

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### 3501/6501HS SEMINAR ON JOHN CALVIN'S *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*

#### KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY WINTER TERM 2023

"We are God's: let us therefore live for God and die for God. We are God's: let God's wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward God as our only lawful goal."

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.1

#### ***Instructor Information***

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Instructor: John Vissers, Professor of Historical Theology  
Office Location: Knox College  
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Office Hours: By appointment

#### ***Course Identification***

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Course Number: 3501/6501HS  
Course Format: *In-class*  
Course Name: Seminar on Calvin's *Institutes*  
Course Location: Knox College, Room TBD  
Class Time: Mondays, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Prerequisites: KNT 1101H (Reformed Theology in Dialogue); KNH1015H (Global History of Christianity) or equivalent with permission if instructor.

#### ***Course Description***

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This course is a close critical reading of the English text of Calvin's *Institutio Christianae religionis* of 1559. We begin by situating Calvin's theology in the historical and theological context of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation before turning to a careful examination of the *Institutes'* major doctrinal themes and their significance both for Calvin's context and the subsequent history of Protestant theology.

## **Course Resources**

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### **Required Course Text**

- *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Volume XX and XXI) Library of Christian Classics. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated and Indexed by Ford Lewis Battles. Westminster John Knox Press, 1960. ISBN: 0664220282

### **Recommended Books**

- Battles, Ford Lewis. *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980.
- Gordon, Bruce. *Calvin*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009
- Reist, Benjamin A. *A Reading of Calvin's Institutes*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991
- Kerr, Hugh T. (Editor). *Calvin's Institutes: A New Compend*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989
- Partee, Charles. *The Theology of John Calvin*. Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008
- Wendell, Francois. *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Thought*. Collins: The Fontana Library, 1963

### **Course Website**

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the U of T Quercus login page and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged into Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you will find the link to the website for all your Quercus based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website Quercus).

## **Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes**

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This course is a graduate seminar in historical theology offered in the graduate degree program for masters and doctoral students. It is also open to upper-level (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year) basic degree students. The course is intended to give students a thorough introduction to the systematic theological program of a major 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation theologian, namely John Calvin, through a careful and critical study of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 edition).

Students are expected to use and develop close reading skills that will enable them to become familiar with the nature, shape and content of Calvin's theology in the English text of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and to reflect critically and constructively on the significance of this theology in relation to the Christian theological tradition and the development of western thought and culture.

### **Depth and Breadth**

By the end of the course students will have gained a thorough knowledge of the major themes in Calvin's theology as set out in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (in the English text). Students will achieve this outcome through a close reading of the text and participation in the seminar discussions.

### **Research and Scholarship**

By the end the course students will have gained an in-depth and critical knowledge of one major theme in Calvin's theology as set out in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (English text). A major research paper will achieve this outcome. This assignment is also intended to increase skills in close critical reading of primary theological texts; increase skills in bibliographic and research competence through exploration and use of relevant secondary materials; and increase skills in the writing of a coherent and cogent historical theological argument.

### **Level of Application and Knowledge**

By the end of this course students will have gained enough knowledge of a major 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformer to form a basis for further advanced study of the Reformation movement and Reformed Protestant theological tradition.

### **Professional Capacity for Autonomy**

By the end of this course students will be able to give an introductory lecture on the main themes of Calvin's theology and to answer basic questions on the nature, scope and significance of Calvin's theology from first year students in a typical introductory basic degree course.

### **Level of Communication Skills**

Students will demonstrate clear and effective theological discourse in seminar participation (oral), seminar presentations (written and oral), and a major research paper (written.)

### **Awareness of Limits of Knowledge**

By the end of the course students will have gained knowledge of how Calvin's theological program was indebted to previous periods in the Christian tradition and how it influenced the Protestant theological tradition that followed it. Students will be able to demonstrate an ability to assess and analyze Calvin's theology in relation to its own historical context and the whole Christian tradition. This outcome will be achieved through the course as a whole.

## **Evaluation**

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### **Requirements**

The final grade for this course will be based on evaluation in three areas:

**Participation** (10%). Attendance at weekly classes and participation in class discussion is mandatory. Students are expected to attend class, to come to class having done the required reading for the week, and to participate in class discussions in a manner that demonstrates the student has done the reading and thought about the material carefully. Evaluation criteria: comments and questions show an understanding of the assigned readings and a readiness to engage critically and constructively with the material.

**Weekly Reading Reports** (40%) Students will write and present weekly reading reports based on one of the two readings from Calvin's *Institutes* for that week. The reading reports are to be 200-250 words (typed, double-spaced and the student should summarize key ideas, make critical evaluative comments, and identify key questions for Calvin's theology raised by the readings. These must be handed in at class. Weekly reflection papers will be graded for a total of 40% of the course grade. These reports are not intended to be research papers. They are designed as an exercise in summative and critical thinking. Each week one student will present a report as the basis for discussion.

**Research Essay:** Students will write an essay on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. This paper is to be a substantial piece of theological research and critical reflection. Students are encouraged to work on this paper with the learning outcomes of the course in mind. Papers should treat important topics in Calvin's theology. Essays should be about 15-20 pages of double spaced 12pt text in length. They should be typed, properly footnoted or end-noted according to the Chicago Style, and should include a bibliography of material consulted. Essay: 50% of course grade. The paper is due on Monday, April 3, 2023.

### **Evaluation of Research Papers:**

**Accuracy:** has the student demonstrated an accurate understanding of the text and topic under consideration, in its historical and theological dimensions?

**Comprehensiveness:** has the student covered all the salient points in the exposition and analysis of the text and topic under consideration

**Clarity:** Is there a self-evident and meaningful order and argument to the paper (structure) and has the student clearly communicated the material so the reader can understand (content)?

**Specificity:** has the student moved beyond generalities and made specific statements and offered precise analyses?

**Critical thought:** has the student assessed the material under consideration in terms of the reasonableness of the argument (logic), its meaning within the whole of the

Christian tradition (appropriateness), and its relevance for contemporary ecclesial, theological, and cultural concerns (adequacy)? Are the judgments made by the student supported with evidence?

**Constructive thought:** does the student demonstrate evidence of putting his/her own thought into the paper?

**Thorough and accurate documentation:** does the student properly cite sources and document the ideas of others and does the student provide the information necessary for the reader also to consult the sources used?

The course will be graded according to the grading system for graduate students at TST:

A <sup>+</sup>	90 - 100	Profound and Creative
A	85 - 89	Outstanding
A <sup>-</sup>	80 - 84	Excellent : clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations, broad knowledge base.
B <sup>+</sup>	77 - 79	Very good
B	73 - 76	Good : good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues, good familiarity with the literature
B <sup>-</sup>	70 - 72	Satisfactory : adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues and with the literature
FZ	0 - 69	Failure : failure to meet the above criteria

Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades.

## ***COURSE POLICIES***

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**Handbooks:** Policies for courses are contained in the TST Basic Degree Handbook (You can find the TST Basic Degree Handbook at <http://www.tst.edu/content/handbooks>) and the Knox Student Handbook (You can find the content of the Knox College Student Handbook at <https://knox.utoronto.ca/documents>).

**Accessibility:** Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

**Plagiarism:** Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. Students should also read the document “Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing” published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges.

**Other academic offences:** TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*

**Back-up copies:** Please keep back-up copies of all essays that have been submitted online.

**Late Policy:** Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. Please check the Late Policy in the Knox College Student Handbook and the TST Basic Degree Handbook. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner. This penalty is not applied to students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness); when facing such difficulties students must consult the Instructor or the Teaching Assistant immediately.

**Completion of Course work:** all course work (including any late work) must be completed by the end of term, the due date is the Tuesday of examination week. Only in the case of illness (with a note from a doctor), bereavement or other unusual circumstances will an extension be considered and this must be authorized by the Academic Dean and reported to the Basic Degree Committee and the Faculty of Knox College.

**Style Guidelines for Papers:** The reference style used in all courses at Knox College is the Chicago style as summarized in *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, by Kate L. Turabian.

**Upload assignments:** All assignments are to be uploaded either as .pdf or .docx files onto Quercus.

**Inclusive Language:** It is the policy of Knox College that inclusive language should be used in all class discussions, class presentations, and written assignments.

**Consultation:** Please do not hesitate to consult the Instructor with any questions.

**Obligation to check email & Quercus:** The course instructor may send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid University of Toronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available on the Quercus site. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. *Students should check utoronto email regularly* for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder.

**Email communication with the course instructor:** The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

## ***COURSE SCHEDULE***

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### **Week 1: Monday, January 9**

**Theme: Introduction to Calvin's Theology**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Calvin's Life and Ministry

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: The Scope of Calvin's Theology

### **Week 2: Monday, January 16**

**Theme: Introduction to the *Institutes***

1<sup>st</sup> hour: The Development and Themes of the *Institutes* (*Institutes*, 3-8)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: The Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France (*Institutes* 9-31)

### **Week 3: Monday, January 23**

**Theme: Revelation and Holy Scripture**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Knowledge of God (*Institutes*, Book I, 35-69)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Holy Scripture (*Institutes*, Book I, 69-99)

**Week 4: Monday, January 30**

**Theme: Trinity & Creation**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Doctrine of the Trinity: (*Institutes*, Book I, Chap.13, 120-159)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Human Nature and Divine Providence (*Institutes*, Book I.15-18, 183-237)

**Week 5: Monday, February 6**

**Theme: Sin and Covenant**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Calvin on Total Depravity (*Inst.*, Bk II, Chaps. 3-5, 289-340)

(See also Calvin on Original Sin, *Inst.* Bk II, Chaps. 1-2, 241-289)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Covenant and Law (*Inst.*, Book II, Chaps 6-7, 340-366)

(See also Gospel and OT and NT, *Inst.* Book II, Chaps. 9-11, 423-464)

**Week 6: Monday, February 13**

**Theme: Calvin's Christology & Soteriology**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: The Mediation of Christ (*Inst.* Book II, Chaps. 12-15, 464-503)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Penal Substitution Atonement (*Inst.* Bk II, Chaps. 16-17, 503-534)

**READING WEEK: February 20-24 (No Class on February 20)**

**Week 7: Monday, February 27**

**Theme: Union with Christ & the Christian Life**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Union with Christ (*Inst.* Book III, Chaps. 1-3, 537-621)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: The Christian Life (*Inst.* Book III, Chaps. 6-10, 684-725)

**Week 8: Monday, March 6**

**Theme: Justification by Faith and Christian Liberty**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Justification by Faith (*Inst.*, Book III, Ch. 9-14, 725-788)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Christian Freedom (*Inst.* Book III, Ch.19, 833-849)

**Week 9: Monday, March 13**

**Theme: Prayer & Predestination**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: Prayer (*Inst.*, Book III, Chapter 20, 850-897)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Doctrine of Election (*Inst.*, Book III, Chaps. 21-24, 920-987)

**Week 10: Monday, March 20**

**Theme: The Church and Ministry**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: The Necessity of the Church (*Inst.*, Book 4, Ch.1-2, 1011-1053)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: The Offices of Ministry (*Inst.*, Book 4, Ch. 3-5, 1053-1084)

**Week 11: Monday, March 27**

**Theme: The Sacraments and Baptism**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: The Sacraments (*Inst.*, Book IV, Chap.14, 1276-1303)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Baptism (*Inst.*, Book IV, Ch. 15-16, 1303-1359)

**Week 12: Monday, April 3**

**Theme: The Lord's Supper and Civil Government**

1<sup>st</sup> hour: The Lord's Supper (*Inst.*, Ch.17, 1359-1428)

2<sup>nd</sup> hour: Civil Government (*Inst.*, Book IV, Chap. 20, 1485-1521)