



## BRISBANE COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY UNIT OUTLINE

### MASTER OF THEOLOGY MASTER OF MINISTRY

UNIT TITLE	<b>DOCTRINE &amp; TRUTH AFTER MODERNITY</b>
UNIT CODE	C74240
UNIT STATUS	Elective
HOST FIELD	C
PREREQUISITE	C51013; C73113 Introducing Theology and one other Field C unit
INCOMPATIBLES	-
CREDIT POINTS	10cp
REQUIREMENTS	Attendance at week-long intensive (40 hours in class) plus 7 hours per week study over the 13-week semester
FREQUENCY	
OF OFFERING	Even Years – Semester 2
PREPARED BY	Dr Geoff Thompson
UNIT	
COORDINATOR	Dr Geoff Thompson
TEACHING STAFF	Dr Geoff Thompson
DATE PREPARED	16 February 2004

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#### **Rationale**

Modernity's critique of Christianity not only targeted specific doctrines, it also drove a wedge between received doctrine *per se* and the question of truth. With Immanuel Kant as the pivotal figure, the Enlightenment's idealist epistemology, its suspicion of tradition and authority, and its philosophical foundationalism all combined to put the doctrinal tradition on the defensive. As a result, the view emerged that the church's doctrines were merely ornaments to a truth that could be better expressed independently of the doctrines themselves. The contemporary discipline of doctrinal and systematic theology is engaged in vigorous debates about the extent to which doctrine itself does the epistemological work previously surrendered to the various foundationalist strategies. Stimulated by Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, the emergence of postliberal theology has provided a framework for exploring non-foundationalist approaches to theology in which close attention is given to the analogical, metaphorical and narrative character of doctrine and the complex nature of its relationship to truth. Doctrinal criticism and construction is now more clearly seen as an ecclesial practice inseparable from other truth-bearing practices of the church.

#### **Relation to Course**

By attending to the complex way that doctrinal work is related to the gospel's truth, the unit will help to overcome the risk of students learning their systematic theology as a set of discrete, unrelated topics. By attending to the way doctrinal work is integrated with other ecclesial practices, the unit helps to overcome any risk of students working with a theory/practice dualism. By attending to the way doctrine functions in the Christian community, students will develop an alertness to the place has in the life of the church and its members.

## Aims

With particular reference to the long-running debates occasioned by George Lindbeck's postliberal theology, the unit aims to introduce students to the Enlightenment critique of the doctrinal tradition and to the contemporary retrieval of doctrinal study and its re-integration into discussions of Christianity's truthfulness.

## Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. demonstrate a critical understanding of the nature and force of modernity's critique of Christianity's doctrinal tradition.
2. demonstrate an awareness of postmodern critiques of the modern worldview and the stimulus they have given to the development of postliberal theology in particular.
3. engage with a collection of doctrinal readings occasioned by the school of postliberal theology
4. understand a constructive revision of the postliberal proposal which draws on discussions of metaphor, narrative, and critical realism
5. Identify the various doctrines that are both explicit and implicit in the practices of their own communities of faith.

## Content

The Intensive will consist of four sessions on each of five days, making a total of 20 sessions, comprising a combination of lectures, seminars and reading times.

- Session 1: [Lecture] Introduction and class exercise focused on developing working definitions of key terms such as 'doctrine', 'truth', 'modernity', 'realism', 'idealism' 'non-realism' 'experience' 'gospel', 'culture' and 'postmodern'.
- Session 2: [Lecture] An introduction to Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, outlining his threefold typology of doctrine (propositionalist, experiential-expressivist, and cultural-linguistic).
- Session 3: [Lecture] Lindbeck's case for the superiority of the cultural-linguistic approach will be outlined with reference to his own engagement with inter-religious relationships, his performative-realist account of truth, and the question of doctrinal change and permanence.
- Session 4: [Lecture] Lindbeck's taxonomy of doctrines will be explored in order to demonstrate how his postliberal approach accounts for the way doctrine 'works' within the Christian community
- Session 5: [Seminar] Class Exercise: Having been introduced in the first four sessions to a framework for considering the role of doctrine, students will present a brief reflection identifying the doctrines that most shape the community of faith with which they are most familiar.
- Sessions 6: [Lecture] With the framework for discussion provided by Lindbeck now in place, this session will (a) retrace the emergence of modernity and postmodernity, (b) present an argument that much postmodern theology – especially that which appropriates 'spirituality', 'culture', 'religion' and 'deconstruction' - has not moved beyond Kant's idealist epistemology and thus leaves the doctrine/truth dualism firmly in place; and (c) argue therefore that debates sparked by Lindbeck's proposal are more likely than others to offer convincing realist accounts of doctrine. These sessions provide the background and rationale for the readings from the set text.
- Session 7: Continuation of Session 6
- Session 8: Reading Time
- Session 9: Class Exercise: Doctrine and Local Practice 2: Continuing the reflections begun in Session 5,
- Session 10: Seminar Preparation Time: Students will work in pairs or small groups preparing a seminar presentation for the whole class on an specific reading allocated from the text book.
- Session 11: [Seminar/Lecture] Students will present the seminar prepared in Session 9, identifying what their allocated reading contributes to the discussions about doctrine and truth after modernity. This will be followed by a short lecture on the same readings by the lecturer.  
Text 1: Hans Frei, "Identity Description and Jesus Christ"  
Text 2: William Placher, "The Triune God: The Perichoresis of Particular Persons."
- Session 12: [Seminar/Lecture] As for Session 10  
Text 1: Colin Gunton, "The Atonement and the Triune God"  
Text 2: J.A.DiNoia, "Theology in Dialogue"
- Session 13: [Seminar Preparation] As for Session 10
- Session 14: [Seminar/Lecture] As for Session 11  
Text 1: James Buckley, "Beyond the Hermeneutical Deadlock"

Text 2: Katherine Tanner, "Self-Critical Cultures and Divine Transcendence"

Session 15: [Seminar/Lecture] As for Session 11

Text 1: Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Feminist Theology: Language, Gender and Power"

Text 2: Rowan Williams, "Postmodern Theology and the Judgement of the World"

Session 16: [Workshop] In a guided workshop format, students will be encouraged to draw together the threads of the discussion generated by postliberal theology and on that basis helped to offer a informed critique of Lindbeck's work and to develop a constructive response.

Session 17: [Lecture] The main strands of the scholarly response to Lindbeck will be outlined and integrated with the critique developed by the class in the previous session.

Session 18: [Lecture] The outline of a counter proposal that better addresses the various issues involved in the relationship between doctrine and truth after modernity will be proposed. This will consist of developing a 'Christian narrative realism' which integrates doctrine, theological hermeneutics and the core practices of the church.

Session 19: [Lecture] Continuation of Session 18

Session 20: [Lecture] An occasional exercise in Christian narrative realism will be undertaken demonstrating how the issues surrounding the problems of doctrine and truth after modernity can be used to address a contemporary contribution to Australian cultural commentary and critique, namely John Carroll's *The Western Dreaming: The Western World is Dying for Want of a Story*.

### Organisation and Teaching Strategies

The intensive will consist of 20 sessions spread over 5 days. There will be a mixture of lectures, seminar-preparation times, seminar presentations and workshops. To facilitate student familiarity with the text book in such a short time, sessions will also be dedicated to reading.

A web-based discussion group will be used to support students between the end of the intensive and the end of the semester.

### Assessment

#### 1. A Project of between 1300 and 1500 words and worth 20% of the final mark.

Identify and classify the formative doctrines of the community of faith you are most familiar with, and indicate which doctrines might be required to deepen that community's Christian experience.

This will test Objective 5 and will be resourced by the overall content of the unit and the discussions generated in Sessions 5 and 9.

#### 2. A series of three Reading Reports, making up a total of between 1950 and 2250 words and worth 30% of the total mark.

Each report will represent an engagement with one of the texts included in the text book. A reading report template will be provided that will structure the students' readings of the texts and their responses to them.

This will test Objectives 1,2 and 3.

#### 3. An Essay of between 3250 and 3750 words and worth 50% of the final mark.

Students will choose from a range of set topics. Examples include:

(a) Identify the currents within the biblical witness, the theological tradition and the contemporary cultural condition which encourage the church to develop realist accounts of Christian doctrine.

(b) Identify and defend the reasons doctrinal work should take its place among the other practices of the Christian community.

(c) Identify the pressures modernity has placed upon a Christian doctrine of your choosing and develop an argument for how that doctrine could be developed after modernity.

This essay will test Objectives 1, 2 and 4.

## Generic Attributes

- Advanced skills in research, including primary and secondary texts
- Developments of capacity to collect, analyse and organize information and convey those ideas clearly and fluently, both in written and spoken forms.
- Further development of the ability to interact effectively with others in order to work towards a common outcome.

## Textbooks

### Required

Webster, John and Schner, George *Theology after Liberalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

### Recommended

Lindbeck, George *The Nature of Doctrine Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984)

Moore, Andrew, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar and Meaning* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003)

## Academic & General Resource Requirements

### References – Books

Buckley, Michael J, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986)

Carroll, John, *The Western Dreaming: The Western Word is Dying for Want of a Story* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2001)

Charry, Ellen T, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1997)

Coakley, Sarah, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

Frei, Hans, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)

Funkenstein, Amos, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986)

Gunton, Colin, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993)

Hyland, Paul, Gomez, Olga, and Greensides, Francesca, *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)

McGrath, Alister E, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Vancouver:Regent, 1990)

Milbank, John, Pickstock, Catherine, and Ward, Graham (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999)

Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996)

Strathern, Paul, *The Essential Derrida* (London: Virgin Books, 2000)

Tanner, Kathryn, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997)

Williams, Stephen, *Revelation and Reconciliation: A Window on Modernity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)

### References – Journal Articles

Hunsinger, George “Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth’s Hermeneutical Realism” in idem, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 210-225

Hunsinger, George, “Postliberal Theology” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 42-57

Jones, Serene “Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life” in Mioslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (eds), *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 51-76

Osborn, Robert T, “From Theology to Religion” *Modern Theology* 8 (1992), 75-88

Schner, George P, “The Appeal to Experience” in Eugene F. Rogers, *Theology and Sexuality: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 23-41

Vanhoozer, Kevin J, “Theology and the condition of postmodernity: a report on the knowledge of God” in idem (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 3-25

Woodhead, Linda, "Sophia or Gnosis? Christianity and New Age Spirituality" in Stephen C. Barton (ed), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 263-277.

**References – Online and Other IT Resources**

*John McDowell's Philosophy and Theology Page*. A site produced by one of the systematic theologians in the Faculty of Divinity at Edinburgh University. It offers articles and resource dealing with Christian theology at the boundaries of contemporary philosophy.

[www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/johnmcdowells\\_page.html](http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/johnmcdowells_page.html)

*Centre for Theological Inquiry (Princeton)*. This website has a 'Reflections' page that provides a variety of resources dealing with Christian theology and its relationship to modernity and postmodernity.

[www.ctinquiry.org/index.html](http://www.ctinquiry.org/index.html)