Creeds and Catechisms

ST540
Fall, 2016

Tuesdays, 1:30-4:45
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CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to the content and structure of the Christian faith through a close study of the ecumenical Creeds and Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms. Historical issues will be considered, but the central focus of the course will be the role of creed and catechism as summary, confession, and rule of the church’s faith, guiding and forming preaching, teaching, and biblical interpretation.

FURTHER DESCRIPTION

This is the first theology course in the NALS curriculum. Its purpose is to lay a foundation for future theological study and reflection, and in effect, to present the principles of Christian theology. The overall aim of the course is to consider in some depth what it means to be a confessional Christian, practicing Christian life, ministry, and theology on the basis of Holy Scripture according to a definite rule of faith. The course seeks to achieve this goal through a study of the ecumenical Creeds and the Catechisms of Martin Luther.

Starting with a brief account of the meaning of “confession” in Scripture, we will go on to reflect on the apostolic message and legacy as the starting-point and norm of Christian faith, life, and theology. We will consider the role of the apostolic “rule of faith” in the post-apostolic church, in its complex relationship to the apostolic legacy, the baptismal initiation, and the development of both the Creeds and the canon of Christian Scripture. Discussion of the Creeds will also lead us to consider the question of doctrinal authority in the church and the character of confessional Christian theology. With the help of the Catechisms, we will examine the way in which the Creeds form us in a scriptural vision of the world and of our own lives, and set forth the normative elements of confessional Christian teaching. In all this, we will be considering what it means to “follow the pattern of the sound words” which the church has received from the apostles “in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:13).

EPIGRAPH

“Among all the other good works that must also be practiced in the Christian community, there is no higher or more noble work or one that matters more both to God and to us human beings, than the cultivation and preservation of right Christian teaching. Where this is present, there God dwells with all His grace and it is not possible for things to turn out too badly. There one finds consolation, help, and joy, not as in the world, which lasts only for a time, but eternal consolation, eternal help, eternal joy. But where Christian teaching is either not present ... or else is impure and falsified ... even when there is no lack of temporal goods, what will ultimately follow is eternal misery, sorrow, and despair.” - Veit Dietrich (1506-1549), Preface to his Kinder-Postille (1546).
OUTCOMES

The general set of desired course outcomes stated by Trinity includes the following:

1. The student will recognize and identify the biblical theology evident in the course work.
2. The student will be able to articulate an Anglican [or in our case, Lutheran] understanding of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology.
3. The student will be able to effectively communicate the Christian message to a diversity of people in order to advance the mission of God.

Our course will serve these ends in multiple ways. It will address fundamental issues in biblical interpretation and reflect on Creeds and Catechisms as summaries of and guides to “biblical theology” (objective 1). It is devoted to the study of Lutheran confessional documents and examines closely the very idea of being “confessional,” which is central to historic Lutheranism (objective 2). The course is focused on the core of the Christian message as articulated in Creed and Catechism and on the meaning of faithfulness to that core as we pursue the mission of the gospel (objective 3).

TEXTBOOKS

Required


Recommended


WEEK 1: September 6: Confessing the Faith in Holy Scripture

Trueman, Creedal Imperative, 12-50