

## SYLLABUS - SYSTEMATIC/CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY- MESOM Fall 2021

8 Saturdays, 9/18, 10/02, 10/16 10/30, 11/06, 11/20, 12/04, 12/18

1:00 pm - 4:00 pm by Zoom

### Christian Theology for the Twenty-First Century

Dr. Phil Devenish – Instructor Email: [philphoeb.devenish@gmail.com](mailto:philphoeb.devenish@gmail.com)

#### Course Description:

The purpose of Christian constructive or systematic theology is always and everywhere the same: to determine what claims advanced in the name of Christianity are genuinely Christian, and to assess whether such claims are actually true. The context in which these questions are asked and answered is always changing. The goal of the course is to ask and answer these questions in ways that take account of the rapidly changing context of today's world.

The overall constructive strategy of the course is for the Instructor to present what might be called the 'skeleton' of the 'doctrinal' content of Christian theology, and for the Guests to add onto this the 'flesh and bones' of its 'practical' or 'lived' application. In this sense, it is a 'Team' effort.

#### Overview:

Typically, each session of the course consists in three units of 50 minutes each, separated by two 10 minute breaks:

Hour 1: The development of a comprehensive 'systematic' or 'constructive' theology by the instructor, consisting in on his own lectures, for which detailed outlines will be provided in electronic form. Each student is expected to print these out in hard copy for reference during class.

Hour 2: Class discussion of assigned readings (*Ogden, Gamwell, Marxsen, Goodwin*) based on one written question by each student, submitted two days ahead of class.

Hour 3: Presentation by guests on specific topics, as indicated above

#### Required Assignments:

For each session:

1. One written question, emailed to the instructor by midnight two days ahead of class

2. A one-page summary of the theological 'locus' covered in the instructor's lecture of the previous week, *due by email by midnight of the day before the following session*
3. Final paper: A 'Credo' or 'Ordination Paper' of 15-20 double-spaced, typewritten pages that incorporates the one-page summaries into a coherent argument, *due by email by midnight of December 23, 2021.*

### **Required Texts:**

To be procured by students in advance of the course, available through Amazon or [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com). HARD COPY REQUIRED—not electronic. The Instructor may assign additional readings from time to time.

- 1) N. B.: *Marxsen and Ogden readings for Session 1 to be prepared ahead for that session.*
- 2) Gamwell, Franklin I. *By the People, for the People: A Political Voice for Progressive Christians* (Wipf & Stock, 2010).
- 3) Goodwin, George L. "Testament" (unpublished; instructor will provide in electronic form)
- 4) Marxsen, Willi. *Jesus and the Church: The Beginnings of Christianity* (Trinity Press International, 1992).
- 5) Ogden, Schubert M. *To Teach the Truth: Selected Courses and Seminars* (Cascade Books, 2015).

### **Course Calendar and Reading Assignments:**

9/18 CT0 and 1 (Overview, Revelation)

Marxsen, *Jesus and the Church*, 117-136 [Marxsen]

-No guest Ogden, *To Teach the Truth*, 1-6 [Ogden]

10/2 CT2 (Christology, Trinity) Ogden, 6-34

-Guest: Peter Plagge -'Theology in the Rural Church'

Gamwell, *By the People, For the People*, vii-47

10/16 CT3 (God, Grace) Ogden, 128-48

-Guest: Alex Vishio -'National UCC Resolutions'

10/30 CT4 (Creation, Eschatology) *Marxsen*, 1-15; 16-35; iii-xxxv

-No guest *Ogden*, 35-8

11/6 CT5 (Church, Means of Grace) *Marxsen*, 137-71

-Guest John Riggs -'Worship in the Local Church'

11/20 CT6 (Human Existence) *Ogden*, 165-83

-Guest Al Sharp -'Addiction as an Issue for Churches in America'

12/4 CT7 (Inauthentic Response [Sin]) *Ogden*, 81-127; *Gamwell* 51-137

-Guest Jen Deweerth -'Christian Political Activism'

12/18 CT8 (Authentic Response [Faith, Goodwin, 'Testament'; *Ogden*, 183-211

Salvation, 'Ethics]

-Guest Larry Goodwin -Retrospective Summation

## Faculty Team

**Dr. Phil Devenish - Instructor**

Received his Ph. D. from SMU under Schubert Ogden in 1977. He taught at the University of Notre Dame from 1977-82 and taught and headed the M.Div. Program at The Divinity School at the University of Chicago from 1987-94. Among other courses, Phil taught Christian systematic theology each of those twelve years. He pastored Union Congregational Church of Hancock, ME UCC from 1983-87 and First Congregational Church, UCC, Webster Groves, MO from 1994-97. He owned and ran Devenish Wines, a Maine wholesale wine distributorship, from 2000-2015. Phoebe, his wife of 52 years, was an operating room nurse. They retired in 2016 and live in Hancock. Email: [philphoeb.devenish@gmail.com](mailto:philphoeb.devenish@gmail.com)

## Faculty Guests with Brief Bios

### Rev. Peter Plagge

“ I was born and raised in Michigan where I grew up on a small farm and worshipped with my family at the local UCC church. I moved from Northern Michigan to study, eventually landing at the University of Chicago Divinity School Ministry Program after taking a Bachelor of Arts degree at Albion College in Albion, Michigan.

I continue to be intrigued by how the Word shapes us today and by the ever-new theological questions that shaping calls forth. I now live in Waterbury, Vermont with my family and for the past twenty-one years, I've served the Waterbury Congregational Church as its pastor. All of my free time is spent riding my bicycle or thinking about riding it! “ Peter Plagge, Waterbury Congregational Church at the White Meeting House [www.waterburyucc.com](http://www.waterburyucc.com)

### Rev. Alexander Vishio

Rev. Alex Vishio was born and raised in Baltimore, MD. Upon receiving his BA from Swarthmore College, where he majored in religious studies, he entered the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, earning his MDiv degree. After returning to Baltimore to teach high school classics, he eventually returned to the Divinity School to pursue graduate work in ethics. He served as an adjunct religion instructor at Chicago Theological Seminary. He returned to Baltimore to teach classics and minister as chaplain at the Gilman School, as well as to teach in the classics department at Loyola University. Most recently, he served as Assistant Minister for Social Justice & Witness and Acting Associate Conference Minister of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ. Alex is currently a doctoral student in systematic theology in the Graduate Department of Religious Studies at SMU, specializing in neoclassical metaphysics. He currently is a co-editor of The Notebooks of Schubert Ogden, an online project at Drew University ([uknow.drew.edu/confluence/display/ogden](http://uknow.drew.edu/confluence/display/ogden))

### Rev. John Riggs

John W. Riggs is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ who retired from Eden Theological Seminary as Professor of Historical Theology and Church History. His writings and public lectures have included issues concerning early Christianity, the Protestant Reformation, baptism, The Lord's Supper, and worship in general. Among his books, John authored *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) and *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition: An Essay on the Mystical True Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015). John served 10 years in local church ministry, five years in rural Indiana and five in rural Missouri. He is the father of two and married to Rev. Ruth Drews, a retired ELCA pastor.

### Rev. Alexander Sharp

On March 10, 2015, Reverend Alexander E. Sharp launched “Clergy for a New Drug Policy.” The mission of the project is to mobilize clergy nationally against the War on Drugs, which has been waged for the past 46 years. The project educates and

advocates for a paradigm of health rather than punishment, in response to drug issues in our society; and for an agenda that will end the War on Drugs as we know it today.

Rev. Sharp has been engaged in faith-based social justice advocacy with organizations in Illinois for over twenty years. He was the founding Executive Director of Protestants for the Common Good, which he led from May, 1996 through June, 2012, and Acting Executive Director of the Community Renewal Society after the organizations merged in 2012.

Rev. Sharp graduated from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, with a Master of Public Affairs in 1969 and received his Master of Divinity Degree from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1996. He was ordained in the United Church of Christ in January, 2007. He served as Commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the first term of Governor Michael Dukakis from 1975-79 and in 1980 was appointed the Vice President of Business and Finance for The University of Chicago. He held this position until entering divinity school in 1994.

In addition to his support of the Center of Addiction and Faith, Mr. Sharp serves on the boards of St. Leonard's Ministries, which helps individuals rebuild their lives following prison; CHANGE Illinois, a reform group for fair and equal political access; and Live4Lali, an education, support, and advocacy organization in response to the opioid crisis. He is a member of Hyde Park Union Church in Chicago. He is married and has two daughters, Lydia and Joanna.

### **Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth**

Jen DeWeerth is the Dean of Student Enrollment at Mohawk Valley Community College. She is ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and preaches regularly as a supply pastor in UCC and Lutheran congregations. She has served on the Board of Directors of the YWCA-Mohawk Valley since 2008 working with the organization to fulfill its mission of Eliminating Racism and Empowering Women in the local community. Since the 2016 election, she has been involved in grassroots political and social justice organizing in central New York. She is a co-founder of Indivisible Mohawk Valley and is active in Citizen Action of Central New York, working for racial, social, and economic justice. Jen holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Swarthmore College and a Master of Divinity degree from The University of Chicago. She lives in Clinton, NY with her husband, Steve Ellingson, and two sons.

### **George L. Goodwin**

Larry Goodwin graduated from the University of Chicago Divinity School where he studied with Schubert Ogden. He taught theology at St. Catherine's University in St. Paul, MN, and later served as academic dean and then president of The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth MN. With his wife Anette he is enjoying retirement on the north shore of Lake Superior.