Introduction to Fundamental Theology

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Introduction to Fundamental Theology: Sources and Methods

In this course, students will be introduced to the basic sources employed by responsible theologians and how they ought to be approached and assessed according to a well-formed theological method. Students in this course will be equipped to:

- explain what is meant by the term "revelation"
- provide, in broad outline, an articulation of the narrative thrust of Scripture from creation to sin, through restoration and to glory
- explain the concept of magisterial, teaching authority in the Church, and distinguish between dogma, doctrine, and theological opinion
- describe "tradition" and identify a variety of elements that comprise it
- critically engage with a theological text, sensitive to the distinctions to be drawn between dogma, doctrine, and theological opinion.

The following lectures will be provided in this course:

- What is Revelation?
- A Closer Look at Scripture
- What is Meant by "Tradition"?
- Magisterium and Magisterial Authority
- Assessing the Evidence and Formulating a Theologian Opinion
What is Revelation?

What is revelation? What does it fundamentally concern?

What is it about God that makes what is revealed accessible only because it is revealed?

Is revelation identical to Scripture? Who or what is God's definitive self-revelation?
What is Revelation?


Notes:
A Closer Look at Scripture

What is the overall narrative thrust of Scripture?

How does God move the narrative of Scripture from individual to clan, to nation, to all mankind?

Why is this movement not entirely linear? What is the source of the problem that causes the overall narrative of Scripture to be repeated on the micro level, over and over again along the way?
A Closer Look at Scripture

What are some of the difficulties associated with identifying what Scripture actually is? What can we make of textual variants in the manuscript tradition? What about the relationship between Hebrew and Greek in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament? Is the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) merely a translation?
A Closer Look at Scripture


Also, for an article with which I do not completely agree, but which shows something of the complexity of the issue of Scripture, such that one cannot accept Scripture without also accepting a view of Tradition, see: Emanuel Tov, "The Essence and History of the Masoretic Text," *Bogoslovlje: Journal of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade*, vol. 1 (2017): 7-26.
What is Meant by "Tradition"?

How does Tradition emerge?

What is the relationship between the various rites of the Church (Latin, Byzantine, Coptic, Chaldean, etc.) and the formation of Tradition, as well as our discernment of its content?

What are the basic elements of Tradition? Granting that doctrine and Tradition are distinct ideas, does Tradition nonetheless have a doctrinal element to it, and does broader Tradition have doctrinal significance?
What is Meant by "Tradition"?


Notes:
What is meant by the term "Magisterium"?

Can we provide some Scriptural evidence for the presence of this concept in the primitive Church?

What do Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch have to say about Magisterial authority as it was understood in the primitive Church?
Magisterium and Magisterial Authority

Why is it important to understand the way Matthew used the term "disciples" in his Gospel? In particular, who is the primary audience for the Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission?

What do the terms ecclesia docens and ecclesia discens mean?

What is the difference between ordinary and universal Magisterium and extraordinary Magisterium? Why is it a mistake to prioritize extraordinary Magisterium at the cost of diminishing the authority we attribute to ordinary and universal Magisterium?
Magisterium and Magisterial Authority


Notes:
Assessing the Evidence and Formulating a Theological Opinion

What are the parameters within which a theological opinion can be formulated responsibly? Can we formulate a theological opinion if we do not take account of what Scripture actually has to say about the question? What about if we take account of Scripture but deny Scripture authority over the question? What role does the actual practice of the Church have in providing evidence for the formulation of a theological opinion?

Why is the question of female deacons a good example of a case-study in formulating a theological opinion? What evidence do Scripture and Tradition supply us as a starting point? What questions do they leave open?
Assessing the Evidence and Formulating a Theological Opinion

How are the terms diakonos (διάκονος) and diakonia (διακονία) used in the New Testament era? How do they differ in meaning from the words doulos (δοῦλος) and douleia (δουλεία)?

As a matter of objective historical fact, were there people in the early Church called "deaconesses"?
Assessing the Evidence and Formulating a Theological Opinion

How were deaconesses used? How were they not used, in comparison to deacons? Did the larger Church condemn as abuses isolated instances in which deaconesses were used interchangeably with deacons? Were the words of ordination in the case of deaconesses the same as the words of ordination in the case of deacons?

Given the evidence available to us, what seems the likely response to the question of the ordination of women as deacons? Does it depend on how we define the term? If the Church restored the order of deaconess, would deaconesses simply be female deacons or something else? Are the terms "order" and "ordin" used differently in these instances or in the same respect?
Assessing the Evidence and Formulating a Theological Opinion


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