

Speaking of God: Method and Procedure in Theology Proper

Semester: Spring 2021
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Course Description

This course articulates the fundamentals of method and procedure in systematics, in the area of doctrine of God. As such, the course handles what is absolutely common and assumed to actually saying anything at all of God, both with respect to his essence/attributes and the Trinity. In short, the course deals with what one needs to know as a prerequisite in order to speak God in the theological science.

The broad flow of topics covered is as follows. The course begins by highlighting the situation of theology within this life, as distinctly knowing what God is in the mirror of creatures, i.e. in analogy. This point underwrites the cardinal ability to function theologically at all, where we operate within the reality that God is not known in himself but in his effects, while in this life. We turn to note clearly the two sources for understanding what God is ("natural" and "supernatural" revelation), which are not equal, but both extracting judgments from us via their own respective authorities, and from our respective intellectual powers of "reason" and "faith." Within these two classes of judgments there is yielded the respective data for understanding God that is synthesized into the theological science as a whole. We then move to some basic points about predication, and relevant issues related to affirmations and denials in theological statements. The course moves to the important issue of how there are two types of perfections among creatures (perfectiones simpliciter simplices and perfectiones secundum quid, i.e. "simple perfections" and "ancillary perfections"), each class of which is in God formally or eminently (respectively). Understanding the difference between these classes of perfections is absolutely fundamental to how we treat each class of names in our speaking of God; the point is pertinent particularly in attempting to navigate how all perfections are not only in God, but are to be said of God—not only that he "is good," but that he "is sad at sin," "rejoices in our righteousness," "has hands," and generally much of the biblical portraiture. We then advance to how names indicating simple perfections are spoken literally of God. This is followed by particular attention to how our various and distinct names are different in some way thanks to God himself, such that their meaningfulness is preserved individually and collectively as we gain understanding by cycling through many names, further and further saying what God is—all because the names are not synonyms of each other! This issue is notably pertinent given it is often viewed as immediately forestalled, given the fact that God is simple in every way. We then deal carefully with the issue of univocal, analogical, and equivocal predication, articulating why analogical predication is not only choice but necessary for the theological science. The issue of "per prius" follows, how certain names are said first of God then of creatures, and others first of creatures then of God, and why that is important. We then begin with relative names of God said from time (all relative names, except for the eternal relations paternity, filiation, active spiration, passive spiration), that are pertinent to any relations either in the divine essence or in a divine person toward a creature. Given this is an especial area of controversy, but of deep importance for many parts of theology proper, we spend significant time on this issue to clarify the relevant points. The course concludes with how "qui est" ("He Who Is") is the most proper name of God, and what this actually means (and what it doesn't), particularly in expounding what God is in the functional specialty of systematics.

Course readings will be in English, and are centered primarily around Thomas Aquinas's *ST I* q 13 aa 1–12, in conjunction with relevant other passages throughout Thomas's opera. Nonetheless, the lectures will take care to pull from the high medievals (e.g., Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Capreolus, Denis the Carthusian), the neoscholastics (e.g., Cajetan, Ferrara, Banez, Zumel, Vasquez), and of course some of the best of the Reformed orthodox (e.g. Voetius, Polanus, Maastricht, Danaeus, Musculus, Maccovius, De Moor).

Course Format

This class is lecture-based but does leave space for student questions and engagement. I am also available via email to deal with issues or questions.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for temporary access for students to view who cannot participate.

Course Requirements

- Reading of the assigned texts
- Careful attendance and engagement with the lectures

Additional Course Requirements for Course Credit

All assignments are due midnight EST the last day of class, via email.

- Written confirmation that you have done the reading (45% of grade).
- One 3000-word essay providing a systematic articulation of some narrow element within the course's scope, in consultation with the professor. (Further details on this will be articulated) (55% of grade).

Course Objectives

- Students will be able to articulate not just the basics of theological method relevant to this course but understand the internal logic of systematic theology proper.
- Students will be able to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of theological understanding and will be equipped to mediate the issue of simultaneously preserving orthodoxy while maintaining a strong irenicism that recognizes the complexity of the historic tradition and what this entails for the contemporary church in all her forms of communion.
- Students will be able to deploy the principles of speaking of God within the entire sphere of theological loci but especially doctrine of God.
- Students will be able to navigate contemporary issues related to speaking of God. The student will be expected to humbly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methods and adjudicate them from the standpoint of orthodoxy while continually preserving the spirit of irenicism, especially as informed by the Reformed commitment to Holy Scripture and its intense articulation without perverted speculation.
- Students will be introduced especially to the pastoral/practical implications of speaking of God and pushed to deploy doctrine to promote "knowledge unto piety" both in themselves and in others within the universal church.

Course Texts

Most all course texts are available in English either <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I> or <https://isidore.co/aquinas/>. (You will want to bookmark these anyway.) Much the better if you can read the texts in Latin. In addition, I do have the Leonine of the *ST* available pdf (email me).

Unfortunately, none of the *I Sent* readings are available yet in English (the translators are working busily). If you can read Latin, please read the texts; if you cannot, please repent and learn Latin (joking, but also not joking). (The *I Sent* readings are mostly secondary loci, so you do not need to worry.) The single text I have taken the time to translate for you, on account of its importance, is *I Sent* d 2 q 1 a 3 resp, which I will supply for you.

I have divided up the readings into primary loci and secondary, to indicate their respective importance for this class. Please read accordingly in that order. For-credit students are required to read all that they can read (i.e., if they cannot read Latin, they are exempt from the readings only in Latin).

A note on reading Thomas: Medieval texts versus modern texts are extremely different in what they are; you cannot read them the same way. Reading Thomas is intensely difficult and *very slow*. He rewards careful, diligent, and repeated reading.

Course Schedule

(The readings are in process of being determined. For the moment, the below serves as a broad indication—an updated syllabus will be provided before the beginning of class. NB that some weeks have significantly more reading than others; this will be balanced by other weeks having less.)

Date	Topic	Primary loci	Secondary loci
Lecture 1 (1/10–1/16)	Speaking of God in This Life: The Disclosure of Undisclosed Mystery	<i>ST I q 12 a 11</i>	
Lecture 2 (1/10–1/16)	Saying What God is: Natural and Supernatural Theology I	<i>ST I q 12 aa 12–13</i>	
Lecture 3 (1/17–1/23)	Saying What God is: Natural and Supernatural Theology II		
Lecture 4 (1/17–1/23)	Introduction to Predication: Affirm the Predicate, Change the Way of Predicating		
Lecture 5 (1/24–1/30)	Affirmations and Denials	<i>ST I q 13 a 12</i>	
Lecture 6 (1/24–1/30)	Simple Perfections and Ancillary Perfections		
Lecture 7 (1/31–2/6)	Literally Speaking God I	<i>ST I q 13 aa 2–3</i>	
Lecture 8 (1/31–2/6)	Literally Speaking God II		
Lecture 9 (2/7–2/13)	All Names Synonyms?: Preserving the Meaningfulness of Different Names in the Face of the Simple God I	<i>ST I q 13 a 4; I Sent d 2 q 1 a 3; De pot q 7 a 6</i>	
Lecture 10 (2/7–2/13)	All Names Synonyms?: Preserving the Meaningfulness of Different Names in the Face of the Simple God II		
Lecture 11 (2/14–2/20)	Univocity, Analogy, Equivocity I	<i>ST I q 13 a 5</i>	
Lecture 12 (2/14–2/20)	Univocity, Analogy, Equivocity II		
Lecture 13 (2/21–2/27)	“Per Prius”?: Names Said First of God	<i>ST I q 13 a 6</i>	
Lecture 14 (2/21–2/27)	“Per Prius”?: Names Said First of Creatures		
Lecture 15 (2/28–3/6)	Relative Names: God Toward Creatures I	<i>ST I q 13 a 7; De pot q 7 aa 8–11</i>	
Lecture 16 (2/28–3/6)	Relative Names: God Toward Creatures II		
Lecture 17 (3/7–3/13)	Relative Names: God Toward Creatures III		
Lecture 18 (3/7–3/13)	Relative Names: God Toward Creatures IV		
Lecture 19 (3/14–3/20)	He Who Is: The Most Proper Name I	<i>ST I q 13 a 11; I Sent d 8 q 1 aa 1–3</i>	
Lecture 20 (3/14–3/20)	He Who Is: The Most Proper Name II		

Additional Details

I am delighted to help you in any way I can in issues or questions related to this course. Please use my email (e.g., not Facebook) to contact me, so I can make sure I do not miss your question but handle it in a timely fashion.