

Year 3 (2012): Week 1

**GUILD SEMINAR
“FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING”**

Week 1: “Faith, with Understanding”

Overview:

1. Prayer, Welcome and Introductions
2. Meaning and Task of Theology
3. Christianity as an Intellectual Tradition
4. Meanings of Revelation

Why the candle?

The candle is the symbol of the Institute for Theological Studies at St. Margaret's. It signifies our goal in theological exploration: "faith, with understanding."

This is in keeping with Anselm's classical definition of theology, *fides quaerens intellectum*: "faith seeking understanding."

Daniel Migliore writes:

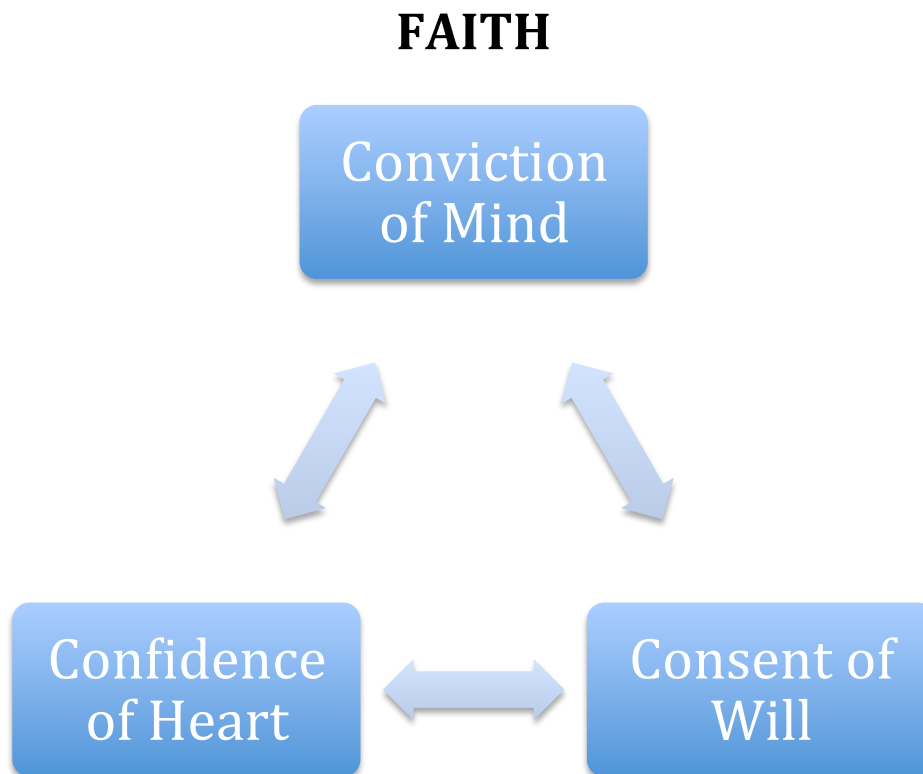
"According to one classical definition, theology is 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*). This definition, with numerous variations, has a long and rich tradition. In the writings of Augustine it takes the form, 'I believe in order that I may understand.' According to Augustine, knowledge of God not only presupposes faith, but faith also restlessly seeks deeper understanding. Christians want to understand what they believe, what they can hope for, and what they ought to love." (DM, 2)

A Comprehensive Definition of Faith

Faith engages the whole person: intellect, emotions, and will.

This comprehensive understanding of faith comes from an Anglican theologian named W.H. Griffiths-Thomas:

“[Faith] affects the whole of [our] nature. It commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence; it continues in the confidence of the heart or emotions based on conviction, and it is crowned in the consent of the will, by means of which the conviction and confidence are expressed in conduct.”¹



¹ Alister McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 86.

About your notebooks

Each week you will be given hand-outs to keep that can help focus discussion now, and in the future will help refresh your memory of the material.

The grand plan for ITSSM is for the Guild members to be ready, willing and able to expand our palette of offerings.

This course is intended to give us a common language and certain points of reference we can draw from as we offer a variety of programs on diverse topics.

The notebooks are a repository for that language and those points of reference.

At the end of the course, the last handout will be a . . . test!

About the test

The test will be *easy, non-threatening, and helpful*.

Easy, because it will be open book and based entirely on material in the handouts you already have in your notebooks. You can do it when you want and take as much time as you need.

Non-threatening, because the only person who will ever see your test is you.

Helpful, because you will have it at the front of your notebook as an outline of the course, with the most important material in one place.

The Meaning and Task of Theology

Here are two other ways of defining theology, which can also be instructive.

A contemporary philosopher's *first-order* definition: "Theology is an enquiry into the being of God and the relation of God to the universe."²

A different contemporary philosopher's *second-order* definition: Christian theology is "the discovery, understanding, and justification of the convictions that are held by Christians or presupposed by their beliefs and practices. . . . Another way of putting it: theology is a second-order discipline that investigates the theories that must be true (or well-supported) if the beliefs and practices are to make sense."³

Note:

To understand theology as a *first-order* form of inquiry is to think of it as primarily and directly concerned with questions concerning God.

To understand theology as a *second-order* form of inquiry is to think of it as approaching questions concerning God indirectly, through analysis and evaluation of the beliefs and practices of an existing community of faith.

Here is Daniel Migliore's *second-order* definition: "Theology must be critical reflection on the community's faith, prayer, and service." (DM, xv)

For example, one of our practices is the confession of sin. The second order question is, what theories must true for this practice to make sense? Two possible responses are:

(a) We must live in a moral universe where we are accountable for our actions; (b) We must have free will, so that we are truly responsible for our actions.

² Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 3.

³ Nancey Murphy, "On the Nature of Theology," in *Religion and Science: History, Method, Dialogue*, ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 155.

Questions for Discussion:

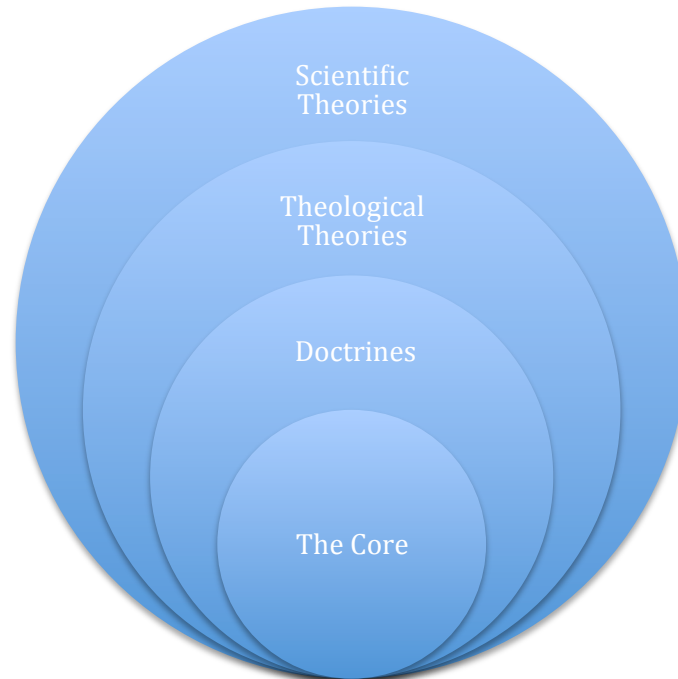
- (1) What are some other interesting things that we say and do as Episcopalians?
- (2) What are some theories that must be true for these to make sense?

Theology as an Intellectual Tradition

A Simple Model

Data and Experience

Data and Experience



Data and Experience

Data and Experience

The Core holds the most important, defining beliefs and tenets of the tradition.

Doctrines are well-winnowed, long-established general teachings of the tradition.

Theological Theories relate core concepts and doctrines to each other and to philosophy, science, data and experience.

Scientific Theories are explanations for data and experience in the world.

Data and Experience are the raw material of life.

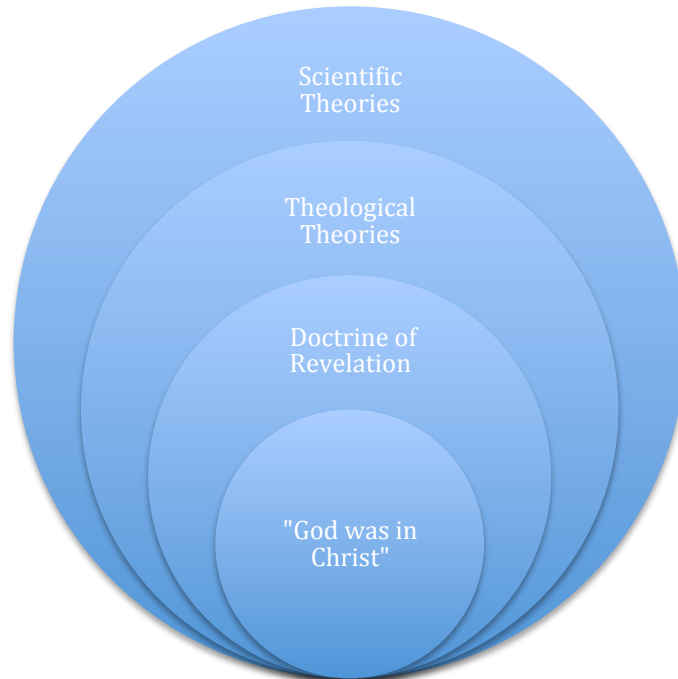
Questions for Discussion:

- (1) What are some of the world's great, or not-so-great, intellectual traditions?
- (2) Is it adequate to think of Christianity solely as an *intellectual* tradition?

Meanings of Revelation

Data and Experience

Data and Experience



Data and Experience

Data and Experience

H. Richard Niebuhr

“The special occasion to which we appeal in the Christian church is called Jesus Christ, in whom we see the righteousness of God, his power and wisdom. . . . But from that special occasion we also derive the concepts which make possible the elucidation of all the events in our history. Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible.” (Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 93, DM, 28)

“In John Calvin’s striking metaphor, the biblical witness to revelation is like a pair of spectacles that enable us to see God, the world, and ourselves in a radically new manner.” (DM, 27.)

Revelation: A Generic Definition. Revelation “literally means an ‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure’ of something previously hidden.” (DM, 20)

Special Revelation: The core premise of Christian theology is God’s definitive unveiling and disclosure to the world in Jesus Christ. Migliore:

“There is a ‘scandal of particularity,’ a relentless specificity and an inexpungible particularity about the reality Christians call revelation.” (D.M., 28)

General Revelation: Christian theology’s core premise has not been thought to necessarily entail that there is no knowledge of God apart from Christ. Various theories of “General Revelation” have been offered to account for the presence and activity of God throughout all of nature and history. Migliore:

“Christian theology has traditionally distinguished two media of the knowledge of God: general revelation and special revelation. The Bible teaches and experience confirms some revelation of God in the created order, in human conscience, and in the lives of people who do now possess the Mosaic law and have not heard the gospel message.” (Psalm 19:1; Rom. 1:20) DM, 30.

A Range of Theories of General Revelation

Pure Relativism	A Popular Liberal Christian View	A Modern Catholic View: 1st Vatican Council	A Traditional Reformed view: John Calvin	Pure Absolutism
<p>“At one end of the spectrum are philosophers and theologians who claim that religions based on allegedly special revelation are only different symbolic expressions of a universally available knowledge of God.” (DM, 30)</p>	<p>“Most Christian theologians today would be more generous than Calvin in finding truth and value in what can be known of God in the created order and in the different religions of humanity. . . . Many Christian theologians today would emphasize that all religions must be approached with openness and respect, and some would acknowledge the presence of God’s gracious initiative and faithful human responses in other religious traditions.” (DM, 30)</p>	<p>“The relation between general and special revelation in this view is like the relationship between part and whole, the incomplete and complete.” (DM, 30.)</p> <hr/> <p>Karl Barth</p> <hr/> <p>Barth’s dialectical approach joins special revelation and a general phenomenology of religion as a “union of opposites,” analogous to the union of divinity and humanity in Christ.</p>	<p>Calvin insists “that there is a natural knowledge of God. [He] speaks of a universal ‘sense of divinity’ and a universally implanted ‘seed of religion.’” However, “Calvin contends that the universal ‘sense of divinity’ is severely weakened by sin and thus ‘insufficient,’ ‘confused,’ vague, and dim by comparison with the special revelation in Scripture.” DM, 30.</p>	<p>“At the other end of the spectrum is the argument that revelation in Christ alone provides true knowledge of God and that all other claims to know God are simply false.” (DM, 30)</p>

Questions for Discussion:

- (1) Intuitively, which of these theories most, and least, appeals to you?
- (2) Theologically, how would one begin to assess the strengths and weakness of theories such as these?

Keller's Proposal for an "Evangelical and Philosophical" Theology

"Evangelical"

"Christian theology seeks to discern and articulate the grace and truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ and to guide the Church in mission."⁴

Theology is evangelical as it looks back through tradition to Scripture's proclamation of God's truth and grace in Jesus Christ, and forward to guide the church into opportunities for fruitful mission. Evangelical theology recognizes fidelity to Christ and fruitfulness in mission as the first and final tests of its proposals.

The Two Evangelical Tasks



⁴ Episcopal Church in the United States of America, House of Bishops, theology Committee, "The Gift of Sexuality: A Theological Perspective," received by House of Bishops March 18, 2003; available from <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/theologycomreport.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2006), 2.

"Philosophical"

Theology is philosophical when it accepts the critical task of testing ideas, the premises upon which they may rest, and connections between them, as well as the constructive task of building to new insights and conclusions.

The Two Philosophical Tasks

