

ALL NATIONS SEMINARY
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PATRISTIC ERA THEOLOGY

INSTRUCTOR: The Rev. Martin M. Davis, Ph.D.

RATIONALE

The course on Patristic-era theology is of vital importance to the student of the historical, orthodox faith of the Christian Church. The Patristic era (c. 100 – 500 AD) is the foundational era of post-biblical theology. During this period, the Church developed the doctrines of the Trinity and the hypostatic union of the two natures of Jesus Christ. In addition, the Nicene Creed, the canon of Scripture, and the doctrine of apostolic succession were developed during this important period.

OBJECTIVES

The student will develop an understanding of the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith with special emphasis on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ (the hypostatic union). Students will become familiar with the historical development of these doctrines as well as their full, orthodox articulation during the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era.

In regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, students will trace the historical development of the early Church's thinking in regard to threefold nature of God as revealed in Holy Scripture. Students will become familiar with early unorthodox (heretical) misconceptions of the Triune nature of God, particularly Sabellianism (modalism) and tritheism. Special attention will be given to the Arian controversy regarding the exact nature of the relationship between the Father and the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Students will focus in detail on the Nicene credal assertion that Jesus Christ is "of one being with the Father" (*homoousios to Patri*).

In regard to the doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, students will familiarize themselves with the Chalcedonian Definition, the early Church's classic statement regarding the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ in one Person. Students will learn to differentiate various Christological heresies, including Adoptionism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Docetism, Ebionism, Monophysitism, and Nestorianism.

Students will also become familiar with the manner in which the canon of Scripture developed in response to various heretical challenges to the integrity of the biblical witness as contained in the Old and New Testaments. In addition, students will gain an appreciation of the early Church's insistence on the importance of the historic bishopric as the guardian of orthodoxy. Finally, students will briefly examine the liturgical practice of the early Church.

At the end of the course, students will be able to provide general answers to the following questions (this list is not exhaustive):

- What are the biblical passages that point to a Triune understanding of the nature of God?
- What were the major trinitarian heresies that confronted the early Church?
- What is the orthodox statement of the doctrine of the Trinity as articulated by the Cappadocian Fathers?
- What biblical passages describe Jesus' relationship to the Father?
- What are some of the early Christological heresies?
- What is the meaning of the Nicene creedal assertion that Jesus is "of one being with the Father" (*homoousios to Patri*)?
- What is the epistemological and evangelical significance of the Nicene *homoousion*?
- What is the Chalcedonian Definition?
- How is the Holy Spirit related to the Father and Son and what is his mission?
- What documents indicate an early, incipient biblical canon?
- What were the ecclesiastical offices in the Patristic-era Church and what was the role of the Bishop?
- What is the relationship between Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition?
- How is the worship of the early Church like the traditional Anglican worship of today?

STRATEGY

The student's primary task will be to complete the required readings. In addition to the required text book, extensive use will be made of material developed by the instructor in the course of his graduate studies in theology, particular in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ. These materials will be provided at no cost to the student via email. Wherever possible, the course will use additional instructional material available online, at no cost to the student, via the Internet.

The student will be expected to provide written (typed) answers to essay questions regarding the content of the course. Academic papers of three or more pages in length (Times New Roman or equivalent, 12 pt font, 1.5 line spacing, 1 inch margins) may be required, depending on the academic level at which the course is taken. The required length of papers may vary according to subject matter and the academic level at which the course is taken. Academic papers are not required for Associate or Bachelor's level students.

REQUIRED READING (available through Internet book sellers)

Hall, C.A. 2002. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press. 307 pp. In addition to the required text, students will be required to read all (or portions of) two classic examples of Patristic writing: 1) Athanasius. *On the Incarnation, With an Introduction by C.S. Lewis* and 2) Basil of Caesarea. *On the Holy Spirit*. These resources are available via the Internet at no cost to the student.

EVALUATION

All Nations Seminary system of grading will be employed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Gonzalez, J.L. 1987. *A History of Christian Thought* (vol 1). Nashville, TN: Abingdon. 400pp.

Kelly, J.N.D. 1978. *Early Christian Doctrines*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press. 511pp.

Olson, R.E. 1999. *The Story of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. 652pp.

Torrance, T.F. 1995. *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*. London: T & T Clark. 345pp. This book is an explication of the Nicene Creed and is highly recommended for Master's and Ph.D. level students.