

CH/TH668: The Trinitarian and Christological Controversies
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dr. Don Fairbairn – Summer 2019

Dr. Fairbairn's Contact Information:

Email: dfairbairn@gordonconwell.edu

Phone: (704) 940-5842

Dr. Fairbairn's assistant is Vyacheslav Lytvynenko ("Dr. Slavik"):

Email: vytvynenko@gordonconwell.edu

Course Schedule: This is a full-summer course extending from May 20 through August 16. The actual class meetings will be Monday – Friday, June 3-7, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM each day.

Office Hours: I will be in Hamilton the week of the course and will be available to have lunch with students and/or to meet after class. I will be available by email before and after the class week.

Catalog Course Description: A detailed look at the two greatest doctrinal controversies of the patristic period. This course focuses on reading and discussion of primary sources from the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, in an effort to discern both the depth of the Church's consensus on these crucial doctrines and the soteriology that lay beneath this consensus.

Relation to Curriculum: This course can serve as either a theology or a Church history elective.

Course Purpose: The doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ are the backbone of Christian theology and were the Church's central focus during the patristic period. These doctrines have also been the subject of intense scrutiny by modern scholars, in terms of both their biblical foundations and their early historical development. This course examines the history of the patristic church's articulation of these doctrines and the way modern scholarship has re-told that history, so as to help students appreciate and express the biblical depiction of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ.

Course Objectives: In keeping with Gordon-Conwell's mission statement, the professor intends that upon completing this course, students will:

1. Appreciate the patristic Church's commitment to Scripture and learn from the way the Church fathers used the Bible to articulate the Trinity and the Person of Christ (article 1 of the mission statement).
2. Grasp the influence of contemporary historians' world views on the perspectives from which they understand patristic doctrinal formulation and reflect on the potential influence of those perspectives on our view of God and Christ (articles 2, 5).

3. Recognize the impact the patristic expressions of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines can have on our pursuit of Christian maturity and our ministry of evangelism and discipleship (articles 3, 4, 6).

Course Requirements: Achievement of the course objectives will be measured through a variety of assignments. The successful completion of these assignments will require each student to spend at least 135 hours devoted to coursework, both in class and outside of class. The following chart indicates how these hours are distributed across the various course assignments. More specific descriptions of the assignments are given later in this syllabus.

| Course Assignment | Approximate Time Commitment |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Reading textbooks | 50 hours |
| Class lectures and discussions | 30 hours |
| Additional reading and informal paper | 15 hours |
| Additional reading and first research paper | 20 hours |
| Additional reading and second research paper | 20 hours |

Required Textbooks:

St. Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Preface by C.S. Lewis. Translation and Introduction by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series. Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. (ISBN: 978-0881414097)

Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind. *Works on the Spirit*. Translation and Introduction by Mark DelCogliano *et al.* Popular Patristics Series. Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. (ISBN: 978-0881413793)

St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*. Translation and Introduction by Stephen Hildebrand. Popular Patristics Series. Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. (ISBN: 978-0913836743)

St. Cyril of Alexandria. *On the Unity of Christ*. Translation and Introduction by John McGuckin. Popular Patristics Series. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. (ISBN: 978-0881411331)

St. Gregory of Nazianzus. *On God and Christ*. Translation and Introduction by Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham. Popular Patristics Series. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002. (ISBN: 978-0881412406)

Norris, Richard A., ed. *The Christological Controversy*. Sources of Early Christian Thought. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980. (ISBN: 978-0800614119)

Rusch, William G., ed. *The Trinitarian Controversy*. Sources of Early Christian Thought. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980. (ISBN: 978-0800614102)

Requirements: The course objectives will be met by completion of the following requirements:

1. **Reading in preparation for class discussions:** Each student must read the seven textbooks in their entirety (both the introductions and the primary source readings contained in each book), a total of about 1000 pages. Because a significant portion of class time will be spent discussing the textbooks, the student should try to complete this reading prior to the beginning of the week-long seminar, and he/she MUST complete each day's reading prior to the day it is to be discussed. Furthermore, each student is urged to do the reading from these textbooks in the order given in the schedule below (approximately chronological), not by simply reading each book straight through.

2. **Informal reflective essay (20 points):** Shortly after the conclusion of the week-long seminar, each student must do 200 pages of additional reading in contemporary scholarship about the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. This reading may include chapters of recent historical theology textbooks, journal articles, and/or books or chapters of books on the controversies. On the basis of the textbook reading, this additional reading, and class discussions, each student must write an informal reflective essay of 5-7 pages addressing the following questions:

- a. What are some of the major perspectives contemporary scholars hold toward patristic doctrinal formulation? How do these perspectives reflect the world views of the scholars, and how have these perspectives influenced us as evangelicals?
- b. How do the scholars' assessments of the central concerns of the controversies compare to the patristic authors' own statements of their central concerns?
- c. What do you believe is the most appropriate way to describe the course of these controversies? What were the fundamental issues? What were they primarily about? What was ultimately at stake?

In this informal essay, you may use parenthetical references to refer to the textbooks or class notes. You should use footnotes to refer to the additional sources you have read. Your bibliography for this essay should indicate that you have read all the textbooks completely and how many pages of reading from each additional work you have read. This should total about 1200 pages (1000 from the textbooks and 200 additional pages).

This paper is due by **Friday, June 21.**

3. **Research Papers (40 points each; 80 points total):** Each student must write **TWO 10-12 page research papers.** It is expected that each paper will involve about 200 pages of reading/research in primary and secondary sources (in addition to reading done to fulfill the previous requirements). The first paper must deal with some aspect of the Trinitarian Controversy and is due on **Friday, July 12.** The second must deal with some aspect of the Christological controversy and is due on **Friday, August 9.** Both papers must include significant discussions of the significance of the research for our own articulation of the faith, our spiritual lives, and our practice of ministry today.

Selection of topics: You do not need my approval for your choice of topic, but you are more than welcome to confer with me as you choose and narrow the topic.

Those who have not had much experience in writing research papers should consult Kate L. Turabian and Wayne C. Booth, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Grading the papers: Your research papers will be evaluated on the basis of five primary criteria:

- 1) The choice of an appropriately narrow topic and the posing of an appropriate question for the paper to answer (5 points)
- 2) The depth of the research in both primary and secondary materials (10 points)
- 3) The quality of the analysis/argument you present (15 points)
- 4) The organization and clarity of your writing (5 points)
- 5) The mechanical correctness and elegance of your writing (5 points)

Document Formatting and Citation Style Requirements: All written assignments should be submitted in either MS-Word or PDF format. (If you use a different word processor than MS-Word, please convert the file to PDF before submitting it.) Assignments should be double spaced with 1” margins on all sides of each page, and should be printed in Times New Roman 12 point type or another font of similar size and appearance. Citations should follow Chicago (Turabian) style. Assignments must be submitted electronically by posting on the Sakai site. Hard-copies will not be accepted.

Grading: The point values listed above mean that the total number of points available for the course is 100. Final letter grades will be applied with cutoffs as follows: A 95, A- 90, B+ 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D+ 67, D 63, D- 60, F below 60. A grade of A+ will be given very rarely, when the student’s work is truly exceptional. (At Gordon-Conwell, a grade of A+ and a grade of A are both counted the same way in calculating the student’s GPA. Thus, a GPA above 4.0 is not possible.)

Late work: All late work will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade per week beyond the due date, unless arrangements are made ahead of time. Extenuating circumstances will be considered as appropriate. Work turned in after **August 14** will normally require that an extension be approved by the Seminary. If you anticipate a problem, contact the professor as soon as possible.

Lecture/Discussion Topics and Accompanying Required Reading:

Students are urged to complete this reading prior to the beginning of the week-long seminar, or at least to have completed each day’s reading prior to the day it is to be discussed. Students are also urged to do the reading in chronological order (the order listed below), rather than simply reading each book straight through.

Monday, June 3:Introduction to the CourseModern Perspectives on the Trinitarian and Christological Controversies*On the Incarnation*, pp. 11-49*On the Holy Spirit*, pp. 11-26*On God and Christ*, pp. 9-23*Works on the Spirit*, pp. 11-49*On the Unity of Christ*, pp. 9-47*The Trinitarian Controversy*, introduction (pp. 1-21 new) [pp. 1-27 old]*The Christological Controversy*, introduction (pp. 1-23) [pp. 1-31]Background to the Controversies: Patristic Understandings of Salvation*On the Incarnation*, pp. 51-173 (English-side only; you don't have to read the Greek!)*The Christological Controversy*, chaps. 2-5 (pp. 25-63) [pp. 33-81]**Tuesday, June 4:**The Outbreak of the Trinitarian Controversy and the Council of Nicaea*The Trinitarian Controversy*, chaps. 2-7 (pp. 23-41) [pp. 29-56]Politics and Theology in the Aftermath of Nicaea*The Trinitarian Controversy*, chaps. 8-10 (pp. 49-103) [pp. 57-129]*The Christological Controversy*, chap. 6 (pp. 65-78) [pp. 83-101]*Works on the Spirit*, pp. 51-227**Wednesday, June 5:**Articulating the Christian Understanding of God: The Council of Constantinople*On God and Christ*, pp. 37-147*On the Holy Spirit*, pp. 27-122*The Trinitarian Controversy*, chaps. 12-13 (pp. 117-139) [pp. 149-179]From Trinity to Christology: Solving one Problem by Creating Another*The Christological Controversy*, chap. 7 (pp. 79-85) [pp. 103-111]*On God and Christ*, pp. 149-175*The Christological Controversy*, chaps. 8, 9-Nes' sermons (pp. 87-101) [pp. 113-131]**Thursday, June 6:**The Nestorian Controversy and the Council of Ephesus*The Christological Controversy*, chap. 9-letters (pp. 101-107) [pp. 131-145]

On the Unity of Christ, pp. 49-133

Articulating the Christian Understanding of Christ: The Council of Chalcedon
The Christological Controversy, chap. 9-Leo and Chalc (pp. 111-122) [pp. 145-159]

Friday, June 7:

Trinitarian and Christological Thought after Chalcedon
No reading assignment

Conclusion: That was Then; This is Now

Friday, June 21: Informal Reflective Paper due

Friday, July 12: First Research Paper due

Friday, August 9: Second Research Paper due

Friday, August 16: All late work due

**For Those Who Are Interested:
Dr. Fairbairn's Writings on the Trinitarian and Christological Controversies**

On the Trinitarian Controversy

“The Synod of Ancyra (358) and the Question of the Son’s Creaturehood.” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 64:1 (April 2013), 111-136.

“The Sardican Paper, Antiochene Politics, and the Council of Alexandria (362):
Developing the ‘Faith of Nicaea.’” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 66:2
(October 2015), 651-678.

Chap 4 of *The Story of Creeds and Confessions*. Co-authored with Ryan Reeves. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming in August 2019.

On the Christological Controversy

Grace and Christology in the Early Church. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: University Press, 2003.

“The Puzzle of Theodoret’s Christology: A Modest Suggestion.” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, 58:1 (April 2007), 100-133.

- “Allies or Merely Friends? John of Antioch and Nestorius in the Christological Controversy.” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58:3 (July 2007), 383-399.
- “The One Person Who Is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective.” In *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, edited by Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler, 80-113. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007.
- Fulgentius of Ruspe and the Scythian Monks: Correspondence on Christology and Grace.* The Fathers of the Church 126. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013. [Co-translated with Rob Roy McGregor.]
- “Chalcedon, Council of,” “Ephesus, Council of,” and “Nestorius/Nestorianism.” In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Chap 5 of *The Story of Creeds and Confessions*. Co-authored with Ryan Reeves. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming in August 2019.

Also of Potential Interest

- “Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse.” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 69:1 (Spring 2007), 1-19.
- “Patristic Soteriology: Three Trajectories.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:2 (June 2007), 289-310.
- Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers.* Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009.
- “Context, Context, Context: Athanasius’ Biblical Interpretation in *Contra Arianos*.” *Perichoresis* 12:2 (Fall 2014), 119-135.