Introduction to Christology- TH 613  
Kirsten Heacock Sanders, Instructor  
Gordon-Conwell Seminary- Fall 2016  

Wednesday, 2-5 pm

Theology ought to refine Christian speech about God. To this end, in this course we will work to develop our understanding of who God is in Christ by examining the historical development of Christological language, along with contemporary attempts at speaking about Jesus. The assignments aim to generate the skills needed to evaluate various Christological accounts, and to communicate where their strengths and weaknesses lie in relation to the orthodox teaching of the Christian church.

To that end, this course aims to develop “evaluative criteria” for thinking about Christology. We will study the history of the development of the two-natures doctrine, and will examine some contemporary Christological accounts in order to apply what we have learned. A successful student will be able to answer the following:
-- How did Christology develop from the fourth to sixth centuries? What language about Jesus emerged?
-- What did Chalcedon do, and what Christological developments emerged only after Chalcedon?
-- What is at stake in a confession of Christ’s two natures?
-- What is hypostatic union? How does this language clarify Christian confession?
-- How does Icon theology help us understand who Jesus is?
-- What are some contemporary accounts of Christ’s two natures, and how can they contribute to the conversation around Christ’s two natures?

All texts are on reserve in the Goddard library, and some chapters will be available electronically. Please do not purchase texts until after the first class meeting.

Required Texts:


Recommended Texts:


Several other articles or book chapters are included throughout.

**Course requirements**

10% Participation and Attendance. *Students are expected to attend class regularly with the assigned material completed.* In addition, three major assignments comprise the course grade:

- 25% Two page papers (3). Double spaced. Due September 28, October 5, October 19.
- 30% Mid-term paper- 3-5 pages, single spaced (due October 19). These papers will be close readings of a primary source. Additional instructions are attached.
- 35% Final exam (essay and short answer)

**Schedule**

Wednesday, September 14: **Introduction to the Course, Christology and God-Talk**
D. Brent Laytham- “God is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” in *God is Not* (pdf)

September 21: **Biblical Origins of Christology, Earliest Christian Iconography**
Read John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*, chapters 1-3

September 28: **Earliest Christology: The Nicene Creed: Christ and the Trinity**
Athanasius, “Against the Arians” in Norris, 83-102.
Jaroslav Pelikan, Ch. 4, “The Mystery of the Trinity” in *The Christian Tradition*
Familiarize yourself with the Nicene Creed.
Two page paper due.

Key questions:

1) What does Athanasius claim that Arius believes? Why is this false belief a concern to him?
2) Where does Athanasius turn in Scripture to make his argument against Arius? Are there other passages of Scripture that Arius might use to defend his position?
3) What is the soteriological significance of the Son’s eternal status for Athanasius?
4) How does the Nicene Creed respond to this particular concern?
5) Do you discern any Arian tendencies in today’s Christian church? If so, what are they?

October 5: **Chalcedon**
Read Norris, 123-160.
Pelikan, Chapter 5, “The Person of the God-Man” (library reserve)
This week we will be learning the origin of the language of “natures” and “persons” that the Christian church utilizes to speak about the person of Christ. This language developed in history—which means that the church did not arrive immediately at the “correct” or most fulsome interpretation! For this assignment, pay close attention to the way language is used in the primary sources.

Nestorius, First Sermon Against the Theotokos
1) What is Nestorius’ concern about the language of Theotokos?
2) What is Nestorius’ resulting Christological argument? Put another way, if Mary is not “God-bearer”, who is she? Why does this matter?
3) What is at stake for Nestorius in God having a human nature in Christ?

Cyril of Alexandria, Second Letter to Nestorius
Nestorius, Second Letter to Cyril
Cyril, Letter to John of Antioch
1) How does Cyril answer Nestorius’ concern? What is Nestorius’ reply?
2) What is Cyril’s own Christological formulation, as evident in his letter to Nestorius and to John of Antioch?

Leo’s Letter to Flavian of Constantinople (also sometimes called the Tome of Leo)
This is an enormously important letter for its articulation of what comes to be orthodox Christian teaching on Christ’s two natures.
1) What are the distinctions Leo makes regarding Christ’s identity?
2) What would be competing positions? Who seems to be Leo’s main interlocutor?

Creed of Chalcedon
1) What is affirmed about Christ in the creed?
2) Can you determine whose language is borrowed in this Creed?

Two page paper due.

October 12: Reading Week- No Class- Why Chalcedon?
Justinian offers what is a necessary clarification on the Chalcedonian two-natures model. How does Justinian clarify this language? What does he contribute to the ongoing refinement of “two-natures” language?

Oliver Crisp- “Desiderata for Models of the Hypostatic Union” (pdf)

October 19: Icon Theology and Hypostatic Union- How do we say that Jesus is both God and human?
Read John of Damascus- “Three Treatises on the Divine Images”
“Homily on the Feast of the Transfiguration” (pdf)
1) What is the argument John makes for the use of images? Why does he feel that icons do not violate the prohibition on images from Deuteronomy 6:4?

2) How does John build on the understanding of “hypostatic union” developed by the church? How does he use this argument to secure the use of icons?

3) The incarnation is the linchpin for John’s argument. Explain how the incarnation functions to secure his defense of icons.

Two page paper due.

October 26: **What does a Two Natures Doctrine Do?: Part 1**
- It says something about Jesus’ divinity.
- **The Theopaschite Controversy and Impassibility**
  - Chapters 1, 4 and 8 in Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (purchase or library reserve)

November 2: **What does a Two Natures Doctrine Do?: Part 2:** It says something about our humanity.
Read Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*

November 9: Reading Week, No Class
**An Incarnational Christology**
Read Kathryn Tanner, second half.
Mid-Term Paper due.

November 16: Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*

November 23: Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus*

Rosemary Radford Reuther, “Can a Male Savior Save Women?” (pdf)

December 7:
Ian A. McFarland, “Spirit and Incarnation: Toward a Pneumatic Chalcedonianism” (pdf)

December 14: Final Exam

**A Quick Guide to Theological Writing**
Students often mistake their ability to argue an opinion with their ability to understand a primary text. In order to have an opinion, however, students must first wrestle with the primary source material and understand it well. To that end, the papers assigned in this course intend to train you to engage closely with your primary source readings. Try to keep in mind that you do not get to have an opinion until you understand the author’s argument.

There will be multiple steps in writing these papers. First, I expect you will read the material you are to write on closely and several times. Identify the main claims and the interlocutors, understand something of the context by consulting outside sources if needed, and outline the progression of the argument. Second, prepare an outline of your paper that includes an Introduction, Statement of the Author’s Thesis, Headings and sub-headings, and a Conclusion. Your paper will be structured directly in relation to this outline, which will be turned in along with your paper. Please following the structure given below:

**Introduction** (in bold face). This should be a one paragraph statement that introduces the topic in a clear and interesting manner. A statement of the thesis (main argument) of the primary source should come at the end of the first paragraph. I should be able to easily identify what the thesis is.

**Headings and sub-headings.** All papers (even two-pagers!) will include headings and sub-headings. The headings will correspond with Roman numerals I, II, and III (etc.) in your paper outline. The first of these should be Historical Background. They should be written in bold and followed by a space in your paper. So, if your heading is “Trinitarian Claims” it will look as follows:

**Trinitarian Claims**

I will then proceed with the body of my paper addressing these Trinitarian claims as follows.

A subheading is the Arabic numerals that follow each Roman numeral in your outline. So, if under “Trinitarian Claims” you include Monotheism, Eternity, and Cooperation, these would appear as follows:

**Monotheism.** Note that this is underlined and followed with a period, and the text follows immediately after.

**Eternity.** You will follow this same pattern for each sub-heading.

**Conclusion.** Your conclusion will be in the same form as your Introduction and Headings, included in bold-face type with a full space beneath it.

The content of each one of these is described in the syllabus and course schedule. “Brief” does really mean two pages or less, double-spaced in no less than 10 font type, with one-inch margins! Work at producing a refined paper. You will want to work through several drafts so as to make every word count. A paper will be deemed excellent if it demonstrates thoughtful interaction with the issue, consultation of available resources, and care for a clear and thorough presentation thereof. A late paper means the loss of 5 points if it is turned in the same day after class time, minus 10 if it is within the next two days, minus 15 if within the week, minus 25 after that. “Late” is any time after the beginning class the date it is due. No paper obviously means a 0 for the assignment. Aim for the top on these; it's a good way to raise your final grade. These must be
submitted as e-mail attachments. One procedure which will help with brevity is to use parenthetical references (last name of author, page number) with all the bibliographic information presented in the works cited section. I expect that most of your citations will be from the primary source material, although you might consult other sources for some historical background.