CH/TH668: The Trinitarian and Christological Controversies
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dr. Don Fairbairn – Summer 2011

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Schedule of Class Meetings: Monday – Friday, June 6-10, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM each day

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.

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).

Required Textbooks:


**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 six textbooks in their entirety (both the introductions and the primary source readings contained in each text), a total of about 900 pages. Because a significant portion of class time will be spent discussing the textbooks, the student is urged 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 read 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 paper is due by **Friday, June 24**.
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 400 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 8**. The second must deal with some aspect of the Christological controversy and is due on **Friday, July 22**. 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:** Students do not need the professor'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.

**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 papers will be evaluated on the basis of four 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 sources, (3) the quality of the analysis/argument you present to answer the paper’s stated question, and (4) the clarity, accuracy and beauty of the writing. Attention to these matters will not only help you on these paper assignments 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 should be prepared in MS-Word format (no pdf files, .dat documents, or Word Perfect documents, please). Assignments must be submitted by uploading them 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+ 97, A 93, A- 90, B+ 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D+ 67, D 63, D- 60, F below 60.

**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 12** 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 6:**

**Introduction to the Course**

Modern Perspectives on the Trinitarian and Christological Controversies
- *On the Incarnation*, pp. 3-24
- *On the Holy Spirit*, pp. 7-13
- *On God and Christ*, pp. 9-23
- *On the Unity of Christ*, pp. 9-47
- *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 1-27
- *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 1-31

Background to the Controversies: Patristic Understandings of Salvation
- *On the Incarnation*, pp. 25-119
- *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 33-81

**Tuesday, June 7:**

The Outbreak of the Trinitarian Controversy and the Council of Nicaea
- *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 29-56

Politics and Theology in the Aftermath of Nicaea
- *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 57-129

**Wednesday, June 8:**

Articulating the Christian Understanding of God: The Council of Constantinople
- *On God and Christ*, pp. 37-147
- *On the Holy Spirit*, pp. 15-118
- *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 149-179
From Trinity to Christology: Solving one Problem by Creating Another
   *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 103-111
   *On God and Christ*, pp. 149-175
   *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 113-131

**Thursday, June 9:**

The Nestorian Controversy and the Council of Ephesus
   *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 131-145
   *On the Unity of Christ*, pp. 49-133

Articulating the Christian Understanding of Christ: The Council of Chalcedon
   *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 145-159

**Friday, June 10:**

Trinitarian and Christological Thought after Chalcedon
   No reading assignment

Conclusion: That was Then; This is Now