This course is built around the January Cooley Lectures given by Dr. Nicholas Perrin, the Franklin S. Dryness Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College.

Professor’s Contact Information:
Email: dfairbairn@gordonconwell.edu
Phone: (704) 940-5842

Course Dates: The course begins on Monday, Jan. 6, and ends on Monday, April 28.

Schedule of Class Meetings:
Thursday, Jan. 23, 7:00-9:00 PM (Dr. Perrin’s first lecture)
Friday, Jan. 24, 2:00-4:00 PM (discussion with Dr. Perrin)
Friday, Jan. 24, 7:00-9:00 PM (Dr. Perrin’s second lecture)
Saturday, Feb. 15, 5:00-7:00 PM (discussion with Dr. Fairbairn)
Saturday, March 15, 5:00-7:00 PM (discussion with Dr. Fairbairn)

Office Hours: I will be in the office and available for drop-in meetings on Monday afternoons. I will be in the office all day on Wednesdays, but most Wednesdays will be filled with meetings. I can also be available by appointment at other times convenient to students.

Course Description/Purpose: The interaction between orthodox Christianity and Gnosticism in the second and third centuries is of vital importance for at least two major reasons. First, because various Gnostic ideas have continued to plague the Christian Church throughout its history and must still be addressed today. Second, because contemporary scholarship radically re-construes the relation between Gnosticism and orthodoxy in the early centuries, in a way that casts doubt on the validity of orthodox Christianity. This course explores the orthodox/Gnostic interaction from both of these vantage points.

Relation to Curriculum: This course can serve as a Christian Thought elective for students in the M.Div. and M.A.C.T. programs, or as a general elective for other students.

Course Objectives: The professor intends that by the end of the term, students will:
1. Understand and critique the common scholarly perspective on the early church and thus on the truthfulness of historic Christian orthodoxy.
2. Grasp the main features of Gnostic belief.
3. Consider the value of Irenaeus’s and Tertullian’s responses to Gnosticism.
4. Develop a specific plan for recognizing and combating Gnostic tendencies in the student’s own ministry setting.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Assignment</th>
<th>Expected Time Commitment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading of secondary literature</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading on Gnosticism</td>
<td>15 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Irenaeus’s or Tertullian’s response to Gnosticism</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Perrin’s lectures and class meetings</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
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<td>Two informal papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Forum</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
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<td>Capstone paper</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
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**Required Materials and Textbooks:**


In addition to these books, students will also read EITHER Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies* OR four writings by Tertullian (*Against Marcion, Against the Valentinians, On the Flesh of Christ,* and *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*). These works are available in the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, vols. 1 (Irenaeus) and 3 (Tertullian). These volumes are in the reference section of the library and are also available on-line at [http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html](http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html). Various reprints are also available from internet booksellers.

**Course Assignments:**

1. **Reading in Secondary Literature:** Between Jan. 6 and Jan. 20, you must read the four books by modern scholars (*Lost Christianities* and *Misquoting Jesus* by Ehrman, *The Gnostic Gospels* by Pagels, and *Lost in Transmission?* by Perrin) in their entirety. This reading totals ~850 pages.
As you read, pay attention to and make notes on the following questions:

- What are the key *stated* elements of Pagels’ and Ehrman’s approaches to the early church?
- What are the key *unstated assumptions* Pagels and Ehrman make?
- Can you give examples of the way this perspective has affected people with whom you minister?
- What are the major problems with Pagels’ and Ehrman’s approaches? Here you may consider problems that Perrin exposes and/or other problems that you recognize yourselves.
- What are some questions you would like to discuss with Dr. Perrin in our private conversation with him on Friday, Jan. 24?

This reading will prepare you to meet objective 1 above.

2. **Informal Paper on Secondary Literature (20 points):** Based on your reflections on the questions listed just above, you must write an informal paper of 5-7 pages on the problems with contemporary scholarly interpretations of the early church. This paper need not involve further research beyond the readings listed above, and it does not need to follow a formal citation structure. Parenthetical references to the books listed above will be sufficient. On your paper, you should indicate what percentage of the secondary literature you have read. Writing this paper will prepare you to interact with Dr. Perrin while he is in Charlotte.

   This paper is due on Thursday, Jan. 23. You will receive 8 points for completing the reading and up to 12 points for the paper, for a total of up to 20 points.

This paper will demonstrate that you have met objective 1 above.

3. **Reading in Lost Scriptures:** Between January 24 and February 10, you must read Ehrman’s *Lost Scriptures* in its entirety (~350 pages).

   As you read, use the introductory material to note carefully which of the writings are Gnostic, which are Judaistic, and which are orthodox (what Ehrman calls “proto-orthodox”). Pay attention to and make notes on the following questions:

   - What are the major distinguishing features of the Gnostic, Judaistic, and orthodox writings?
   - Is there evidence that Gnostic ideas have affected the orthodox writers as well?
   - What are the major arguments the orthodox writers use to counter Gnostic ideas?
   - Ehrman claims that all of these writings were regarded by some Christians as “Scripture.” Is there evidence that the Gnostic writers thought they were writing Scripture? That the Judaistic writers thought they were writing Scripture? That the orthodox writers thought they were writing Scripture? Or is there evidence that they knew they were not writing Scripture?

   This reading will prepare you to meet objective 2 above.

4. **Informal Paper on Gnosticism (20 points):** Based on your reflections on the questions listed just above and Dr. Perrin’s lectures, you must write an informal paper of 5-7 pages
on the central features of and major problems with Gnosticism. This paper need not involve further research beyond the readings listed above, and it does not need to follow a formal citation structure. Parenthetical references to the books listed above will be sufficient. On your paper, you should indicate what percentage of the book Lost Scriptures you have read.

This paper is due on Saturday, Feb. 15. You will receive 4 points for completing the reading and up to 16 points for the paper, for a total of up to 20 points.

This paper will demonstrate that you have met objective 2 above.

We will use class time on Feb. 15 to pool ideas and develop our understanding of Gnosticism.

5. Reading in Irenaeus or Tertullian (8 points): Between Feb. 15 and March 14, you must read one of the following sets of writings:

Irenaeus’s response to Gnosticism (Against Heresies in its entirety)

OR

Tertullian’s responses to two groups of Gnostics (Against Marcion and Against the Valentinians) and his responses to Gnostic ideas (On the Flesh of Christ and On the Resurrection of the Flesh)

Both sets of writings comprise the equivalent of about 750 single-spaced pages of normal size. (Note that if you read from the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, the writings span about 250 pages. I estimate that each page in that series has about triple the number of words on a page of a regular book.)

My intention is that about half of the class will read each set of writings. Those of you who have taken the patristic theology course (and have thus read most of Irenaeus’s Against Heresies) must read Tertullian instead. Those of you who intend to take the patristic theology course in the future should read Tertullian. The rest of you should read Irenaeus.

As you read, pay attention to and make notes on the following questions:

- How does Irenaeus’s or Tertullian’s depiction of Gnosticism compare to the picture you have developed from previous reading in the course?
- Is Irenaeus or Tertullian being unfair to Gnosticism in the way he presents it? Is he caricaturing it unduly?
- Are there elements of Gnosticism that you had not encountered in your previous reading? How can Irenaeus’s or Tertullian’s depiction round out your understanding of Gnosticism?
- What are the strongest arguments Irenaeus or Tertullian makes against Gnosticism?
- What parts of Irenaeus’s or Tertullian’s arguments are weakest?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the way Irenaeus or Tertullian presents orthodox Christianity?
By Saturday, March 15, you must indicate on Sakai what percentage of this reading you have completed.

We will use class time on March 15 to compare Irenaeus’s and Tertullian’s responses to Gnosticism.

This reading and the ensuing class discussion will enable you to meet objective 3 above.

6. Discussion Forum on Irenaeus and Tertullian (12 points): Between March 15 and March 31, you must continue the discussion begun in class on March 15 through an on-line discussion forum. The purpose of this forum will be to shore up all students’ understanding of both Irenaeus and Tertullian, so I encourage you to pose questions about the writer you did not read and to answer questions posed by other students about the writer you did read. Continue paying attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the way each writer combats Gnosticism and presents orthodox Christianity.

You will receive two points for each quality post or response to another student’s post, up to the 12 points available for the discussion forum. (You may, of course, post more than six times if you wish.) A quality post is one that does not merely repeat or summarize information, but raises substantive issues or helps to address substantive questions raised by other students.

7. Capstone Paper (40 points): You must write a 10-12 page paper exploring one of the two major components of this course in more depth. This is not to be a true research paper, and thus it may be broader in scope and must be practical in orientation. However, I do expect you to do some additional reading (perhaps ~200 pages) beyond the materials you have already read for this course. I also expect you to use course readings, Dr. Perrin’s lectures, and the in-person and on-line discussions with students and with me. The paper should include a bibliography and standard footnote citations, and in this respect it is to be more formal than the ones you wrote earlier in the course.

In this paper, you may pursue one of the following directions:

- You may explore some aspect of the contemporary scholarly approach to the early church and reflect further not just on what is wrong with this approach historically, but also on why it matters that Christians understand the problems with this approach. (For example, you could focus on the way the Pagels/Ehrman approach undermines historic orthodoxy without actually succeeding in demonstrating that there was no consensus in the early church.)

  OR

- You may explore some aspect of Gnosticism that is dangerous and that is present (or potentially present) in Christianity today, and you could offer concrete suggestions for avoiding the dangers in light of the way Irenaeus and Tertullian fight Gnosticism. (For example, you could reflect on Dr. Perrin’s discussion of the way Gnosticism has affected contemporary hermeneutics.)
The paper is due on Monday, April 21.

This paper will demonstrate that you have met objective 4 above.

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

1) The choice of an appropriate topic—one with significant ministry implications (5 points)
2) Appropriate additional research and integration of material from all facets of the course (10 points)
3) The quality of the analysis/argument you present and the practical implications you suggest (15 points)
4) The organization and clarity of your writing (5 points)
5) The mechanical correctness and elegance of your writing (5 points)

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 later than May 5 will normally require that an extension be approved by the Seminary. If you anticipate a problem, please contact me.

Attendance Policy: Class attendance and participation are a central part of this course. If you must miss a class period, you should notify me in advance to justify your absence. If you have more than one unexcused absence from class, you will receive a penalty of three points per additional unexcused absence on your final grade.

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. Assignments must be submitted electronically by posting on the Sakai site. Hard-copies will not be accepted.

Class Schedule and Assignment Due Dates:

Thursday, Jan. 23 – Informal paper on secondary literature is due.

Thursday, Jan. 23, 7:00-9:00 PM – Dr. Perrin’s First Lecture
“Ancient Gnosticism and its Re-emergence in Contemporary Culture”

Friday, Jan. 24, 2:00-4:00 PM – Discussion with Dr. Perrin

Friday, Jan. 24, 7:00-9:00 PM – Dr. Perrin’s Second Lecture
“Irenaeus against the Gnostics–How and Why?”

Saturday, Feb. 15 – Informal paper on Gnosticism is due.

Saturday, Feb. 15, 5:00-7:00 PM – Discussion of Gnosticism

Saturday, March 15 – Reading report on Irenaeus or Tertullian is due.

Saturday, March 15, 5:00-7:00 PM – Discussion of Irenaeus’s and Tertullian’s Responses to Gnosticism

March 15-31 – Discussion Forum on Irenaeus and Tertullian
(You must post at least six times during this period.)

Monday, April 21 – Capstone Paper is due.

Monday, April 28 – All late work is due.

Syllabus Addendum

Academic Standards
Cheating and plagiarism are considered serious breaches of personal and academic integrity. Cheating involves, but is not necessarily limited to, the use of unauthorized sources of information during an examination or the submission of the same (or substantially same) work for credit in two or more courses without the knowledge and consent of the instructors. Plagiarism involves the use of another person’s distinctive ideas or words, whether published or unpublished, and representing them as one’s own instead of giving proper credit to the source. Plagiarism can also involve over dependence on other source material for the scope and substance of one’s writing. Such breaches in academic standards often result in a failing grade as well as other corrective measures. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook.

ADA Policy
The seminary complies with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A student with a qualifying and authenticated disability who is in need of accommodations, should petition the seminary in accordance with the stated guidelines in the Student Handbook.
Cancellation of Class
In the event the seminary has to cancel a class meeting (impending storm, professor illness, etc.), the Registration Office will send out an email (via the GCTS email account) notification to all students registered in the respective course. If the cancelation occurs the day of the scheduled meeting, the Registration Office will also attempt to contact students via their primary phone contact on record. The professor will contact the students (via GCTS account) regarding make-up. If a weekend class is cancelled, the class will be made up during the scheduled Make-Up weekend (see the academic calendar for the designated dates). For more info, consult your Student Handbook.

Extension Policy
Arrangements for submission of late work at a date on or before the “last day to submit written work,” as noted on the seminary’s Academic Calendar, are made between the student and professor. Formal petition to the Registration Office is not required at this time. This includes arrangements for the rescheduling of final exams.

However, course work (reading and written) to be submitted after the publicized calendar due date, must be approved by the Registration Office. An extension form, available online, must be submitted to the Registration Office prior to the “last day to submit written work.” Requests received after this date will either be denied or incur additional penalty. For a full discussion of this policy, please consult the Student Handbook.

Grades
Faculty have six weeks from the course work due date to submit a final grade. Grades are posted on-line within twenty-four hours of receipt from the professor. Students are expected to check their CAMS student portal in order to access posted grades (unless instructed otherwise). Those individuals who need an official grade report issued to a third party should put their request in writing to the Registration Office.