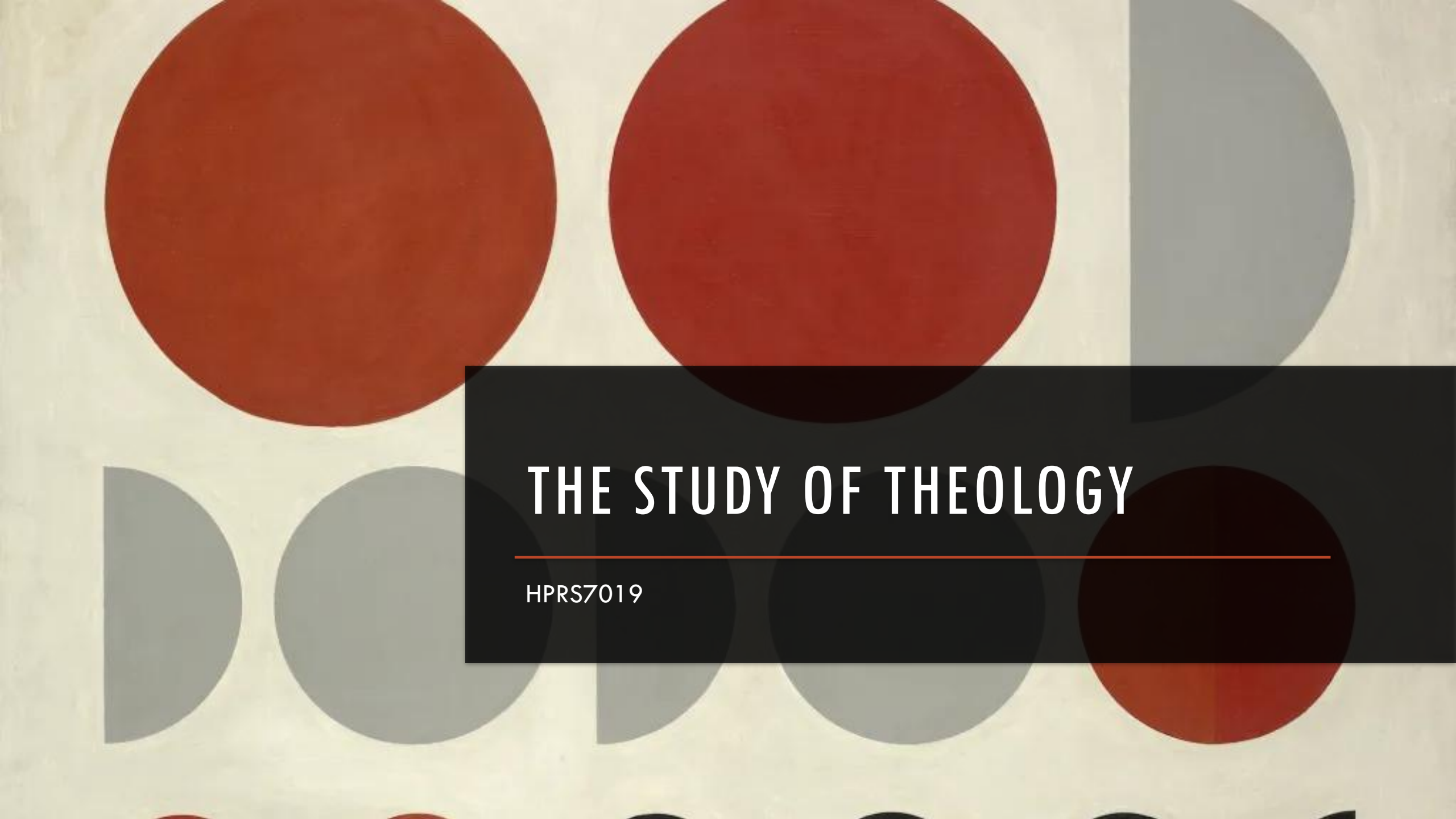
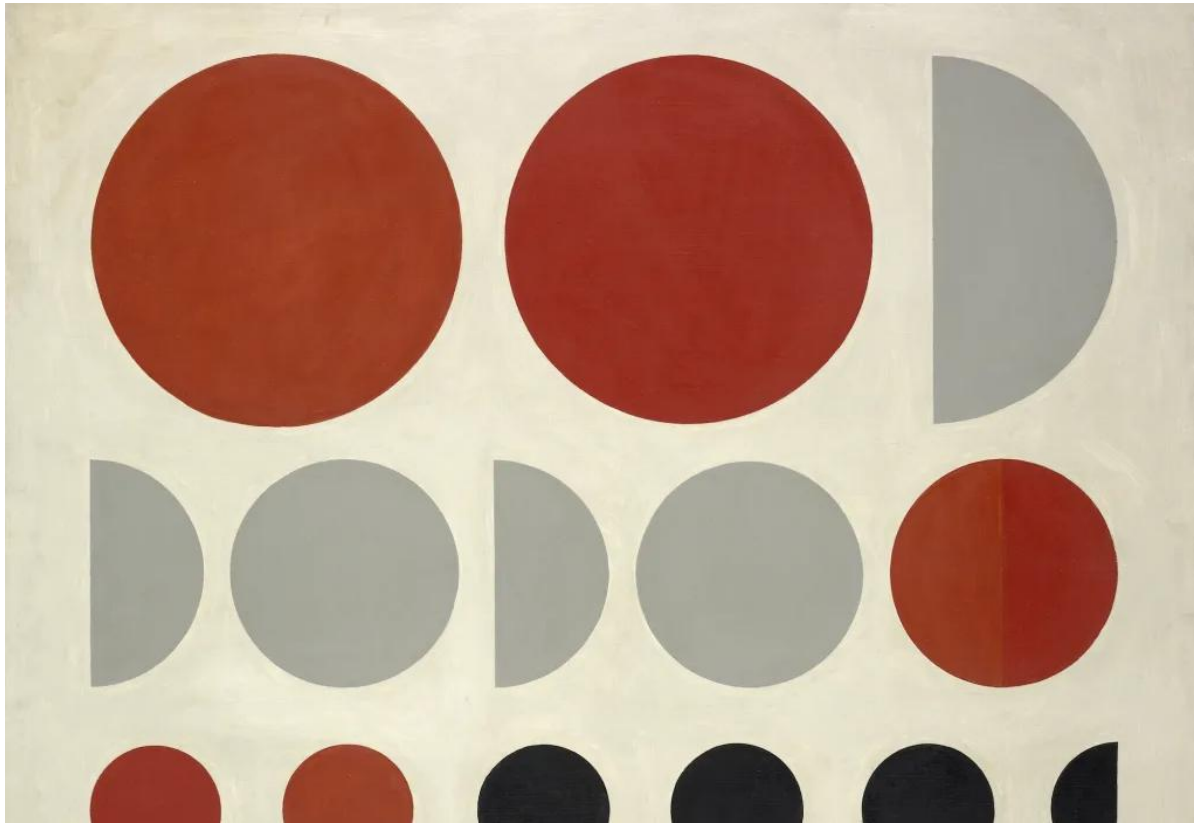




THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

HPRS7019

THEOLOGY AND
BIBLICAL STUDIES



THEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

The relationship between theology and biblical studies has sometimes been ambiguous.

The Bible is the principal source of Christian Theology, but Christians have often had very different ideas about how Scripture ought to source theological reasoning.

This stems from disagreements about the nature of Scripture, its authority over Christian faith and praxis, and its wider function within the economy of grace.



THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

“Holy Scripture” names that authoritative body of biblical texts which constitute the sufficient norm of the church’s own faith and practice.

Scripture is comprised of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. Though written by a number of different authors in a wide variety of different contexts, these constitute one book which uniformly attests the works of God in the economy of grace.



THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

This is a contentious issue, particularly in inter-religious contexts where the legitimacy of the New Testament is either not acknowledged or subordinated to some other religious authority.

But this is an essential commitment of the Christian faith which believes the life of Jesus Christ to be the true culmination and fulfilment of God's purposes in the history of Israel.



THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Scripture's authority derives from its holiness, that is, from the fact that it is a divine instrument:

It is a means of God's sanctifying work:

- "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

It has its origin in God by "inspiration":

- "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16);
"men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).



THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Inspiration is a controversial doctrine in the modern context because it grounds the fittingness of Scripture as divine teaching, thus attributes a special status to the text *qua* text.

It does not presuppose the suspension but the providential employment the contingent processes of textual production, including the author's own idioms, concepts, and experiences.

We need not contrast the “human” character of Scripture to its “divine” character.



THE SUFFICIENCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

To say that Scripture is “sufficient” is to specify its suitability for some particular end. But what is the end to which Scripture is sufficient?

- “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.”

“The Westminster Confession of Faith” (Dennison, Reformed Confessions, 4:235)

Defining the sufficiency of Scripture in relation to salvation imposes limits on the ends for which one might appeal to Scriptural authority, and introduces a fair degree of flexibility in accommodating interpretive difference.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

In Protestantism, the sufficiency of Scripture also checks the authority which the church can claim:

- “We affirm, therefore, that such as allege the Scripture to have no authority but that which it receives from the Kirk to be blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk which always hears and obeys the voice of [Christ].”

“The Scottish Confession” (Dennison, 2:201)

The sufficiency of Scripture also defines the work of theology as a kind of biblical reasoning – a collation of and conceptual expansion upon the Apostolic witness



THE USES OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT USES OF SCRIPTURE

Patristic and Medieval use of Scripture treated the Bible as a mystical, supernatural book, which speaks with authority to supra-historical realities.

- Uses: Lectio Divina; Biblical Commentary; The Four-fold Senses of Scripture (Literal; Allegorical; Moral; Spiritual)

Reformation critiques of the institutional church brought about a hardened account of the authority of Scripture which emphasised the literal sense as regulative over the interpretive process.



AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS III.5.9

“What I see in them today is something not accessible to the scrutiny of the proud nor exposed to the gaze of the immature, something lowly as one enters but lofty as one advances further, something veiled in mystery.

At that time, though, I was in no state to enter, nor prepared to bow my head and accommodate myself to its ways . . . My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning.

Scripture is a reality that grows along with little children, but I disdained to be a little child.”

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Legaspi: Biblical Criticism as an alternative to dogmatic/theological approaches to the Bible.

Served a new political order: end religious conflict on the European continent to create a regime governed by “universal reason”.

A naturalised method focused on “the text” of Scripture – its production and cultural provenance.

Readings guided by confessional traditions regarded as “sectarian”.

The Bible here is studied like any other book: as an historical and cultural artefact.

OXFORD STUDIES IN
HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies



MICHAEL C. LEGASPI

THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Every sub-tradition (Protestant and Catholic; Liberal and Fundamentalist) has worked constructively with biblical criticism to some extent, though with varying results.

The Bible may be a source of theological reasoning, but only by means of biblical criticism, not apart from it, as criticism becomes a means of sifting the biblical texts to identify some consistent commitments of Christian faith.



THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Where biblical criticism is guided by the “rule of faith”, it can be more or less congenial to Christian orthodoxy.

But the authority of Scripture comes to be regarded not as a property of the text as such, but of the function the text serves within the Christian community (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit).



THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Some forms of biblical criticism advance reading strategies which recommend a stance of “resistance” or “protest”, discouraging deferential or “reverent” readings of the biblical text.

These strategies attempt to force a choice between the scientific study of Scripture and its authoritative use.



THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Some versions of biblical criticism have retreated to strategies like “reader response”, which privilege the historical use of the text in the church.

But is Scripture really the norm here?

Or is it the church?

What would constitute a mis-interpretation on this account?

And where does reform come from?



THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

In order to repair the gap between biblical and theological studies, the church needs to re-conceive of the interpretation of Scripture as an activity in which God is active.

Discerning the meaning of Scripture is not merely a matter of technique but grace:

“Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things
out of your law”

Ps. 119:18



THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

That implies:

- The enlargement of the relevant context beyond that of the biblical authors, to include the active presence of God.
- The deepening of the possible senses of Scripture, as participating in a communicative event that transcends the powers of human communication.



THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

That implies:

- That reading Scripture is an ineluctably moral/spiritual act. Our sin is an impediment, and we require the Spirit to be “guided by the rule of love and faith” (“First Helvetic Confession”, Dennison, 1:344).
- That a proper understanding of Scripture is itself a divine gift





READING

The first two essays, those by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Robert Jenson, provide two different perspectives on the inspiration of Scripture and its relevance for theological reasoning.

The final essay by Kavin Rowe addresses criticisms of some within the field of New Testament studies which lament the intrusion of "theological readings".

According to Rowe, our methods of reading the New Testament require and imply that its readers have made a judgment about its truth claims. In that sense, interpreting the New Testament is an unavoidably theological endeavor.



READING

‘Basic questions in theology ; collected essays’, Pannenberg, W, 1970. Chapter 5 – What is a Dogmatic Statement?

Jenson, R. W. (2004). A Second thought about Inspiration. *Pro Ecclesia* (Northfield, Minn.), 13(4), 393–398.

Kavin, R. C. (2022). What if it were True? Why Study the New Testament. *New Testament Studies*, 68(2), 144–155.