

## *Understanding Our Task: Defining and Locating "Theology"*

### Course Outline

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#### I. Introductory Observations

#### II. Etymological Definition

- a. Theos + logos = the study of God
- b. The logos, which is the basis and norm of theological work, is not abstract (see John 1:1-18), but Jesus Christ.
- c. Brief exegesis of John 1:18
  - i. There is a basic human incapacity for God identified in the statement that “no one has seen God.”
  - ii. The only basis for rightly thinking and speaking for God is in God Himself.
  - iii. In Christ, God “exegetes” Himself.
- d. Theology refers to the study of God (theos) according to the claims and expectations established in his word (logos), Jesus Christ.

#### I. Historical Definition

- e. To confess that Christ is the singular basis and norm of theological study is already to be involved in the life of faith.
- f. The oldest and most-venerated definition of theology is *fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding.”
- g. If theology is an exercise in “faith-thinking,” then it needs to be differentiated from secular religious studies / science of religion.
  - i. The former studies God as recipients of His address, therefore according to the authority, shape, and substance of His teaching.
  - ii. The latter studies the human as a religious agent, i.e., as exemplifying certain psychological, social, philosophical, and anthropological states of being.
  - iii. The former is guided by a text identified by a community as Scripture.
  - iv. The latter is guided by norms of a given field of inquiry (psychology,

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sociology, philosophy, anthropology).

#### V. Descriptive Definition

- h. If theology is an exercise in faith, then it is guided by a concrete confessional orientation informed above all the scriptural sources of that tradition.
- i. Theology is constructive reiteration of God's self-speech or revelation in Jesus Christ, undertaken as an examination of the community's past and present testimony to Christ in the light of the texts recognized by that community to be authoritative witnesses to God's revelation, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

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