

**CT760: Readings in Christian Thought—Patristic Theology**  
**Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary – Charlotte**  
**Dr. Don Fairbairn – Fall 2011**

**Professor's Contact Information:**

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**Schedule of Class Meetings:** Saturdays, Sep. 24, Oct.22, and Nov. 19 (5:00 to 7:00 PM)

**Course Description/Purpose:** The patristic period (from the end of the New Testament until about A.D. 800) was the formative period in the articulation of Christian doctrine. This reading course gives students both a general familiarity with patristic theology and the opportunity to explore the thought of several influential patristic theologians in some detail.

**Course Objectives:** The professor intends that by the end of the term, students will:

1. Develop a general understanding of and appreciation for the patristic task of articulating Christian doctrine within the cultural and intellectual context of late Antiquity.
2. Examine the ways patristic theology can correct, augment, and refine our own expressions of the Christian faith.
3. Examine the implications of patristic theology for our own individual and corporate Christian life today.
4. Develop a better understanding of evangelicalism as the heir of Christianity's great tradition.

The achievement of these objectives will be measured through a reading log, a reflective paper, and a research paper, as detailed below.

**Textbooks:**

The reading for this course all comes from primary sources and falls into two categories. The first category is short selections from a variety of patristic writers, arranged around basic themes in the following four anthologies. Reading these anthologies in connection with study of the professor's Power Point presentations will give you a general overview of patristic theology.

Burns, J. Patout, ed. *Theological Anthropology*. Sources of Early Christian Thought. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981. (ISBN: 978-0800614126)

Froehlich, Karlfried, ed. *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*. Sources of Early Christian Thought. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984. (ISBN: 978-0800614140)

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)

The second category is in-depth reading from three patristic theologians at three crucial points in theological history: Irenaeus (writing in response to Gnosticism in the second century), Athanasius (writing against Arianism in the fourth century), and Cyril of Alexandria (writing against Nestorianism in the fifth century).

By Irenaeus, we will read the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* and books 3-5 of *Against Heresies*. The former is available in the Ancient Christian Writers series, vol. 16 (in the reference section of the library) or in the following affordable edition:

St. Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. (ISBN: 978-0881411744)

*Against Heresies*, books 3-5, is available in the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, vol. 1, pp. 414-567. This volume is in the reference section of the library and is also available on-line at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>. Various reprints are also available from internet booksellers.

By Athanasius, we will read *On the Incarnation of the Word*, *Orations Against the Arians* 1-3, *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, *On the Councils of Arimium and Seleucia*, and the *Synodal Letter*. The first is available in many places, and an affordable edition is:

St. Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993. (ISBN: 978-0913836408)

*Against the Arians* 1-3 is available in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 4, pp. 303-431, which is in the reference section of the library and available on-line at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>. Book 1 is also in *The Trinitarian Controversy* and part of Book 3 in *The Christological Controversy*.

The other writings by Athanasius are available in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 4 (in the reference section of the library and available on-line), pp. 150-72, 451-86.

By Cyril of Alexandria, we will read *That the Christ is One* and *Commentary on John*, books 9-11. The first is available in the following edition:

St. Cyril of Alexandria. *On the Unity of Christ*. N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995. (ISBN: 978-0881411331)

The *Commentary on John* is available on-line at [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Cyril\\_Commentary\\_on\\_the\\_Gospel\\_of\\_John](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Cyril_Commentary_on_the_Gospel_of_John)

**Requirements:** This course will require at least 135 hours to complete. This total breaks down as follows:

General reading of patristic theology and studying the professor's Power Point presentations from the lecture version of the course	25 hours
Concentrated reading of three patristic theologians to prepare for class discussions	60 hours
Discussion of three patristic theologians in class	6 hours
Reflective paper on the basis of the reading listed above	10 hours
Research paper	35 hours

**1. Reading and study to obtain an overview of patristic theology (10 points; approximately 25 hours):** You must read the four assigned anthologies (totaling ~600 pages) and read/study the professor's Power Point presentations covering the development of patristic theology. This reading and study should give you a good general grasp of patristic theology, thus fulfilling course objective 1 above.

**2. Reading to prepare for class discussions (10 points; approximately 60 hours):** You must read the assigned writings by Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Cyril (totaling the equivalent of ~1300 single-column pages) prior to the class meetings in which they will be discussed. This reading and the discussions that will flow from it will give you an opportunity to reflect on the relation between patristic theology and contemporary evangelicalism, thus contributing to the fulfillment of course objectives 2-4 above.

For requirements 1 AND 2, As you read, you must keep track of what you have read and how long it has taken you to read it. Please note that the reading for requirement 2 is available in many different formats, some of which have vastly different amounts of text per page or may have no page numbers at all. You may report your reading of these texts by section numbers or simply by stating what percentage of a work you have completed. By Monday, November 28, you must upload a reading log to the Sakai site indicating what percentage of each required work you have read and how long it took you to read it.

**3. Reflective Paper (40 points; approximately 10 hours):** On the basis of your reading (requirements 1 and 2 above) and class discussions, you must write a reflective paper in which you address the following issues:

- Major ways in which patristic theology articulates the same truths evangelicals seek to articulate today, but does so in ways superior to ours. Explain why the patristic articulation is better and how we can incorporate that articulation of the faith into our proclamation.
- Major ways in which patristic theology articulates the same truths evangelicals seek to articulate today, but does so in ways inferior to ours. Explain why the patristic articulation is worse or less adequate.
- Major ways in which our proclamation actually differs from that of the early church. On these issues, either defend our proclamation or suggest ways we can modify our proclamation in light of patristic theology, as appropriate.
- Some implications of patristic theology for our individual and corporate Christian life today. (Here the focus is not just on what we should *say* or *proclaim* differently in light of

patristic theology, but on what we should *do* differently or do with a different *attitude* if we grasp what the early church was trying to articulate.)

This paper should be approximately 8-10 pages long and will constitute evidence that you have met course objectives 2-4 above. You must upload it to the Sakai site by Friday, December 2. Please indicate on the title page of the paper approximately how long it took you to complete it.

**4. Research Paper (40 points; approximately 35 hours):** You must write a 10-12 page research paper. It is expected that the research will involve ~300 pages of additional reading, bringing the course total to ~2200 pages. The paper is due on Monday, December 19. Please indicate on the title page of the paper approximately how long it took you to complete it (including the additional research beyond the required reading for the course and the actual writing of the paper).

Selection of topics: You have considerable freedom in choosing your paper topic, as long as it deals with some aspect of patristic theology and the relation between that theology and contemporary evangelical theology, life, and/or practice. You do not need the instructor's approval for your choice of topic, but you are more than welcome to confer with me as you choose and narrow the topic.

The task of research: Students should consult the document “Writing Theological Papers” (available on the Sakai site) in order to understand the professor’s expectations regarding research papers. Those who need additional help on their papers may want to consult Dr. Robert Mayer, Director of the Library at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte). Remember, however, that an important part of writing a research paper is the sometimes difficult task of locating and selecting the sources you want to use. This will probably involve several hours of hard work in an archive or library. Do not expect others to do this work for you; this is part of your assignment.

Completed papers should be typed and in correct form (double-spaced, using twelve-point Times New Roman or other comparable font, 1” margins on all sides of each page, footnoted where appropriate, with a bibliography of all sources used for the study, etc.). Those who have not had much experience in writing research papers should consult Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Grading the papers: Your research paper 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, (2) the depth of the research in both primary and secondary materials, (3) the quality of the analysis/argument you present, (4) the connection you draw between the world of the early or Medieval Church and contemporary Christianity, and (5) the clarity, accuracy and beauty of the writing. Attention to these matters will not only help you on this paper assignment, but it will also aid you in developing the analytical and communication skills you need for the ministry to which God has called you.

Please note that all written assignments must be prepared in MS-Word format (no pdf files, .dat documents, or Word Perfect documents, please) and uploaded to 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 later than December 19 (one month after the last class meeting) will normally require that an extension be approved by the Seminary. If you anticipate

### **Class Schedule and Assignment Due Dates:**

Prior to the first class meeting on September 24, do the following:

- 1) Read and be ready to discuss Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, Against Heresies*, books 3-5.
- 2) Read *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 1-81, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, pp. 1-132.
- 3) Study the professor's Power Point presentations 1 and 2.

### **Saturday, September 24: Discussion of Irenaeus**

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Prior to the second class meeting on October 22, do the following:

- 1) Read and be ready to discuss Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word, Orations Against the Arians*, books 1-3, *Defense of the Nicene Definition, On the Councils of Arimium and Seleucia*, and the *Synodal Letter*.
- 2) Read *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 83-101, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 1-179.
- 3) Study the professor's Power Point presentation 3.

### **Saturday, March 19: Discussion of Athanasius**

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Prior to the third class meeting on November 19, do the following:

- 1) Read and be ready to discuss Cyril of Alexandria, *That the Christ is One (On the Unity of Christ)*, pp. 49-133) and *Commentary on John*, books 9-11.

- 2) Read *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 102-159, *Theological Anthropology*, pp. 1-128.
- 3) Study the professor's Power Point presentation 4.

**Saturday, November 19: Discussion of Cyril**

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**Reading Log is due by Monday, Nov. 28.**

**Reflective Paper is due by Friday, Dec. 2.**

**Research Paper is due by Monday, Dec. 19.**

**All late work is due by Monday, Dec. 19.**