

Christian Doctrine, SPST's Mission, and My Teaching and Research Commitments

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"Doctrine develops." This pithy statement of theologian Elizabeth Johnson points to a vital aspect of Saint Paul School of Theology's commitment "**to inspiring passion for ministry in diverse Christian bodies.**" While the notions of "doctrine" and "passion" could seem to oppose one another, these two concepts in concert undergird my teaching and my research commitments.

Preparing students for the work of doctrinal development undergirds my teaching at Saint Paul School of Theology. I want students to see the development of doctrine as an ongoing task through which the church assesses and articulates its teachings on belief and practice. Whether teaching Introduction to Systematic Theology, Christ and Salvation, Engaging World Religions, Ecumenical Theology and the Unity of the Church, or Christian Scripture and Feminist Hermeneutics, I want students—as future church leaders—both to situate themselves as participants in the work of doctrinal development and to see their theological education as equipping them for their participation. Further, I want them to recognize that the "church" engaged in doctrinal development includes **diverse Christian bodies**—local congregations, denominations, world communions, and the great Church catholic.

I set the task of doctrinal development within the context of **church renewal** whereby the church decides which aspects of tradition should be passed on and which aspects should no longer be endorsed. These are not easy decisions. It is important that SPST students—who will serve as **leaders** of congregations and denominations—be prepared to make proposals concerning what is "appropriable" from the past. A significant facet of my work as teacher is helping students develop skills to analyze, build, and respond to proposals concerning the legacy that contemporary Christians ought to bequeath to others.

My concern for doctrinal development provides the pulse to my current research and writing on what it means to be created human—male and female. Through this project, I seek to commend and nurture a shape of living that presents equality and mutuality between women and men as God's original and abiding will for human life. This "shape" stands in sharp contrast to the hierarchical pattern whereby men have superiority and women are subordinate, which has dominated the Christian description of God's intentions and will for humankind.

My project displays and examines a significant witness from Christian tradition who offers surprising endorsements for an egalitarian anthropology from the sixteenth century—Martin Luther. The book I am writing shows that Luther's teachings concerning Eve and Adam provide provocative resources for a Christian anthropology that endorses gender equality as God's original intention for the shape of human life. This book is a critical retrieval of Luther's teachings on Adam and Eve, particularly through a close reading of Luther's so-called *Great Lectures on Genesis*. It offers a theological approach to Luther's views so that contemporary conversation partners—be they in Lutheran churches or in the Church catholic or in the secular **world**—might come to know the support Luther offers to current ventures to liberate Christianity from its "captivity" to gender hierarchies. The prospects for this liberation are important when educating leaders **to make disciples for Jesus Christ, renew the church, and transform the world.**