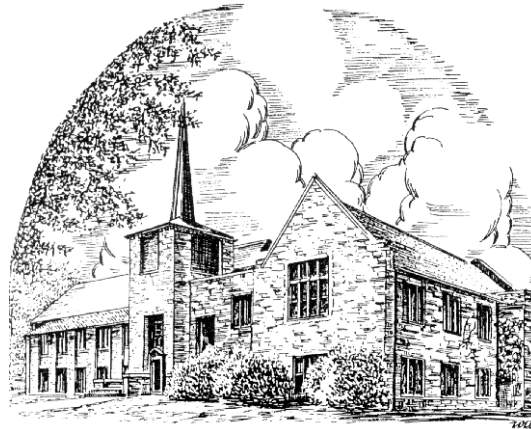


The Hebrew prophets condemned this sort of strict reliance on ritual. While many people felt that as long as the sacrifices were offered in the correct fashion God would bless them, the prophets called for their hearers to transform their behavior and live lives of righteousness rather than relying on sacrifice alone.

Meanwhile, the Greek philosophic tradition tried to articulate an understanding of life, the universe and everything. Many Greek thinkers accepted the idea of one God behind the universe, something the Jews had proclaimed for centuries. The followers of Jesus would attempt to bring the two traditions together, to create a systematic understanding of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

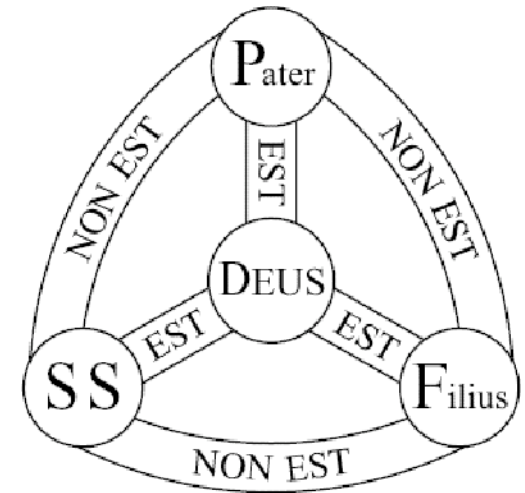


Roundy Memorial Baptist Church
 1250 E. Hampton Road
 White Fish Bay, WI 53217
 (414) 332-4980



Sunday evenings from February 10
Time: 7:00 - 8:00

Lawrence Stewart received an M.Div. with an emphasis in Biblical Studies from Bethel Theological Seminary and took archaeology courses from Tel Aviv University while working on digs in Israel. He earned a Ph.D. in the field of Early Christianity from Brown University in 1993. Since moving to Wisconsin he has taught as adjunct faculty at various colleges in Wisconsin.



The so-called Shield of Faith presents an illustration of how the church came to view the nature of God. It represents a rejection of two understandings: Modalism (which lost the distinct persons in the Trinity) and Tri-theism (which undermines the idea of monotheism.)

Foundations of Theology

Ancient religions did not worry about orthodoxy (right belief) but placed an emphasis on orthopraxy (right actions). As long as the sacrifices were offered in the proper way people assumed the gods were pleased. They made no effort to give a consistent presentation of God, life, and the world.



16th century illustration of Justin Martyr. Like a number of early Christian teachers Justin was a professional philosopher. These men attempted to present Christian teachings in a systematic fashion - the basis for theology.

February 10 - Foundations and the Father

Christianity combined two currents, the traditions of Israel and Greek philosophy. Many, both inside and outside the Church, looked on the Christians as a new school of philosophy. The efforts by these early Christians to explain and promote their faith laid the foundations for later theology, and pointed to issues Christianity still tries to answer.

The followers of Jesus inherited monotheism from their Jewish roots. But what happens when that encounters the issues of Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

February 17 - Son and Holy Spirit

Efforts to understand who Jesus was, and his relationship with God the Father lay behind most of the early Ecumenical Councils of the church. Different groups emphasized different aspects of the question. The councils tried to reconcile the viewpoints to the best of their ability. (Sometimes it appears they were more successful at pointing out errors in efforts to understand Jesus than presenting a clear picture of who Jesus was.)

Compared with the fights over understanding the nature of Jesus the church had a much easier time with the Holy Spirit



February 24 - Sin and Salvation

Christians never achieved a universally accepted understanding on the doctrines of sin (Hamartology) and salvation (Justification). Issues in regard to sin include when it began, how it affected human nature, and the contrast between 'actual' and 'original' sin. Similarly, while all Christians saw the death of Jesus as bringing reconciliation with God, exactly how it brought about salvation remained an issue for debate.

March 2 - Sanctification

Christians did not completely abandon the idea of orthopraxy. How one lived after becoming a follower of Jesus remained a concern. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian professional philosopher of the late 2nd/early 3rd century, wrote a work on Christian theology that reads like a book of etiquette. Here is how Christians dress, eat at the dinner table, converse, etc.

After coming to Jesus, what sorts of changes would be visible in your life? Could sin be forgiven after one became a Christian? Could one live a sinless life? Christians never fully resolved some of these issues, and the arguments led to several church splits.

March 9 - Eschatology

Eschatology, the doctrine of last things, covered topics such as what happens to a person after death, what are Heaven and Hell like, and when will Christ return.

Perhaps even more than other doctrines the early church failed to achieve consensus on issues related to eschatology. While they never achieved complete agreement, however, many of the most common ideas related to eschatology in the early church might surprise some modern Christians interested in the subject.