T862: Studies and Critical Discussion or H802 Issues in Church History: Foundations of Reformed History, Theology, and Practice: John Calvin

This course will review the historical setting for the emergence of Reformed theology and practice, with a concentration on the work of John Calvin and discussion of Calvin’s contributions to subsequent Reformed traditions and implications in the life of the Church and the world today.

This is going to be an advanced reading seminar that will use John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as the seminal source for the Reformed family of Protestant churches. Emphasis will be on Calvin’s most crucial and constructive contributions. In addition we will set the historical stage before we engage the *Institutes*, and at the end of the course we will read Jane Dempsey Douglass’ classic *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* to see a contemporary historical reading of Calvin.

**Required Texts:**


**Course Requirements:**

1. **Participation:** You presence and participation will weigh substantially in the grade for this class. Each week, you should have completed the assigned readings and be prepared to participate thoughtfully in a discussion of them. Expect your grade to drop if you miss more than two class sessions, are frequently late, or appear not to have read the assignments. **Reminder:** CTS policy states that anyone who misses more than 25% of a course cannot pass it, whatever the reason.

2. **Weekly Papers:** Six short papers (2 single-spaced pages), each written right after a class session, will ensure that you are understanding the key issues. You should start these right after next week’s class to get them over with. Each paper must be turned in the week after the class session and reading that it covers. Page 1 of the weekly paper should describe the main issues and insights from the previous week’s discussion and reading, not in the form of listing topics covered, but describing the most important content. Do Not use phrases like, “First we talked about, and then we talked about...” Instead, it should be more like, “The most important issue was about sin as loss of trust in God.” Page 1 should not include your further opinions or reflections on the issues - that comes on Page 2. On Page 2, reflect on what you found most important, your growing edges, and your further thinking about key insights.

3. **Reading in Calvin and Presenting what you find:** In addition to the assigned reading, you should pick an issue or an area of Calvin’s writings that you are interested in (and that is not covered in class) and read in it. For example, look at Calvin’s *Commentary on Genesis* for insight on how he handles the conflict between biblical inspiration and science. In weeks 9 and 10 (Mar. 26 & Apr. 2) everyone will share with the class what they have read and learned in a brief oral presentation (15 minutes each). You will also write a 3-5 page report on it. You should discuss your choice for the reading with the instructor by March 10.

4. **Worship:** Each class member will lead a 10-15 minute worship session at the end of class. The worship should incorporate some aspect of Reformed theology and practice in a liturgically meaningful way. Feel free to use materials from Reformed prayer books (citing them properly!), whether historical or contemporary, but you must write some of the worship yourself (prayer or litany or brief homily). Each week we will discuss the previous week’s worship, so be prepared to explain what makes it distinctively “Reformed”. And please do not assume that “Reformed” means stilted! There is a great deal of contemporary worship material in the Reformed churches – don’t neglect it!

4. **Alternative Proposals:** If you wish to do an alternative project, such as a major term paper (20-25 pages) or some other project, instead of the 6 short papers and short report, you should negotiate this with the instructor by the third class (Feb. 3).
Calendar:

Jan. 20 First class: Introductions to each other, to the syllabus, and to Calvin.

Jan. 27 Historical Context: Cameron chapters 1 (pp. 9-19), 6 (pp. 79-98), 15 (pp. 210-266), and 17 (pp. 293-318). Worship:

February 3 Life of Calvin: Cottrett Part II.
Worship:

February 10 Knowledge of God in Creation and Scripture: Bk 1, chap I-VII (pp. 35-81)
Worship:

February 17 Providence, Human Nature, Principle of Accommodation: I:XIII-XVII (pp. 159-228); Worship:

February 24 Third Use of the Law, Ten Commandments, Jews: 2:VII-VIII (pp. 348-423); 2:X-XI (pp. 428-464) Worship:

March 3 Wrath of God and the Atonement; Christian Freedom; Adiaphora 2:XVI (pp. 503-534); Book 3:XVII (pp. 802-849); Book 4:X:29 (p. 1206-07). Worship:

March 10 Prayer; Hell, and Predestination: pp. 850-897; p. 1007; pp. 920-987 Worship:

March 17 Sacraments: Book 4:XIV-XVII (pp. 1276-1428) Worship:

March 24 Holy Week: No Class

March 31 Civil Government: 4:XX (pp. 1485-1521); Worship:

April 7 Oral reports on readings: Worship:

April 14 Oral reports on readings: Worship:

April 21 Douglass, Chapters 1-3 and 6; Worship:

April 28 Reading Week: No Class

May 5 Exam Week: Make up day if needed
Bibliography

This is just a small sample that contains some of the better known works and a few interesting-looking ones. For a more complete list, go to the library website, www.palni.edu.


Parker, T. H. L. [There are many books on Calvin by Parker, a well-known Calvin scholar.]
