North American Lutheran Seminary

Creeds and Catechisms

ST540 – Fall, 2020

SHORT SYLLABUS

Instructor: David S. Yeago

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

A study of the foundations of Christian theology and ministry through reflection on 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 the Creeds and Catechisms as the “rule of faith” in the handing-on of the “pattern of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13) which the church has received from the Apostles of Christ. From this starting-point the course will address what it means to “confess the faith,” the nature and interpretation of Scripture, and the scope and authority of church doctrine.

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 understanding of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology. Students of other traditions, especially those in the Lutheran and Presbyterian programs, should be able to articulate the theological perspective of their own tradition.
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.
4. The student will be prepared to lead effectively in a variety of Christian communities.

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). It will be focused on the unifying center that holds diverse Christian communities together in a common faith (objective 4).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Basic Academic Decency**: Read and reflect on reading assignments in a timely manner. Attend class regularly and on time, or keep up with the recorded lectures. Turn in assignments on the assigned date in the prescribed manner.

2. **Participation in class**. Ask questions. Respond to your fellow students. It is my job to respond to your questions and to preside over our time in class. It is therefore not your job to decide whether your questions and concerns are “worthy” of attention. Your job is to **take responsibility for your learning** and put your questions and concerns out there where they can be addressed.

Class participation will not be formally graded but good class participation can raise a marginal grade to the next level, while frequent absences and other forms of disrespect can bring a grade down.

3. **Make the instructor work for his pay**. Questions and concerns that for whatever reason don’t get addressed in class are still your responsibility and mine. The best way to pursue such questions is by email or (for residential students) by stopping me on campus.

**ONLINE STUDENTS ONLY**: In order to help me keep in touch with your needs, I am asking you to “Check In” with me once a week by email on your understanding of the course material. If things are making sense, you can simply say so. If you have questions or concerns, this is your opportunity to “raise your hand” and ask. Please send me your email for each week before the following Monday, for example, before September 12 for Week 1. (There may be a better way to do this using Google tools. Your suggestions will be welcomed.)

**RESIDENTIAL STUDENTS**: I am not requiring a weekly check-in from you because you have the opportunity to ask questions in class. However, you may email me with questions and concerns at any
time, and you should do so if you are having trouble and your concerns have not been addressed in class.

4. Written Assignments

   - Midterm reflection paper (app. 2000 words)
   - Brief theological-exegetical sketch on an assigned text (app. 1000 words)
   - Final reflection paper (app. 3000 words)

Paper topics and due dates TBA. More specific information about the exegetical sketch will be provided.

In arriving at a final grade, the final paper will constitute 45%, the midterm paper will constitute 35%, the exegetical sketch will constitute 20%.

REQUIRED TEXTS


