

# Natural Law and Scriptural Authority

Davenant Hall Core Foundations

Michaelmas Term 2020

Teachers: Drs. Alastair Roberts and Bradford Littlejohn

## Course Description

Although Protestants are well-familiar with the classical Protestant insistence on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, they are less familiar with the equally important teaching of the Reformers that God reveals himself through the “two books” of Scripture and nature. As Paul teaches in Romans 1 and 2, God has revealed enough of his nature to render us “without excuse” and given us a moral law “written on our hearts.” In an age that is in rebellion not merely against Scripture but against nature, it is urgent for us to recover both, and to understand a right how each serves to illuminate the other, and to help us walk faithfully in the midst of uncertainty.

This course, making use of classic readings from Aquinas, Calvin, Hemmingsen, and Hooker, along with meditation on key passages of Scripture, will help the student gain a right understanding of the meaning of *sola Scriptura* and the use of moral reason in classical Protestantism.

## Course Format

The format of the course will blend short lectures and guided discussion of the assigned texts. Drs. Littlejohn and Roberts will alternate from week to week as the primary instructor, though both will be present for most classes. The instructor(s) will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate (but not for dissemination outside of class). Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on a Google Classroom discussion board.

## Course Objectives:

Objectives for this course include: (1) to understand the meaning of natural law as the metaphysical order of creation; (2) to understand the value of natural law, as discerned by reason, as a tool for gaining knowledge; (3) to understand the limitations of natural law,

as discerned by reason; (4) to understand how Scripture illuminates and restates natural law; (5) to understand the various purposes of Scripture as special revelation; and (6) to understand the roles of both Scripture and natural law in framing human law.

### **Course Requirements:**

*Participation (20%)*: Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. For-credit students may have one excused absence.

*Reading Responses (30%)*: All students are requested and for-credit students are *required* to complete the assigned readings each week. Students will submit a Reading Response each week offering a brief synopsis and critical reflections on either the biblical or historical reading for the week (alternating each week so that half their reading responses are biblical, and half historical).

*Term Paper (50%)*: For-credit students are required to submit a 3,000-5,000 word term paper by 12/24. Papers will combine limited secondary source research with attentive primary source engagement and thoughtful analysis. They may be primarily exegetical, historical, or theological-philosophical in their orientation, or blend elements of all three, though the topic should be approved with the instructors in advance.

### **Course Texts**

The Bible.

Aquinas, "On Law" from *Summa Theologiae* (available free online here; available in English translations of the *Summa* or collections like R.W. Dyson, ed, *Aquinas: Political Writings*)

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, selections (available free online here; Beveridge and McNeill translations available in print).

Niels Hemmingsen, *On the Law of Nature: A Demonstrative Method*, trans. E.J. Hutchinson (CLP Academic)

Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity in Modern English*, ed. Brad Littlejohn, Brian Marr, and Bradley Belschner (Davenant Press)

Andrew Fulford and David Haines, *Natural Law: A Brief Introduction and Exegetical Defense* (Davenant Press)

## Course Schedule

**A Note about Course Structure:** With the exception of the initial introductory reading, the readings have been ordered chronologically throughout history, rather than chopped into little bits and re-organized to fit with the “Key Topic” of the week and the Scripture reading. This means that at times the historical texts will introduce us to topics that we have not yet discussed systematically, or will lead us to circle back to topics already discussed at an earlier point in the course. This is a feature, rather than a bug; the many profound issues we will discuss in this class are deeply interwoven, and deserve to be looked at again and again from several different angles, as the readings will compel us to do.

Week	Dates	Key Topic	Scripture Reading	Historical Reading
1	9/28-10/3	Natural law as metaphysical reality: the creaturely <i>telos</i>	Genesis 2-3	Fulford and Haines, Intro – p. 48
2	10/5-10	Natural law as epistemic problem: the noetic effects of sin	Genesis 6, 11	Fulford and Haines, pp. 49-115
3	10/12-17	Biblical law and natural law: discerning the purposes of Scripture	Ex. 20, Deut. 25-26	Aquinas, <i>ST Iallae</i> , Qs. 90-93, 98-101, 104
4	10/19-24	Natural law, covenant and political order	1 Sam. 8	Aquinas, <i>ST Iallae</i> , Qs. 94-97
5	10/26-31	Law and wisdom: attunement to the order of reality	Prov. 1	Calvin, <i>Institutes</i> , Bk. I, chs. 1-6
6	11/2-7	The limits of natural law and the prophetic vocation	Jer. 1	Calvin, <i>Institutes</i> , Bk. I, chs. 7-12
7	11/9-14	Natural law and Christian ethics: new wine in old wineskins?	Matthew 5	Hemmingsen, <i>Law of Nature</i> , pp. 3-74
8	11/16-21	Natural revelation, natural theology, and natural law	Rom. 1-2	Hemmingsen, <i>Law of Nature</i> , pp. 75-181
	Thanksgiving			
9	11/28-12/3	Nature, conscience, and Christian freedom: Pauline moral reasoning	1 Cor. 8-10	Hooker, <i>Laws</i> , Bk. I
10	12/5-10	The Light of Nature and the Light of the Gospel	2 Cor. 3-4	Hooker, <i>Laws</i> , Bk. II; Bk. III, chs. 4-10