions:

(1) Argument:

- > What is the chief claim being made and how is it constructed as well as supported?
- > What are the main questions to which the author's arguments are intended as answers?
- > What are the highs and lows of the argument?
- > What objections could be raised against the author and how might they respond?

(2) Interpretation

- > Identify areas of the argument that are ambiguous or difficult; what are the most charitable and just ways of understanding these portions?
- > Identify any the larger context(s) for the argument; how do these bear upon its intelligibility?

(3) Claims

- > Where does the argument succeed and where does it fail?
- > What are some unexplored/unarticulated consequences of the argument?

**b. Notes.** The kind of reading and participation required of students is impossible without thoughtful note-taking on the material we read together. At the conclusion of the term, students will submit electronically a copy of their notes on the reading material to the faculty convener.

**i. Instructions for notetaking.** As a rule of thumb, the quality of your reading grows and diminishes in proportion to the quality of your notes. Part of what you should seek to cultivate this term, in this course, are better habits of notetaking. Notes may be taken on your computer or by hand; electronic copies will be due and submitted on Dec 11.

**c. Précis and Discussion Theses.** When we meet, one or two student responders will be chosen to provide a précis and critical response to the session's reading(s). Both assignments must be distributed to the whole class electronically by 8:30am of the day that we meet.

**i. Précis instructions.** The student responder(s) will submit a précis (a critical outline and overview) of that session's reading, to be distributed to the whole class. Rather than a mere summary or book report, the précis of the material engages critically with its argument so as to display its logical structure as well as tensions. The instructions provided above on reading are very relevant here. Success will require students to go beyond their initial notes, probing the argument, and sitting with the material so as to reproduce a critical and analytical outline of the steps the author takes and how they cohere together. On

average, a précis of an *individual chapter* in a normal monograph could be anywhere from 800-1500 words, so the assignment should be substantive without being excessively large. The goal: produce a précis comprehensive enough that you won't ever need to read the book again.

**ii. Discussion Theses instructions.** The student responder(s) are each responsible for writing a handful (3-4) of "theses" drawn from their critical analysis of the reading. A thesis proposes a disputable claim for discussion that weds insightful interpretation and analysis. Theses should be succinct without being pithy, too obvious, or immaterial. Writing the précis with care is essential for constructing good theses.

**d. Critical Response to each Series.** Students will write a 3k word response essay to the material read in each "Series," drawing connections and exploring differences. These short essays should be appropriately supplemented by outside sources, where relevant.

**i. Critical Response instructions.** These are *not* book reviews. Critical response essays should have the mindset of a conference presentation, thus advancing a thesis with economy and care. Papers should be in Times New Roman, 12-pt font, 1.5 spacing, and conform (more or less) to Chicago-Turabian style. These essays are due on Sept 18 (Series 1), Oct 30 (Series 2), and Dec 11 (Series 3).

## VII. GRADING

Grades for this class are determined on the basis of a pass/fail metric, where work must merit a "B" to pass.

## VIII. PROCEDURE

Each session will be led by the faculty convener and the student responder(s). This course offers a unique setting in which faculty and students think together about the same arguments. Thus, as members of one and the same intellectual community, everyone's participation is expected. Students should come prepared with issues they would like to raise and discuss.

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at his discretion.

## IX. READING SCHEDULE

Session	Assigned Readings	Student Responders
Sept 18	Series 1	TBD
Oct 30	Series 2	TBD
Nov 13	Scheeben (pages TBD)	TBD
Dec 11	Scheeben (pages TBD)	TBD