



Convivium Irenicum 2017: “To All Generations: Teaching the Doctrine of God in the Life of the Church”

Plenary Speaker: Fred Sanders, “The Strong Name of the Trinity:
Expanding, Extending, and Deepening the Knowledge of the Triune
God in the Church”

Fred Sanders is Professor at the Torrey Honors Institute, Biola University, and author of *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (2nd ed., Crossway, forthcoming 2016) and *The Triune God* (Zondervan, 2016).

Location: Davenant House, Landrum, SC

Dates: May 31–June 3, 2017

Evangelicals today are perhaps more confused than ever about the central mystery of our faith—the doctrine of God. In both sober academic tomes and popular paperbacks, our theologians often invoke Trinitarian community as the blueprint for everything from male headship to world peace and the solution to everything from bad art to capitalistic exploitation. Many pastors are frankly ignorant of Nicene trinitarian theology and key tenets of classical Christian theism, including divine unity, simplicity, and immutability, while many in the pews lap up devotional books promising that you, too, if you learn the right steps, can join in the Trinitarian dance and tango with the Almighty.

And yet, who can blame them? For decades, evangelicals have not known how to teach the fundamentals of the doctrine of God. We have lacked the categories and the intellectual method. After all, we are Bible people, first and foremost, and the niceties of Nicene theology, not to mention the scholastic doctrine of divine simplicity, do not simply escape our grasp, but ring false in our ears. How can we be faithful to God’s self-revelation in Scripture if we are straitjacketing the divine in the mold of Greek philosophy? How can we make Scripture the only rule of our theology if we are hemmed in by allegiance to traditional dogmatic formulations?

It is clear, then, that far from being a case of arcane speculation into doctrinal minutia, debates over the doctrine of God raise fundamental questions of theological method that the evangelical and Reformed churches must confront if they are to faithfully teach the faith to the next generation. In this year’s Convivium Irenicum, we propose to use the doctrine of God as a case study, as a lens, into exploring the role of Scripture, creeds, and philosophy in forming our doctrine and how to effectively teach it in 21st-century churches. Accordingly, we invite paper and panel proposals on questions such as the following:

- How important are differences over the doctrine of God in the life of the church relative to other doctrinal and ethical divisions?
- To what extent is creedal language revisable in light of ongoing biblical studies?



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- How central and authoritative are the philosophical categories in which the classical doctrine of God has been articulated?
- Is there a distinctively Protestant approach to the doctrine of God that emphasizes the narrative self-revelation of God in Scripture?
- How might seminary curricula need to change to ensure pastors are better grounded in historic orthodoxy?
- Given the challenging environment posed by the evangelical publishing industrial complex, the theological blogosphere, and social media, how can we communicate orthodoxy effectively and winsomely to ordinary Christians?

Note that although all of the above are framed as normative questions, historical explorations of these issues, uncovering models from our catholic and especially Protestant past, are also welcome.

Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words must be submitted to b.littlejohn@davenanttrust.org by March 1, 2017 for consideration.