

# BRITE–BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

## *Prolegomena & Scripture Syllabus*

*Spring 2019*

Christ Church Radford, Conference Center, 6226 University Park Drive, Radford, VA  
January 28–May 6, 2019  
Mondays 6:30pm to 8:30pm

Dr. W. Duncan Rankin

### Course Description

This course is a study of **Theological Prolegomena** (introduction, theological method) and **Doctrine of Scripture** (revelation, inspiration, authority). Our survey of doctrine will be based on the exegesis of Scripture, with continual reference to historical theology. All along we will remember the crucial nexus between faith & life, doctrine & practice, endeavoring to stress the importance of these doctrines for Christian thought, life, & ministry.

### Course Objectives

To introduce the student to the main Biblical themes concerning Revelation & Scripture is the main objective of this course. We also will endeavor to increase the student's understanding of these doctrines & the historical/contemporary debates surrounding them, as well as the ability to communicate them in both academic & popular settings. To strengthen the student's commitment to historic Christian theology (see <https://www.brite-va.org/about-brite/> for BRITE's Theological Foundations) & to assist in preparing the student to deal with unbiblical systems of theology in their various contemporary manifestations are also important course goals. Finally, we will seek to move the student to obedience & worship of the God who redeemed him or her.

### Course Reading Prerequisite

All students who have never taken a systematic theology class should before the first class read Donald Macleod's *A Faith to Live By* (Christian Focus, 2015), which is only \$9.99 in Kindle format from Amazon for a Kindle device, app, or any browser. Yes, physical copies also meet this requirement, but only if they are also the revised edition, which was published in hardback in 2002 & in softback in 2010. While a little weak on the doctrine of creation, the sweep of this fine work will introduce you to a broad range of theological concepts.

## Course Digital Library Requirement

Providing affordable theological education to the Virginia Blue Ridge region, BRITE now requires all students taking courses for credit to invest in its boutique institutional digital library resource: the Custom Designed BRITE Logos Package.

Core textbooks for BRITE theology courses are included in this digital library resource at a lower cost than the physical texts.

You will also benefit in other ways from your BRITE digital library:

- \* Cut & paste quotations, letting Logos automatically do the work of providing the perfect proper footnotes for your reaction papers, Berkhof Study Guide Questions, & term papers!
- \* Read more quickly & with better comprehension, since key passages highlighted by other readers are visible in each ebook!
- \* Speed research by effortlessly searching within books for key theological words & biblical texts.

Adding to your Logos digital library thru your years of study will also be a help:

- \* Gather the commentaries you need for teaching & preaching in Logos: there is no better way to prepare a lesson or sermon.
- \* Never buy a bookshelf or pack a box of books again!
- \* Always have your library readily at hand on your laptop!
- \* Keep your library at your fingertips with the Logos iPhone or Android app, so you have a fighting chance to answer those “I’m gonna stump you!” questions we all get at the most inconvenient times....

Do not rush out & get a Logos package directly yourself: it will cost more & not contain all that you need. A special institutional discount has been negotiated by BRITE for our own boutique package resource! After registration, all for-credit students will receive an email from Logos with details on how to get the Custom Designed BRITE Logos Package at this helpful discount.

## Course Requirements

### Class Attendance

Class attendance for all lectures will be imperative for successful completion of this course.

Spring Break is scheduled for March 18<sup>th</sup>, with class cancelled for this middle day of the semester, unless a previous class had to be cancelled as a Snow Day, ruining our dreams of a Spring Break beach holiday! Snow Day cancellations will be announced by the professor or Dean by email.

During lecture hours, questions are welcomed, but students are asked to hold them until asked for by the instructor.

All students should bring a Bible, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, & the *Trinity Hymnal* (1990) to class each week. Classes will begin with a student devotional & singing. Musical accompaniment provided by the prof!

Three additional reading seminars will also be held outside of class lecture time via small group Zoom online video conference arranged by the professor with all for-credit students. Audit students who have completed the seminar reading will also be welcome. These monthly Zoom seminars will cover the reading seminar texts assigned below.

### Required Textbooks

- (1) John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster/John Knox, 1960 translation of the 1559 Latin edition, edited by John T. McNeill & translated by Ford Lewis Battles), 1:35-96. [Included in Custom Designed BRITE Logos Package]
- (2) Louis Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* contained in *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, revised & enlarged 1996 edition), 1-200. [Included in Custom Designed BRITE Logos Package]
- (3) Derek Thomas, *The Bible* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), xi-118.
  - \* This book is not yet in ebook format on Logos or Kindle, although its title pages appears to list an electronic version.
  - \* It is currently in print (ISBN 978-1848718128), available via Westminster Seminary Bookstore or Amazon for under \$10.
  - \* Audit students are also encouraged to read this excellent small book, so that they may participate in the classroom discussion of it during the Scripture lectures.

### Required Zoom Reading Seminar Texts

- (1) Peter Jensen, *The Doctrine of Revelation* (IVP, 2002) [Included in Custom Designed BRITE Logos Package]
- (2) RC Sproul, *Scripture Alone* (P&R, 2005). Available in paperback or audio format from Amazon for under \$15.

- \* Details on each of these Zoom Online Video Conferences TBD with prof.
- \* Do not panic: these Zoom seminars will be more manageable than you might think!
- \* The first Zoom will be held in February & the second in April.
- \* See the professor at the close of the first course for more details.

## Evaluation:

Because of its central & essential importance to the Gospel, pour your heart, mind, & strength into the learning of this course. It will glorify God & bless His people for years to come!

### 1. **Reading Seminars** (20%)

Three reading seminars will be held outside of class lecture time via small group Zoom online video conference arranged by the professor with all for-credit students. Audit students who have completed the seminar reading will also be welcome.

The Zoom seminars will cover the reading seminar texts assigned above. Details on each of these 2 Zoom Online Video Conferences TBD with prof. The first will be held in February & the second in April. See the professor at the close of the first course for more details

A three page reading response report will be required for each Zoom seminar, due one week after each respective seminar.

### 2. **Berkhof Reaction Paper** (10%)

A three page reaction paper should be submitted after reading Berkhof's *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology*. This paper is due by April 1.

### 3. **Calvin Outline** (10%)

Each for-credit student should prepare an original outline of the reading assigned in Calvin's *Institutes*. Beginning with the book, chapter, & section divisions included in the text, expand your outline by briefly summarizing a key point or two in each section, but no more. Outlines will be graded comparatively.

Outlines of Book I, chapters 1-9 should be submitted by March 1.

### 4. **Term Paper** (30%)

A 10 page theological research paper is required for this course, including a title page, introductory paragraph, clear thesis statement, section headings, concluding paragraph, footnotes, and bibliography.

Papers must only cover a theological substantially matter raised in Derek Thomas's *The Bible* & agreed with the professor. No exceptions will be allowed.

Sources cited in a footnote & included in the bibliography must at least include the following 20 items:

- (1) One dictionary of theology or historical theology
- (2) Two commentaries on Old Testament books
- (3) Three commentaries on New Testament books
- (4) Four creeds or confessions of faith
- (5) All three required course textbooks
- (6) One course seminar text
- (7) Two journal articles
- (8) Three major systematic theology works
- (9) One other work

The following schedule should be followed in submitting this paper:

- (1) One page topic proposal is due on February 15
- (2) Two page bibliography is due on March 1
- (3) Three page thesis statement & outline is due on March 15
- (4) A draft of the paper is due on April 10
- (5) The final paper submission is due with the Final Exam

Draft papers will be marked extensively by the professor & returned to the students, so that their final paper submissions & grades will be stronger. With this in mind, draft papers must be submitted in MS Word, so that the professor can use the Review function to include comments & proposed changes, which the students can then read & either accept or reject.

Students should expect to lose marks for deficiencies in deadlines, form, content, or argument. See the Course Grading Guide at the end of this syllabus for more detail on how papers will be marked.

However, students that submit their draft in a timely fashion & do not shrink from completing this assignment have good grounds on which to hope for a strong grade!

#### **5. Final Exam (30%)**

The examination will test the student's mastery of all the material covered in the course lectures & reading & allow the student to apply principles learned in the course to theological test cases.

## Reading Guide to Calvin's *Institutes*

The following reading guide is provided to aid the student in understanding the assigned reading in Calvin. They are arcane but still helpful, taken from an appendix to volume 1 of Thornwell's *Collected Writings*. The questions put here should not be turned into the professor, but rather should be read before reading each chapter, to help you see in advance the key points Calvin raises. These questions can also help you prepare the required outline on Calvin's *Institutes*, Book I, chapters 1-9.

### CHAPTER I.

1. In what sense does Calvin use the term *Wisdom*?
2. What is the propriety of this use?
3. What is the sense attached to it in the Scriptures, particularly in the Proverbs of Solomon?
4. What was the use of it with Plato and Aristotle?
5. In what does wisdom principally consist?
6. What is the scope of the first chapter?
7. Show how the knowledge of ourselves conduces to the knowledge of God. Generalize Calvin's three propositions upon this point.
8. Show how the knowledge of God conduces to the knowledge of ourselves. Generalize the proposition and give the illustration.
9. What effect has the presence of God clearly manifested, even upon good men, and why? Illustrate by instances.
10. Recapitulate the chapter.

### CHAPTER II.

1. What is the scope of this chapter?
2. What kind of knowledge does Calvin mean? Discriminate it from two other kinds of knowledge of God.
3. What is the question in regard to God which this knowledge answers?
4. Can we answer the question, *Quid sit Deus*?
5. Recapitulate.

### CHAPTER III.

1. What is the connection of this chapter with the preceding?
2. What does Calvin mean by saying that the knowledge of God is natural?
3. What is the doctrine of innate ideas combated by Locke?
4. What is the true doctrine in relation to *a priori* cognitions?
5. Are Calvin's expressions liable to any just censure?
6. What is the proof that the knowledge of God is natural?
7. What are the recognized *criteria* of primitive truths?

8. Show that a sense of religion is universal.
9. Answer the objection that religion is the invention of politicians.
10. Show that a sense of religion is ineffaceable. Recapitulate.

#### CHAPTER IV.

1. What is the scope of this chapter and its connection with the preceding?
2. To what two causes does Calvin ascribe man's natural ignorance of God?
3. Is this ignorance excusable or not, and why not?
4. Show the effects of vanity coupled with pride, explaining what vanity and pride are.
5. Show the effects of malice or deliberate wickedness.
6. How would you meet the objection that superstitious worship will be accepted, because it is well-meant and sincere?
7. What is the kind of worship rendered by the malicious?

#### CHAPTER V.

1. What is the design of this chapter?
2. Into how many parts may it be divided?
3. What is said of the fitness of nature to teach us the being and character of God?  
What is the testimony of the Psalmist?
4. Is this testimony confined to the universe as a whole, or is it true of every department of God's works? What is the impression produced by it as a *whole*?
5. What is the difference between the unlearned and the man of science with relation to this testimony?
6. Among the mirrors of God in nature which is the most eminent? and why?
7. How does Calvin illustrate our ingratitude in not recognizing God in our own structure and constitution?
8. How does Calvin illustrate the wonderful constitution of the soul?
9. What does he say of a soul of the world?
10. What is said of the sustentation and guidance of this mighty fabric? And how are God's eternity and goodness educed?
11. What does Calvin mean by extraordinary works?
12. What is the real teaching of Providence in its ordinary and extraordinary operations?
13. What may we infer from the astonishing contrasts often presented in the lives of men?
14. How would you show that the manifestations of God in His works are singularly suited to promote piety?
15. What light does it throw upon the doctrine of a future life?
16. What is the actual effect of this teaching upon men? How do they pervert it?
17. How, particularly, is the vanity of the human mind illustrated?
18. How do the Scriptures represent all will-worship? Mention the four Scripture proofs appealed to.
19. Is nature, then, alone competent to lead a sinner to God?

20. Is human ignorance excusable?
21. What two inferences may be drawn from this chapter?

#### CHAPTER VI.

1. What is the design of this chapter?
2. What has been God's method from the beginning in instructing His Church?
3. Is revelation necessary in order to the knowledge of natural religion?
4. How does Calvin illustrate this?
5. To what two heads may revelation be reduced?
6. If reason in our fallen state cannot *discover* the doctrines of natural religion, of what use is it in relation to them?
7. How did God at first communicate His will?
8. What was the next step?
9. What is the advantage of reducing it to writing?
10. Where is the entire revelation now found?
11. What is the chief scope of this revelation?
12. How do the doctrines of natural religion stand related to this end?
13. What, therefore, is the only true method of knowing God?
14. How do the Scriptures contrast the lights of nature and revelation?

#### CHAPTER VII.

1. What is the scope of this chapter?
2. What is the real state of the question?
3. What is the *thesis* which Calvin maintains? and what is the opposite one which he condemns?
4. What is the first objection to the Romanist doctrine?
5. What is the Church's commendation of Scripture?
6. How is Scripture authenticated?
7. How is the sentiment so often quoted from Augustin explained?
8. What is the real ground of the authority of Scripture?
9. How can we infallibly know it to be the word of God?
10. Of what use are the probable proofs?
11. What is the nature of that faith which the self-evidence of Scripture produces?
12. How is the relation of the Church and Scripture expressed by Melancthon?

#### CHAPTER IX.

1. What is the connection of this chapter with the preceding?
2. What does Calvin say of those who neglect the Word under the pretext of being led by the Spirit?
3. How does he show that the Holy Spirit always produces reverence for the Word? Mention all the Scripture arguments.

4. How would you answer the objection that the Spirit is degraded by subjecting Him to the trial of Scripture?
5. How would you answer the cavil against the Word, that it is merely the letter which killeth? Explain the passage.
6. What is the precise function of the Spirit in relation to the Word? and how is the Word a test of the Spirit?
7. What is the Word without the Spirit, and what the Spirit without the Word?

### Course Lecture Topics

The projected lecture topic schedule is as follows:

- (1) Syllabus
- (2) Introduction
- (3) Theological Method
- (4) General Revelation
- (5) Special Revelation
- (6) Scripture
- (7) Hermeneutics

### Office Hours

The professor will be available to meet with students before each class by appointment.

In addition, telephone or Zoom online conferences can be scheduled as needed. Students may contact the professor by phone/text (706-691-3702) or email ([drankin@brite-va.org](mailto:drankin@brite-va.org)), but preferably before 10pm in the evening.

### Recommended Books

The following books are highly recommended for your reference during the course:

#### **Systematic Theology**

- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 McNeill-Battles)
- Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.)
- W. à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (4 vols.)
- John Owen, *Collected Works* (16 vols.)
- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.)
- Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*
- B.B. Warfield, *Collected Works* (10 vols.)
- H Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (4 vols.)
- H Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*
- L Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*

L Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*  
L Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*  
John Murray, *Collected Writings* (4 vols.)  
R.L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*  
Wayne Gruden, *Systematic Theology*  
Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (+4 vols.)  
Donald Macleod, *Faith to Live By*  
Joel Beeke, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*  
Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology* (+2 vols.)

**Theological prolegomena** (introduction, theological method)

Richard Muller, *The Study of Theology*  
John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*  
David Wells, *No Place for Truth*

**Scripture** (revelation, inspiration, authority, hermeneutics)

Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol.1  
N.B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, eds. *The Infallible Word*  
Nigel Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible*  
D.A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds. *Scripture and Truth*  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*  
E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*

## Paper Grading Guide

The following criteria will be used in grading all written work for this course:

### GENERAL

- Interesting.  Substantial.  Well-written.
- Sufficiently [ Not sufficiently] focused or developed.
- Not organized clearly.  Read instructions again.

### DEVELOPMENT

- Shows  Does not show clear plan and purpose.

### TREATMENT

- The thesis or objective of your piece should be stated more clearly.
- Raises more issues than can be adequately treated in a piece of this length.
- Contains [ does not] contain enough data to enable the reader to understand the problems/ issues.
- Gives attention to Biblical principles  Paper contains good exegetical work.
- Interacts well with Confessional documents (esp. WCF and Catechisms).
- Displays knowledge of and interacts with  views within the broader Reformed tradition
  - views within modern evangelicalism  contrasting secular views.
- Paper contains good pastoral advice to Christian seeking to obey the Word of the Lord.
- The treatment [ is  is not] objective enough.
- You have too much material not germane to the subject.
- Too short to adequately develop your subject.

### DOCUMENTATION

- Good.  Adequate.  Lacking adequate documentation.

### APPENDICES/EXHIBITS

- Appropriate to the case.
- There are good, available documents you could have used.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- No bibliography!
- The bibliography is adequate.
- The bibliography is excellent.
- The bibliography leaves out some important sources on your topic.

### APPEARANCE

- Neat
- Sloppy

### ERRORS

- Grammatical.  Spelling errors.  Some typographical errors.
- Because the paper was late, I have unfortunately had to reduce your grade by five points per day from the due date, in fairness to your peers.

The grade I have assigned you is based upon your fulfillment of the instructions for the assignment, the overall quality of your presentation, my assessment of your grasp of the subject matter, your skill in communication of the material, and how well you did your work in comparison with your peers in the course.