

**HT 503 History of Doctrine
Instructor**

**Dr Robby Dean
Spring 2023**

“We live in a world where personality has more street value than character, where psychological wholeness is more valued than spiritual authenticity. We find ourselves in a world where pleasures are embraced without moral norms or a sense of social responsibility. Christian truth is attacked not so much for its particular assertions as for its fundamental claim that there is such a thing as binding, objective truth. The quest for truth has been replaced by the preoccupation with pleasure and entertainment. Thus, we live in a world of the therapeutic and the psychological, where people are engaged in an endless pursuit of self-fulfillment and entitlement.”

~John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 18.

Systematic
Theology

History of Doctrine

Church History

Biblical Theology of Each Book

39 OT Books
Hebrew

27 NT Books
Greek

Important Terms

theology (Gk. θεολογία), lit. the 'science of God.' Among the Greek Fathers it comes to have two specific references: it can denote either the doctrine of the *Trinity (i.e., of God's being, as opposed to his dealings with the created order), or it can mean prayer (as it is only in prayer that God is truly known). Later, in the W. it came to mean the science of the Divinely revealed religious truths.[1]

[1] F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1616.

Important Terms

Dogma: Dogma comes from doctrine.

1. The term, *dogma*, derives from a Greek term which generally means “a decree, a decision, or a command.” “*dokein*” (it seems). In the New Testament it became attached to the findings of an ecclesiastical body such as in Acts 16:4 (*dogmata*).
2. The study of dogma embraces the confessional statements of a particular ecclesiastical tradition. [OL,21]

“The word ‘dogma’ is derived from the Greek *dokein*, which in the expression *dokein moi* meant not only ‘it seems to me’, or ‘it pleases me’, but also ‘I have definitely determined something so that it is for me an established fact’. The last meaning gradually predominated, so that the word ‘dogma’ became the designation of a firm, and especially a public, resolution or decree.”

~Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 17.

A religious dogma, on the other hand, is a religious truth based on authority and officially formulated by some ecclesiastical assembly. This meaning of the word is not determined by its scriptural usage, in which it always denotes a decree, a commandment, or a rule of practical life, but is more in harmony with the philosophical use of the word to denote a proposition or principle. Some of the early Church Fathers used it to describe the substance of doctrine. Cf. Hagenbach, *History of Doctrines* I., p. 2 f.; Hauck, *Realencyclopaedie*, Art. Dogmatik.

[1] Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 18.

**Says Wilmers in his *Handbook of the Christian Religion*,
p. 151:**

**“A dogma, therefore, is a truth revealed by God, and at
the same time proposed by the Church for our belief.”**

**[1] Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI:
WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 18.**

Important Terms

Doctrine

Doctrine διδασκαλία (*didaskalia*), teaching, instruction;
διδαχή (*didachē*), teaching; what is taught by a teacher.

1. The academic definition: the response of the church to questions that have been posed either by heretics from outside the church (threats) or by the faithful within it (questions). In the New Testament, it refers to the teachings of Scripture relative to any theme. [OL, 21]
2. The more colloquial sense: the instruction of Scripture covering the entire range of instruction from presuppositions, abstract thought, biblical procedures, to theological developments, to application.

Religious doctrines are found in Scripture, though not in finished form, but dogmas in the current sense of the word are not found there. They are the fruit of human reflection, the reflection of the Church, often occasioned or intensified by theological controversies. Roman Catholics and Protestants differ somewhat in their description of the origin of dogmas. The former minimize, if they do not exclude, the reflection of the Church as the body of believers, and substitute for it the study of the teaching Church or the hierarchy. Whenever a new form of error arises, the teaching Church, that is the clerus, which now has its infallible spokesman in the Pope, after careful examination, formulates the doctrine taught in Scripture or by tradition, declares it to be a revealed truth, and imposes its acceptance on all the faithful.

[1] Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 18.

Presupposition

By presuppositions we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world. Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People's presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions.

~Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live*, 19

Most people learn or absorb their presuppositions from parents, peers, professors, and pastors.

Presuppositions are caught more than taught.

Presuppositions can be examined, evaluated, and revised.

To understand where we are in today's world—in our intellectual ideas and in our cultural and political lives—we must trace three lines in history, namely, the philosophic, the scientific, and the religious.

~Schaeffer, *HSWTL*, 20

Our views on everything consciously and consistently derive from our view of ultimate reality, or they are thrown together willy-nilly based on pragmatics, emotions, and popularity at the time, but they always derive from our view of ultimate reality.

A person, a culture, a civilization is always built on theological presuppositions.