

**Assemblies of God Theological Seminary**  
**PTH943 'Hot' Topics in Theology**  
**October**

**Frank D. Macchia, D.Theol.**  
**fmacchia@vanguard.edu**

**Fall, 2004**

I. Course Description:

This course will explore select "hotly debated" topics in theology among Evangelicals and Pentecostals today, such as postmodernism, open theism, the rapture, justification by faith, and "immediacy" with regard to speaking in tongues. The purpose is to bring students into these discussions with an eye toward scriptural faithfulness and contemporary relevance.

II. Objectives:

- 1) To explore several hotly debated topics in order to enter the most popularly discussed theological issues of the day.
- 2) To work through these issues with an eye toward faithfulness to the biblical witness.
- 3) To discuss these issues with the goal of enhancing one's witness and ministry, especially with regard to sound doctrine and answering the questions of our church members.

III. Textbooks:

Gregory Boyd, *The God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Baker Book House, 2000).

Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Eerdmans, 1998).

Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Baker Book House, 1998).

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith (available online by typing in this title in the search engine).

Henry Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Abingdon, 1997)

Frank D. Macchia, "Justification through New Creation: The Holy Spirit and the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls," *Theology Today* (July 2001).

Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (Vintage, 2004).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Vintage, 1989).

Cecil B. Robeck, "An Emerging Magisterium? The Case of the Assemblies of God," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 25:2 (Fall 2003).

Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Westview Press, 2004).

Gerald Sheppard, "Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (Fall 1984).

#### IV. Outline:

- Day 1: Introductions  
The Conspiracy of Orthodoxy? The So-called "Lost Gospels" (Reading: Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*; and Pagels, *Beyond Belief*)  
  
Postmodernism (Reading: Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith*; and Henry Knight, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World*)
- Day 2: Postmodernism Pt. 2  
  
Open Theism (Reading: Gregory Boyd, *The God of the Possible*)
- Day 3: Open Theism Pt. 2  
  
Left Behind: The Rapture Question (Reading: Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*; and, Gerald Sheppard, "Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Fall 1984)
- Day 4: Rapture Question, Pt. 2  
  
Justification by Faith (Reading: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith; also, Frank D. Macchia, "Justification as New Creation: The Holy Spirit and the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls," *Theology Today*, July 2001; and Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ*)
- Day 5: Justification, Pt.2

Tongues as Initial, Immediate Evidence (Reading: Cecil M. Robeck Jr. "An Emerging Magisterium? The Case of the Assemblies of God," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Fall, 2003)

## V. Methodology:

The method of this course will be systematic and biblical theology, dealing with topics with an eye toward biblical faithfulness, relation to historical developments, coherence of thought, and relevance to contemporary questions.

## VI. Course Requirements:

### A. Pre-Course:

Do all of the reading in advance of the course and write a 2 - 3 page paper (double spaced) giving your essential viewpoint on *each* of the following six questions: (Due on the first day of class)

- 1) Elaine Pagels has joined with others to lead a charge that Christianity of the first two centuries was enormously diverse (including Gnostic groups and other so-called heretics as well as various "lost Gospels") but that the road to the formation of the Nicene Creed and the New Testament canon involved a shutting out of certain groups (such as the Gnostics) in order to achieve a politically-correct, narrow understanding of "orthodoxy." Read Pagels' books carefully (first, *The Gnostic Gospels*, and then, *Beyond Belief*) and give your view of this scholarship.
- 2) What is Postmodernism in a nutshell and where do you stand as to its advantages and dangers for Christian ministers today? Read Erickson's and Knight's books (in that order) and respond.
- 3) Does God know the future exhaustively? If so, where precisely do you think Gregory Boyd has gone wrong in his interpretation of scripture? If not, why exactly has Boyd convinced you of his view? What are the major issues that require further exploration (dwell especially on this question if you are undecided)?
- 4) Many people today are debating the rapture question because of the popularity of LaHaye's and Jenkins's *Left Behind* series. Since Barbara Rossing's strong critique of this doctrine is shared by many in the mainline church world, advanced seminary students need to interact with her views. Question: Will there be a secret rapture of the church before the tribulation period begins? Explain your view, especially in interaction with Barbara Rossing's sharp critique of both the *Left Behind* series and the Evangelical belief in the soon-coming rapture of the church. Also include Sheppard's article with regard to whether or not Pentecostals should side with the dispensationalist theology that supports the pre-tribulation rapture position.

- 5) Unknown to many, Lutherans and Catholics shocked the church world in 1999, when the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, claiming that they no longer consider this key doctrine of the Reformation church dividing (in other words, though there are still differences between Lutherans and Catholics on this doctrine, there is enough essential agreement now that there is no longer need to be divided over it). In the Joint Declaration, Lutherans and Catholics explain their historic differences over the doctrine of salvation in such a way as to reveal essential agreement and, where there are differences, sensitivity to each other's concerns. Yet, many are angry with the Joint Declaration because they feel it sells out Luther's doctrine of "forensic justification" (we are justified by faith alone as a declaration of legal acquittal, wholly apart from ourselves and based solely on the work of Christ for us on the cross). Meanwhile, the Lutherans from Finland engaged in dialogue with Russian Orthodox theologians, producing a new view of Luther that viewed his justification theory as a sanctifying participation in the being of Christ by faith (and not a purely legal declaration from God). Question: In the light of the Joint Declaration, the book, *Union with Christ*, and Frank Macchia's (my) article on justification ("*Justification through New Creation*"), give your view as to whether or not justification is forensic. Be sure to define what you mean by this concept from scripture and explain how the reading has altered or confirmed your definition of this concept. Draw in a detailed way from the reading.
- 6) Pentecostals have long held that tongues is the natural (for many, initial) evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Assemblies of God today is debating whether or not to add "initial, immediate evidence" so that tongues is believed to occur immediately upon being baptized in the Spirit. Read Cecil Robeck's article carefully and answer the following questions: Has the Assemblies of God handled this issue in the right way in their publications and in the minister's exam (where a question on immediacy weeds out ministerial candidates without previous General Council approval)? Is there a danger of developing a top-down magisterial tradition on doctrinal issues that does not arise from an adequate consensus of the General Council? And what about the doctrine in relation to the New Testament? Is it biblical?

## B. Course

Attend all of the sessions and be prepared to take extensive notes and engage substantially in all discussions.

## C. Post-Course:

Choose one of the six issues given above and do further research so as to write a 10-12 page paper (double spaced) on it. Suggestions for further research are given in the Select Bibliography below. The student should also include several other sources, especially from scholarly journals. Due on the date prescribed by AGTS.

## VII. Evaluation:

Six brief papers: 400 pts.

Class Participation: 200 pts.

Research Paper: 400 pts.

## VIII. Select Bibliography:

### A. Lost Gospels:

Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford Press, 2002).

Burt Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (Harper SanFrancisco, 1994).

Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford Press, 2003).

Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (Harper SanFrancisco, 1997).

### B. Postmodernism:

Nancy Murphy and Werner Kelber, eds., *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Trinity Press International, 1996).

Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Eerdmans, 1996).

Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation, and Promise* (Eerdmans, 1996).

### C. Open Theism:

James K. Beilby, et al., eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (InterVarsity Press, 2001).

Bruce Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Crossway Books, 2001).

James Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (InterVarsity Press, 1998).

#### D. Rapture Question:

John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Zondervan, 1979).

George Eldon Ladd, *Blessed Hope* (Eerdmans, 1980; this book was written in response to *The Rapture Question* listed above).

Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Zondervan, 1973).

#### E. Justification by Faith:

Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Eerdmans, 1998).

Anthony Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (T & T Clark Ltd., 2003).

Karl Lehmann, et al., eds., *Justification by Faith: Do Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?* (Continuum, 1997)

William Rusch, ed., *The Joint Declaration: Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement* (Liturgical Press, 2003).

#### F. Tongues:

Gary McGee, ed., *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism* (Henrickson Pub., 1991).

Jack Hayford, *Beauty of Spiritual Language* (Thomas Nelson, 1996).

Carl Brumback, *What Meaneth This?* (Gospel Pub. House, 1998).

(Numerous articles in *Pneuma* and the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*)