Outline/Study Questions for “The Theology of Francis Turretin”

I. The concept and method of theology

1. Why does Francis Turretin devote a question to the meaning of the word “theology”?

2. Why does Turretin claim that “that which is best is most communicative of itself”?

3. Why is theology superior to metaphysics? Why might one think otherwise?

4. How does theology as a “system of saving doctrine” differ from “habitual theology”? Why is this distinction useful?

5. Define “formal object” and “material object.” How does Turretin employ the distinction between the two in 1.2.2, 1.2.10, and 1.5.5?

6. In what sense does Turretin consider the human mind a tabula rasa?

7. What do you think of Turretin’s argument from “universal experience” to the existence of a habit of natural theology?

8. How can natural knowledge of God and his law suffice to render one inexcusable before God without also sufficing to show human beings the way of salvation? Why might one find this state of affairs paradoxical?

9. Reconcile Heb 11:6 with the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation.

10. Why might one consider theology either merely theoretical or merely practical? Why does Turretin think otherwise?

11. What role should reason play in theology?

12. Why does Turretin consider the conclusions of sound “mixed syllogisms” revealed?

13. Did you notice anything peculiar about Turretin’s understanding of miracles?

14. What role should the testimony of the senses play in theology?

15. Why does Turretin consider the consequences of explicitly revealed premises equally revealed? How does his reasoning about this subject relate to his treatment of “mixed syllogisms”?

16. Distinguish between the concepts of “necessity of precept” and “necessity of means.” How does Turretin employ this distinction?
17. In what sense are the fundamental articles of the Christian faith identical in the old
dispensation and the new?

18. To what extent can one identify the fundamental articles?

II. Scripture

1. Do any of Turretin’s arguments for the preservation of Scripture (2.10.5-7) establish his
conclusion indubitably?

2. Why and in what sense does Turretin consider the vowel points contained in the
Masoretic text of the Old Testament authentic (2.11.11-13)?

3. As Turretin admits, the autographs of Scripture have perished; why, in his view, is it
nonetheless important for the church today to affirm the inerrancy of the autographs (cf.
his reasoning on an analogous point in 2.11.7)?

4. How does Turretin differ from the papists in his views on the sense(s) of Scripture
(2.19.2-6)?

5. Is Turretin correct to interdict all emendation of the texts of Scripture on the basis of
ancient versions and/or conjecture (2.12.6-12)?

6. Could one apply Turretin’s argument against a distinction between authority in itself and
authority with respect to us (2.6.3) to the distinction he implicitly draws between
perspicuity in itself and perspicuity with respect to individuals (cf. 2.17.13)?

7. How does Turretin employ the formal-material distinction to clarify: a) the sense in
which versions can be authentic (2.13.12); and b) the sense in which human traditions
may be acceptable in matters of faith (2.16.30)?

8. Could the criticisms Turretin urges against Cappell in 2.12.11 legitimately be applied to
Turretin’s position in 2.20.18 and 20?

9. In what sense does Turretin consider the quotations of the Septuagint in the New
Testament authentic (2.14.8)?

10. What does Turretin mean by his distinction in 2.16.4 between “intensive and qualitative
perfection” and “extensive and quantitative perfection”?

11. If the Old Testament is sufficient “to make us wise to salvation,” why is the New
Testament not superfluous for this purpose? If the New Testament is not superfluous,
why must oral traditions be superfluous? Cf. 2.16.13 and 31.

12. Why, according to Turretin, is every addition in matters of faith a corruption (2.16.15)?
III. The Trinity (2.23-31)

1. Why is it useful to distinguish subsistence from existence (3.23.5)?

2. Are the two definitions of “person” mentioned in 3.23.8 reconcilable?

3. Why might one consider the ousia to which the Son is said to be homoousios in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed a specific, rather than an individual, essence (3.23.11; 3.25.1-2; 3.25.22-3)?

4. Why is it useful to distinguish between essential and notional acts (3.23.15; 3.29.6, 23)?

5. What does Turretin mean by the statement: “the Trinity is contained in the Symbol (the Apostles’ Creed) if not in the signified act, at least in the exercised inasmuch as we seal our faith in the three persons” (3.24.12)?

6. How does Turretin know that “Christ cannot be acknowledged without the Father and the Spirit” (3.24.14)?

7. How does Turretin attempt to refute the argument: “The divine essence is the Father; the divine essence is the Son; therefore the Son is the Father” (3.25.22-3)? To what extent does he succeed?

8. Reconcile the incommunicability of the divine persons with their objective identity with the communicable, divine essence (3.25.24; 3.27.4).

9. Put the last sentence in 3.27.14 into your own words. If you have difficulty, try consulting 3.27.18.

10. In 3.27.15, Turretin insists that the divine persons are constituted as distinct from each other by more than the negative quality of incommunicability. Why might one think otherwise?

11. How might one defend and/or criticize the stance Turretin takes in 3.31.6?

12. Reconcile Turretin’s statement that the Son is autotheos (3.28.40) with his affirmation of the doctrine of the Son’s generation (3.29.1-2).

IV. Predestination to Salvation and Damnation

1. Why does Turretin accuse the supralapsarians of confounding the natural and the supernatural orders (4.9.12, 22)? Do the supralapsarians actually confound the two orders? Is confounding these orders necessarily blameworthy?

2. Why does Turretin deny that Christ is the cause and foundation of election (4.10.4-8)?

3. Is Turretin’s argument in 4.10.22 sound?

4. Why is it important to distinguish between preterition and predamnation (4.14.6-13, 24)?
V. Providence in General

1. Is Turretin’s claim that providence is “so connected with divinity that it cannot be wholly denied without at the same time denying God” (6.1.3; cf. 6.1.8) justified?

2. What does Turretin mean by his distinction between “things that are absolutely and in every way necessary” and “those which are of a hypothetical necessity from the divine ordination” (6.3.10)?

3. Is Turretin’s statement, “to pretend that man is independent in will and action is to make him independent in being because whatever he is in acting such he is in being” (6.3.11; cf. 6.4.9) objectively justified?

4. How did the Jesuits and Dominicans of Turretin’s time differ in their understandings of divine providence (6.4.4-5 and 6.5.6)?

5. What is Turretin attempting to establish in 6.4.18 (cf. 6.5.14)?

6. Is Turretin’s statement, “Nor, if he uses second causes as means, does it follow that he does not act immediately also” (6.5.3) defensible?

7. Is the argument of 6.5.7 sound?

8. Is the argument of 6.5.8 valid?

9. Does Turretin succeed in 6.5.16-17 in absolving God of responsibility for the sinful acts his pre-determining causality enables human beings to commit?

10. In particular, how can God be responsible for the good works of human being if he is not equally chargeable for evil, human works (6.6.8)?

11. What is Turretin’s point in 6.7.8?

12. Is Turretin’s argument in 6.7.24 and 6.7.27 sound?

13. According to 6.9.6-8, what spiritual benefits can one gain by rightly understanding and meditating on the doctrine of providence?

VI. The covenant of nature and original sin

1. Why does Turretin take up the question of whether Adam, in his prelapsarian state, possessed the ability to believe in Christ (8.2.1)?

2. Is Turretin’s argument from “reason of contraries” in 8.3.7 sound?
3. Is Turretin’s argument from Adam’s desire for happiness in 8.3.9 sound?

4. Reconcile Turretin’s statement that “no one is bound to an absolute impossibility” (8.3.11) with his conviction that those who do not accept the gospel savingly are: a) incapable of accepting it savingly; and yet b) culpable nonetheless.

5. Does Turretin confound the orders of nature and grace in 8.3.14?

6. Does Turretin compromise the strictly supernatural character of the beatific vision in 8.6.8?

7. What are the implications of 8.7.2, 9 and 10 for the relation between eschatology and interconfessional conflict?

8. Is Turretin’s argument in 9.9.21 sound?

9. Is Turretin’s interpretation of Ezek 18:20 correct?

10. What is Turretin’s point in 9.10.22?

11. Is Turretin’s argument in 9.11.3 sound?

12. Why is the Roman Catholic position outlined in 9.11.7 dangerous?

**VII. The Moral Law**

1. Why must that which is dependent on God in the genus of being also be dependent on him in the genus of morals (11.1.15; 11.2.12)?

2. Why does Turretin distinguish not only between the natural law and the moral law and between natural and positive law, but also between the primary and secondary elements of natural law (11.2.6; 11.2.11)? How could one distinguish between these primary and secondary elements?

3. Does Turretin succeed in resolving the difficulty he raises in 11.2.30?

4. What is Turretin’s point in 11.2.31?

5. Is Turretin’s argument in 11.3.21 sound?

6. When one calls sinners to repent, is one preaching law or gospel or both under different respects (11.3.33)?

7. Are Turretin’s second (11.6.3) and fourth (11.6.5) rules for interpreting the commandments objectively valid?

8. Are Turretin’s arguments for (11.14.5-7) and rebuttals of objections against (11.14.16) the view that the Apostles instituted the Lord’s Day convincing?
9. What is the “decent burial of the synagogue” to which Turretin refers in 11.14.22?

10. Are Turretin’s comments in 11.14.20 justified?

VIII. The Covenant of Grace

1. Assess Turretin’s argument in 12.2.12.

2. In what sense(s) is the covenant of grace conditional (12.3.3-5)?

3. Does the conditionality of the covenant of grace undermine the distinction between law and gospel (12.3.6)?

4. Is Turretin’s understanding of assurance realistic (12.3.13)?

5. Is Turretin’s argument in 12.5.11 sound?

6. Assess Turretin’s argument in 12.5.21.

7. What are the implications of Turretin’s claims in 12.6.11?

8. Is Turretin’s argument in 12.6.17 sound?

9. Is Turretin’s argument in 12.7.15 sound?


IX. The Atonement

1. What is Turretin’s point in 14.13.9?

2. What is Turretin’s point in 14.13.15?

3. Is Turretin’s argument in 14.13.26 sound?

4. Why do the Amyrauldians consider the decree that Christ would die logically antecedent to the decree of election (14.14.6)?

5. How does 14.14.11 relate to the Marrow controversy?


7. Is Turretin’s argument in 14.14.20 sound?

8. To what objections is Turretin’s argument in 14.14.51 liable?

XI. Faith

1. What is the “faith of Carbonarius” (15.9.3), and why does Turretin mention it?

2. How does Turretin’s distinction of faith into various acts assist his anti-Roman polemic (15.8.13-14)?

3. What does Turretin mean by the statement, “knowledge is the genus of all habits” (15.9.5)?

4. What is Turretin’s point in 15.9.12 (cf. 15.9.15)?

5. In what sense does trust not belong to the essence of saving faith (15.10.3)?

6. What is the point of 15.10.12?

7. What is the significance of 15.11.7?

8. Is Turretin’s conclusion in 15.11.14 correct?

9. Why does Turretin distinguish between faith as a theological virtue and faith as a gospel condition (15.11.15)? Is he justified in so doing?

10. What is Turretin’s point in 15.12.6?

11. How do 15.12.12 and 15.17.27 relate to our previous discussions of the revealed status of the conclusions of sound “mixed syllogisms”?

12. Does Turretin err in 15.13.8-9?

13. What is Turretin’s point in 15.14.14?

14. Is Turretin’s argument in 15.16.17 sound?

XII. Church and State

1. Turretin recognizes the validity of Roman ordination for Luther, Zwingli, etc. and yet refuses to grant that the Roman communion is a true church (18.25.10). Is his position tenable?

2. In what senses was the call of the Reformers ordinary (18.25.16)? In what senses was it extraordinary (ibid.)?

3. In what respects does legitimate ecclesiastical power differ from legitimate political power (18.29.14-18)?

4. Are Turretin’s remarks in 18.31.15 warranted?
5. To what extent is Turretin’s argument in 18.32.10-12 judicious?


7. Summarize, in your own words, Turretin’s critique of the Council of Trent.

XIII. The Sacraments

1. If the grace signified in a sacrament belongs to its matter (19.1.11), how can a sacrament be valid even if dispensed to an unbeliever (19.1.14; cf. 19.5.11)?

2. Comment on Augustine’s remark, quoted in 19.3.4: “If the sacraments did not have a certain similitude, they would not be sacraments.”

3. Why must sacraments be visible, as opposed to merely audible, signs (19.3.6)?

4. What is Turretin’s point in 19.3.8?

5. Do sacraments belong to the genus of actions or signs (19.3.9-12)?

6. Is Turretin’s argument in 19.4.6 sound?

7. Why do Turretin’s Roman Catholic opponents deny that the sacraments are seals of grace (19.5.2; 19.6.2)?

8. Is Turretin’s argument in 19.7.12 sound?