

Abilene Christian University
BIBD 640 Historical Theology: The Doctrine of God
3 credit hours
Fall 2022
T 3:00-5:50 pm | BSB 122

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Office Hours: Monday 9:00-11:00,1:00-3:00; Thursday 9:00-11:00,1:00-3:00

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

The mission of the College of Biblical Studies is to fulfill ACU's mission to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world by providing leadership preparation and resources for effective worldwide ministry in the cause of Christ.

The Graduate School of Theology aims to equip men and women for effective missional leadership for ministry in all its forms, and to provide strong academic foundations for theological inquiry. By equipping students with the requisite skills, knowledge, and experience, the GST aspires to produce graduates with trained minds and transformed hearts.

Course Description

This course traces the development of one or more theological topics over time by investigating historical contexts, the theological perspectives that emerge from them, and their lasting influences on the Christian tradition. This seminar focuses on the development of the doctrine of the Trinity during the first four centuries of the Christian era and brings this history into conversation with modern trends in Trinitarian theology.

Class Format

This course is structured as a seminar in which students come prepared to engage in an informed conversation about the topic for the day with the professor and one another. Assigned readings should be read in their entirety prior to class. A variety of activities may be expected: brief lectures clarifying the finer points of the day's topic, discussions based on student observations and questions, debates and/or position papers, and exploratory applications for contemporary ministry settings.

Required Texts

Anatolios, Khaled. *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Baker Academic, 2011.

Behr, John. *The Way to Nicaea*. Formation of Christian Theology Vol. 1. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.

Gavrilyuk, Paul L. *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Harrower, Scott. *God of All Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of This World*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.

Additional required readings will be provided via Canvas.

Recommended Reading

Anatolios, Khaled (trans.). *Athanasius*. Routledge, 2004. (Includes new translations of *De Decretis* and selections from *Orations against the Arians*)

St. Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics Series. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012.

St. Augustine. *The Trinity (De Trinitate)*. Translated by Edmund Hill OP. 2nd Edition. New City Press, 2012.

Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Course Objectives

GST Student Learning Outcome	Course Competencies	Evaluation
Graduates will have knowledge of the major theological content, structures, and procedures of the Christian tradition. (Prog. 2)	To analyze and evaluate theological claims, formulations, and expressions used in the theological controversies of the 1 st -4 th centuries in terms of their biblical, historical, and philosophical dimensions.	Weekly essays, weekly discussions, Exegesis and Christology essay, critical book review
Graduates will have facility in critical thinking, analysis, and in oral and written communication. (Prog. 5)	To gather relevant information, to construct coherent arguments, and to convey those arguments clearly in oral and written form.	Weekly essays, Exegesis and Christology essay, critical book review
Graduates will have critical facility with the most important primary sources and issues of scholarly discussion in biblical studies, theology, or church history. (MA 1)	To examine diverse approaches to the doctrine of God by key Christian thinkers and leaders of the 1 st -4 th centuries and to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, and lasting contributions of each.	Weekly essays, weekly discussions, Exegesis and Christology essay, critical book review
Graduates will have the ability to integrate theology in contemporary cultural contexts. (MDIV 1)	To interpret critically the role of historical and cultural contexts in the formation of Christian theological perspectives and to understand how those historical developments continue to shape the church today.	Weekly essays, weekly discussions, Exegesis and Christology essay, critical book review, Trinitarian Theology in Practice project
Awareness of the historical and contemporary beliefs and practices of the worldwide church.	To analyze critically contemporary theological proposals in light of historical knowledge and to apply	Weekly essays, weekly discussions, Exegesis and Christology essay,

(MDIV 2)	that knowledge in ministerial practice.	critical book review, Trinitarian Theology in Practice project
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Grading Scale:

92-100	= A	Excellent
83-91	= B	Good
74-82	= C	Decent
65-73	= D	Unsatisfactory
0-64	= F	Fail

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class meetings. If you expect to miss a class period, please inform the professor in advance. Legitimate excuses for an absence include personal illness, family emergencies, a death in the family, or other reasons according to the discretion of the professor. *More than one unexcused absence will result in the drop of a letter grade. Three unexcused absences (20% of the course) may result in the student being dropped from the course.*

Tardy: Students are expected to arrive on time for every class period and be present in the room at the time that the class starts. Repeated tardies (3 or more) may be counted as an unexcused absence and will affect the student's participation grade.

Late Work: Please submit all work on time. For each day that an assignment is late, there will be a grade reduction of a letter grade. *No assignments will be accepted later than two weeks after the initial due date, unless special arrangements have been made with the professor.*

Academic Integrity: Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating, as defined in ACU's Academic Integrity Policy, involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying and represent actions contrary to the behavioral norms that flow from the nature of God. Violations will be addressed as described in the Policy. While the university enforces the Policy, the most powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from ones' desire to imitate God's nature in our lives. Every member of the faculty, staff, and student body is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship, and research. The full Policy is available for review at the Provost's office web site (<http://www.acu.edu/campusoffices/provost>) and the following offices: provost, college deans, dean of campus life, director of student judicial affairs, director of residential life education and academic departments.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination. If a student requests accommodations under ADA, please notify the professor one week prior to the course. If needs arise during the course, please notify the professor as soon as possible. The professor will work with the College of Biblical Studies to accommodate the student's needs.

Title IX & Sexual Misconduct

The professor will uphold the university's Title IX policy. At ACU, we strive to comply with all applicable legal requirements prohibiting, preventing, and responding to sexual misconduct against any member of the ACU community. Moreover, as a Christian community, ACU has committed itself, unequivocally, to ensuring a working and learning environment in which the dignity of every individual is respected. Our Title IX – Sexual Misconduct Policy outlines specific definitions and procedures related to **sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual assault, stalking, and relationship violence**. If you experience sexual misconduct in any of these forms, we encourage you to report it so that we can help maintain a work and academic environment free of unlawful behavior. For more information, please see <https://www.acu.edu/human-resources/title-ix-and-sexual-misconduct-information/>.

Course Materials: Course materials prepared by the instructor (including PowerPoint presentations, study guides, and handouts), together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor, are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person.

Subject to Change: The professor reserves the right to alter the readings, assignments, and due dates as needed during the semester. She will make every effort to communicate these changes to students in advance and in written form.

Expectations and Requirements

Weekly Assignments (40%)

Preparation and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class, to read all assigned texts prior to class, and to come to class ready to take an active part in discussion. Students who often come to class unprepared or late will lose participation points. (15% of the final grade)

Weekly Reflection

Each student will compose a reflection of no fewer than 250 words on the readings and class discussion for the week, due by 11:59 pm on Friday each week.

These reflections will be posted to a designated discussion board on Canvas. Each student must complete **12 reflections** over the course of the semester.

Acceptable content includes: reflection on a significant thing learned or new perspective engaged; critical reflection on the theological implications of the topic(s) of the week; connecting the week's material with previously encountered material (whether in this class or another setting); connecting the week's topic or material to a specific contemporary ministry setting; etc.

Please limit your reflection to a single topic, developing that topic clearly and succinctly. Resist verbosity or jumping from topic to topic in order to reach the required word count. The weekly reflection will be graded on proper use of English grammar and syntax, appropriate length, clarity of

thought, depth of reflection, relevance to the week's discussion, and thoughtful engagement with another student's post. (25% of the final grade)

Major Assignments (60%)

Exegesis and Christology Essay (15%)

Students will write a 1,250- to 1,500-word paper analyzing the relationship between an ancient author's exegetical approach to scripture and the author's Christology. (Christology is the branch of theology concerning the study of Jesus Christ.) Select one of the following texts for analysis: Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, or Origen's *First Principles*. (You may use previously assigned readings as a starting place, but your analysis should also extend to other relevant parts of the text.) As you engage the primary source, reflect on these questions:

- *Biblical Exegesis:*
 - What key exegetical principles, explicit and implicit, govern this author's approach to scripture?
 - Which biblical passages are most central to the author's Christology? How does the author apply his exegetical principles to these key passages?
- *Context:* In what way does the historical or literary context influence the author's exegetical and theological choices?
- *Analysis:* What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author's exegesis and Christology?
- *Influence and Application:*
 - What lasting contributions has this author/work made to Christian theology?
 - What might the church today learn from this author/work?

Compose an essay arguing for a specific understanding of the relationship between the author's exegetical approach and his Christology. Offer a concrete proposal for how the church today should approach this ancient text considering its relative strengths and weaknesses.

NB: Please ***do not*** simply answer the questions above in your essay. These questions are just mulch for the garden; the essay is the harvested fruit.

Critical Book Review: The Suffering of the Impassible God (15%)

The doctrine of divine impassibility – the teaching that God cannot suffer – is perennially debated in Christian theology. It is also a theological position that most patristic writers took for granted. Modern Christians are often ambivalent, if not opposed, to a notion that seems to make God distant, and this can inhibit fruitful engagement with the church fathers.

Paul Gavrilyuk's *The Suffering of the Impassible God* narrates the formative period of Trinitarian and Christological theology with careful attention to the function of divine impassibility in patristic sources. He aims thus to nudge modern theologians toward a more informed, less dismissive engagement with the Fathers' treatment of divine impassibility.

An excellent book review will critically engage the main arguments presented by the author, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the book's argument, and draw out reasonable implications of the author's thesis for the modern students of historical theology. The review should be 1,250-2,000 words in length.

Pathways Assignment: Trinitarian Theology in Practice (30%)

In this summative assignment, the student will produce a theologically-grounded series of teaching materials or worship services. The project has two essential parts:

1. A robust articulation of the Trinitarian theology undergirding the project that draws extensively and creatively from course material as well as additional research. This part should be approximately 1,250 to 1,500 words in length (about 5-6 pages double-spaced). Write a proper essay and use SBL citation style.
2. Artifacts, such as teaching notes, a sermon series, orders of worship, or other materials, that bear out in practice the theology articulated in part 1. Make explicit the connections between the theology and artifacts by use of footnotes/endnotes or another form of commentary. (Even if you think it is obvious, make the connections explicit.) Be sure to indicate the intended audience and demonstrate contextually-appropriate pastoral application.

Here are some artifact/project ideas, just to get your wheels turning (but please feel free to come up with your own):

- A worship or teaching series for the season of Advent/Christmas
- A multipart catechesis for candidates for baptism
- A sermon series on Trinitarian theology
- Installments for prayer stations
- Theological curriculum for families or small groups meeting in homes
- A podcast or video series introducing key aspects of Trinitarian theology

The Pathways assignment is worth 30% of your grade. This breaks down into three parts:

1. One-on-one meeting with the professor to discuss your topic idea prior to Thanksgiving Break. Submit a one-paragraph description of the project and a working bibliography 24 hours before the meeting. (5/100)
2. In-class presentation and discussion on the final day of class. (5/100)
3. Final submission of your Trinitarian theology paper and your artifacts (parts 1 and 2 above). (90/100)

Alternative Research Paper: Students who are only doing an academic MA may choose to write a traditional research paper on a topic related to the development of Trinitarian theology in place of the Pathways Assignment. The deadlines and grade weight remain the same.

Course Schedule and Assignments*

Unit	Date	Topic	Assigned Reading	Assignments
1: Early Trinitarian Theology	8/30	Beginnings of Trinitarian Theology	Behr, pp. 1-70	Weekly reflection 1
	9/6	The Word of God	Behr, pp. 73-133 Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> 55-64 Irenaeus of Lyons, <i>Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i> 1-8, 43-56 _____, <i>Against Heresies</i> II.27-28.3, III.1-5, IV.20 & 26	Weekly reflection 2
	9/13	The Son of the Father	Behr, pp. 135-241 Origen, <i>On First Principles</i> preface; I.1-3; II.4, 6-7	Weekly reflection 3
	9/20	Exegesis & Christology	<i>Additional reading depends on the author/ text you are writing about – see the assignment instructions.</i>	Weekly reflection 4 Exegesis & Christology Essay
2: The Nicene Controversy & Key Figures	9/27	Theologies of the Nicene Controversy	Anatolios, pp. 1-98	Weekly reflection 5
	10/4	Athanasius	Anatolios, pp. 99-156 Athanasius, excerpts of <i>Orations against the Arians</i> II, chapters 16-22 (= paragraphs 18-82) _____, <i>De decretis</i> (= <i>On the Nicene Council</i>)	Weekly reflection 6
	10/11	Basil of Caesarea & Gregory of Nazianzus	Stephen Hildebrand, "Chapter 6: Greek 'Paideia' and Scripture Exegesis in Basil's Trinitarian Theology" Verna E. F. Harrison, "Illuminated from All Sides by the Trinity: Neglected Themes in Gregory's Trinitarian Theology" Basil of Caesarea, <i>On the Holy Spirit</i> 9-12, 15-16, 19, 21-23 Gregory Nazianzen, <i>Theological Orations</i> 29 & 31	Weekly reflection 7

* All readings outside of your required textbooks are provided via links and PDFs on Canvas.

	10/18	<i>No class meeting</i>	Use this week to reflect, review, catch up on reading, and plan your major project/paper.	Weekly reflection 8
	10/25	Gregory of Nyssa	Anatolios, pp. 157-240 Gregory of Nyssa, <i>Against Eunomius</i> pp. 62-69, 74-78, 86-93 _____, <i>Ad Ablabium</i>	Weekly reflection 9
	11/1	Augustine	Anatolios, pp. 241-292 Augustine of Hippo, <i>On the Trinity</i> 4.19-21 & 15.1-7, 21-23 _____, Sermons 52 & 117	Weekly reflection 10
3: Divine Impassibility	11/8	Divine Impassibility in the Church Fathers	Gavrilyuk, pp. 1-175	Weekly reflection 11 Critical Book Review
4: Contemporary Trinitarian Thought	11/15	God of All Comfort	Bruce Marshall, "Trinity" Harrower, pp. 1-91	Weekly reflection 12
	11/22	Reading and writing break No class meeting—Happy Thanksgiving!		
	11/29	God of All Comfort	Harrower, pp. 92-221	Weekly reflection 14
Course Wrap-Up	12/6	Final projects and papers/wrap-up	N/a	Weekly reflection 15 Pathways Assignment (Trinitarian Theology in Practice) or Research Papers

GST Classroom Virtues

The GST invites students to participate in a process of theological and spiritual formation. Knowing how to think theologically comes by habit and by imitation, not simply by acquiring isolated facts. The assumption here is that books alone are insufficient for addressing difficulties of life and forming people into the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, we strive to form communities of inquiry, inviting you to inhabit a shared world of learning. Within such an environment, the goal is to cultivate critical skills of reflection, spiritual disciplines, interact authentically with one another, and learn to function as a community of inquiry. A large part of this involves connecting areas of life rather than pitting them against one another. Prayer, study, and other dimensions of life are all integral to the process of formation. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices; nurtured within this context, you pursue “intellectual, moral, spiritual excellence” the result of which is the formation of the whole person.

- a. **Desire for truth in the context of love**—the aptitude to discern whether belief-forming processes, practices, and people yield true beliefs over false ones. People motivated by this desire will be more likely to conduct thorough inquiries, scrutinize evidence carefully, investigate numerous fields of study, and consider alternative explanations while respecting and caring for others.
- b. **Humility**—the capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. This is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment.
- c. **Honesty**—the capacity to tackle difficult questions without seeking simple answers. Ignoring complex and difficult questions only solidifies vices such as intellectual dishonesty, close-mindedness, and rash judgments. These vices preclude the possibility of refining our thinking and of participating in conversations with others.
- d. **Openness**—the desire to engage in an open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality, patience, and love.
- e. **Courage**—the ability to articulate one’s position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.
- f. **Wisdom**—the capacity to offer a synthetic discernment of knowledge on behalf of the community. The aim is not merely the dissemination of information but a pastoral implementation of faith for the building up of the community. It solidifies various pieces of data, practices, and experiences and aptly applies knowledge and faith to particular situations.
- g. **Stewardship**—the commitment to one’s accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that one brings to the classroom. Classroom engagement includes proactively participating in the course goals, seeking mastery of course competencies, and collaborating with faculty and fellow students in the development of a learning environment. Committing oneself to spiritual and intellectual well-being and growth is a faithful response to the opportunities graduate education affords.
- h. **Hopefulness**—the receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.
- i. **Prayerfulness**—the making of space to commune with God. The task of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God’s sanctifying work.