Creeds and Catechisms in the Lutheran Tradition
Department of Lutheran Studies
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte
The Rev. Dr. Nathan Howard Yoder, STS
Spring, 2015
Mondays, 1:00-4:00

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CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION
An introduction to the content and structure of the Christian faith through a close study of the ecumenical Creeds and Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms. Historical issues will be considered, but the central focus of the course will be the role of creed and catechism as summary, confession, and rule of the church’s faith, guiding and forming preaching, teaching, and biblical interpretation.

FURTHER DESCRIPTION
This is the first theology course in the North American Lutheran Seminary curriculum. Its purpose is to lay a foundation for future theological study and reflection. The overall aim of the course is to consider in some depth what it means to be a confessional Christian, practicing Christian life, ministry, and theology on the basis of Holy Scripture according to a definite rule of faith. The course seeks to achieve this goal through a study of the ecumenical Creeds and the Catechisms of Martin Luther. We will consider the development of the Creeds, their origin in the apostolic ministry and the mandate of Baptism, and their relationship to what the early church called “the rule of faith.” We will reflect on the relationship of the Creeds to Holy Scripture and the role of the Creeds in the interpretation of Scripture. Discussion of the Creeds will also lead us to consider the question of doctrinal authority in the church. With the help of the Catechisms, we will examine the way in which the Creeds form us in a scriptural vision of the world and of our own lives. In all this, we will be considering what it means to “follow the pattern of the sound words” which the church has received from the apostles “in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:13). (David S. Yeago, Fall 2004)

EPIGRAPH
“Among all the other good works that must also be practiced in the Christian community, there is no higher or more noble work or one that matters more both to God and to us human beings, than the cultivation and preservation of right Christian teaching. Where this is present, there God dwells with all His grace and it is not possible for things to turn out too badly. There one finds consolation, help, and joy, not as in the world, which lasts only for a time, but eternal consolation, eternal help, eternal joy. But where Christian teaching is either not present ... or else is impure
and falsified ... even when there is no lack of temporal goods, what will ultimately follow is eternal misery, sorrow, and despair.” - Veit Dietrich (1506-1549), Preface to his Kinder-Postille (1546).

**Course Objectives**

Our course will address fundamental issues in biblical interpretation and reflect on Creeds and Catechisms as summaries of and guides to “biblical theology.” It is devoted to the study of Lutheran confessional documents and examines closely the very idea of being “confessional,” which is central to historic Lutheranism. The course is focused on the core of the Christian message as articulated in Creed and Catechism and on the meaning of faithfulness to that core as we pursue the mission of the gospel.

In keeping with Gordon-Conwell’s mission statement, the professor intends that in participating in this course, students will:

1. Understand the biblical notion of “confessing” Christ and be able to explain the rationale for public, corporate creedal and confessional statements in the church. (Art. 1, 2, 3)

2. Recognize and identify the biblical theology evident in the course work. (Art. 1)

3. Understand and be able to explain the foundational role of the apostles in Christianity and the interplay of Canon, Creed, and Catechism in preserving the apostolic legacy in the church. (Art. 1, 3, 5)

4. Be able to articulate a Lutheran understanding of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology. (Art. 2, 3).

5. Understand the role of the Creeds in guiding the interpretation of the Bible and the role of the Bible in filling out the creedal outline. Students will have brought this reflection to bear in exercises of theological interpretation of Scripture “according to the rule of faith.” (Art. 1)

6. Acquire a basic historical and literary understanding of the three so-called “ecumenical creeds” and the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther. (Art. 2, 3)

7. Be able to reflect on the way in which the Catechisms teach us to see the world and our own lives through the lens of the Creeds. (Art. 3, 4, 5)

8. Be able to speak about the nature and exercise of doctrinal authority in the church and the role of the Creeds therein. (Art. 1, 2)
9. Show that they can discuss thoughtfully the bearing of the course material on the life of a congregation and the practice of ministry. (Art. 3, 5)

10. Be able to effectively communicate the Christian message to a diversity of people in order to advance the mission of God. (Art. 5, 6)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Reading: You must complete 2000 pages of reading, of which 1,361 pages will come from the textbooks, and the remainder will come from either approved supplementary sources or the reading for your research paper. This assignment will help prepare you to achieve all 10 course objectives. As you read, you must keep track of the books and pages you have read. By the end of the course, you must hand in a report indicating which books and pages you have read, and the total number of pages. (5 points)

2. Participation in class. Ask questions and respond to your fellow students. The professor will respond to your questions and preside over the class. It is therefore not your job to decide whether your questions and concerns are “worthy” of attention. You are to take responsibility for your learning and put your questions and concerns out there where they can be addressed. (5 points)

3. You will write three brief (500-1000 words) theological-exegetical discussions of assigned biblical texts, relating them to the Apostles’ Creed in a format that will be set forth in a further handout (with examples). This assignment will give you an opportunity to practice interpreting Scripture “according to the rule of faith” and will further serve the integration of your theological study with exegesis and preaching. (30 points total) Due February 20, March 27, and April 17.

7. You will write a midterm reflection paper (5-7 pages) on the relationship between Scripture and the Creeds. A reflection paper does not require research or reading outside the assignments in the course. It provides an opportunity to integrate and express in your own words the ideas and perspectives you have encountered in the course. (25 points) Due March 13.

8. You will write a final paper (10-12 pages) on the Creeds and the Catechisms as formative of the vision and imagination of the church and the believer. In this paper, you will compare Luther’s Catechisms with at least one other significant work relevant to the Creeds. The list provided contains both ancient and modern works, and provides the opportunity to take the topic in diverse directions. (35 points) Due May 9.

NOTE: Written work must be submitted to me by email on the specified date.

In grading written work I take into account not only theological comprehension and insight but also clarity and competence in writing. The Christian ministry is a ministry of the word, and the ability to use language clearly is therefore an extremely important issue in formation for ministry. I reserve the right to require that any written assignment be rewritten. Since rewriting in such cases is the alternative to a very low grade, this provision is, rightly considered, merciful.

GRADING

The point values indicated above total to 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, 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.)

Again: In arriving at a final grade, reading and class participation will constitute 10%, the final paper will constitute 35%, the midterm paper will constitute 25%, and the exegetical papers will together constitute 30%.

TEXTBOOKS

Required


COURSE SCHEDULE

January 26: Confessing the Faith in Holy Scripture

Trueman, Creedal Imperative, 12-50

February 2: The Apostolic Legacy

Williams, Tradition, 15-52
Truman, *Creedal Imperative*, 51-80
Pelikan, *The Creedal and Confessional Imperative*, 35-63

February 9: Scripture and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church
Williams, *Tradition*, 53-79, 163-183
Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 1-76
Frank Thielman, *The Road to Nicea: The New Testament* (George, 34-44)
Pelikan, 123-157

February 16: Interpreting the Rule in the Early Church
Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*
Pelikan, 158-185

**First Exegetical Paper due February 20**

February 23: The Rule of Faith and the Interpretation of Scripture
Williams, *Tradition*, 119-147
Jenson, *Canon and Creed*, 79-121
Mark S. Gignilliat, “The Gospel Promised by the Prophets” (George, 20-33)

**March 2: No Class**
(Supplementary Reading)

March 9: Creeds, Councils, and After
Williams, *Tradition*, 81-118
Trueman, *Creedal Imperative*, 81-133
Gerald R. Bray, “Whosoever Will Be Saved” (George, 45-60)

**Midterm Reflection Paper due March 13**

March 16: Creeds, Confessions, and Authority in the Church
Trueman, *Creedal Imperative*, 156-189
John Webster, “Confession and Confessions” (18 pages, available in library)
Pelikan, *The Authority of Creeds and Confessions*, 245-277
Arand, Introduction – Chapter 2

March 23: The Creed in Luther’s Catechisms
The Small Catechism, *Book of Concord*, 345-363
The Large Catechism, *Book of Concord*, 377-386
Arand, Chapters 3-5

**Second Exegetical Paper due March 27**
March 30: Confessing God the Father

*Large Catechism, Book of Concord*, 386-433
Seitz, 19-34

**April 6: Easter Monday, No Class**

(Supplementary Reading)
April 13 Confessing God the Son

*Large Catechism, Book of Concord*, 434-435
Seitz, 35-138

**Third Exegetical Paper due April 17**
April 20: Confessing God the Holy Spirit

*Large Catechism, Book of Concord*, 435-480
Seitz, 139-228

April 27: Creed, Catechism, and Christian Formation

The Small Catechism, *Book of Concord*, 363-375
Williams, *Tradition*, 149-162
Trueman, *Creedal Imperative*, 135-158
Pelikan, 486-516

**Final Paper due May 9**

**Suggested Books for the Final Paper and Supplementary Reading**


