The Theological World of the Nicene Controversy

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The Nicene Creed is embraced as an essential statement of Christian faith across the major confessions of Christianity—Protestants, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and the Church of the East all embrace this succinct summary of Christian doctrine. However, in the turbulent fourth century, such a wide-ranging embrace was not the case. In this course, we will explore the theology of the supporters of Nicaea as they sought to articulate and forge orthodox Christianity from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon in the years 325-451. The theologians who fought for Nicaea and who established how to interpret its creed are also among the greatest foundational theologians for Christianity, East and West, Greek, Latin, and Syriac, to this day.

**Course Format**

Each week will consist of two hours of teaching time. One hour will consist of a lecture outlining the history and theology involved, and the second hour will consist of a discussion of assigned readings. A weekly blog will be used to stimulate discussion and thinking in advance. Each student is expected to write at least one blog post on an assigned reading; the blog posts will be graded.

**Course Timeline**

Week 1 (wk of Jan 11): Arius and the Council of Nicaea

-Read Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.4-22; Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.5-9; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 19-21; Nicene creed from Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*

Week 2 (wk of Jan 18): The battle over orthodoxy, 325-381

-Read Jerome, *Chronicle* 2330-end; Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.6-8; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.5-7; Creed of Constantinople 381

Week 3 (wk of Jan 25): Athanasius of Alexandria

-Read Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*

Week 4 (wk of Feb 1): Orthodoxy in a Syriac Mode

-Read Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity*, *Homily on Our Lord*; Aphrahat the Persian, *Demonstration 17*: Of Christ the Son of God

Week 5 (wk of Feb 8): Basil of Caesarea

-Read Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*

Week 6 (wk of Feb 15): Gregory of Nazianzus

-Read Gregory of Nazianzus, *Five Theological Orations*

Week 7 (wk of Feb 22): Gregory of Nyssa

-Read *Against Eunomius*

Week 8 (wk of Mar 1): Latin Trinitarian thought

-Read Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils*; Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 52

Week 9 (wk of Mar 8): Christology and the Council of Ephesus

-Read Cyril of Alexandria, letters to Nestorius and letter to John of Antioch; Council of Ephesus, decree against Nestorius

Week 10 (wk of Mar 15): Latin Christology and the Council of Chalcedon

-Read Leo the Great, *Tome* and Sermons on the Nativity; Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith

**Grading and Expectations**

Participation: 5%

Course blog (600 words): 10%

Review essay (1000 words): 30% (due Week 7)

Research essay (4000 words): 60% (due week of March 22)

Participation

Every student is expected to do the readings, log in to the lectures, comment on the course blog, and participate in the discussions. The aim of this course is to think critically about these authors and issues, so your presence is required to achieve this aim.

Course blog

The course blog does not have to be academic in mode or form, although it should be respectful and professional. The purpose of the exercise is for the student writing each week’s blog post to write down his or her reactions, responses, and questions upon reading one of the assigned texts.

Review essay

This assignment sits somewhere between the blog and the research essay. Each student will read and review one piece of ancient literature from a list provided. The literature to choose from are all from 325-451, but they are all from authors not included in the course readings, and they are all primarily concerned with doctrines other than the Trinity and Christology. 325-451 has a lot more to offer than those very crucial doctrines!

*Books for the review essay*

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*. <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207/npnf207.ii.i.html>

Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus*. <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210/npnf210.iv.iii.i.html>

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*. <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111/npnf111.vii.html>

Jerome of Stridon. *Against the Pelagians*. <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206/npnf206.vi.ix.i.html>

Evagrius of Pontus, select letters trans. L. Dysinger, <http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/11_Letters/00a_start.htm>

Research essay

This major piece of writing is an analysis of a work either covered in the course or in the review essay that the student has not yet researched. A research question of a theological or historical nature should be chosen that will enable the student to present his or her own original research while at the same time consider the analyses of scholars in the field. All topics are to be approved by Dr Hoskin before students begin their research.

**Weekly Readings**

*Wherever possible, the required readings have both a preferred translation as well as a public domain translation. Dr Hoskin will be using his preferred translation, but public domain is allowed as well. Cost and access are real concerns these days!*

Before the first class, if everyone could read John Behr, “The Trinity and Scripture in the Greek Fathers,” <https://frjohnbehr.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Behr-Trinity_Living_Pulpit.pdf> and the so-called “Athanasian Creed”, that would be great. Dr Hoskin’s translation of said “creed”: <https://thepocketscroll.wordpress.com/classic-christian-texts/the-so-called-creed-of-saint-athanasius/>

Week 1:

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.4-22. Preferred: Trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall. Cambridge, 1999. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.iii.iv.html>

Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.5-9. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202/npnf202.ii.iv.v.html>

Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 19-21. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202/npnf202.iii.vi.xvii.html>

Original Nicene creed translated by Dr Hoskin from Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*: <https://thepocketscroll.wordpress.com/classic-christian-texts/the-nicene-creed/>

Week 2:

Jerome, *Chronicle* 2330-end. Open access translation: <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_chronicle_03_part2.htm>

Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.6-8. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202/npnf202.ii.viii.vii.html>

Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.5-7. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202/npnf202.iii.xii.v.html>

Week 3:

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*. Preferred: Trans. John Behr, Crestwood, NY: 2012. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204/npnf204.vii.ii.i.html>

Week 4:

Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity*. Preferred: Trans. Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns.* New York, 1989, pp.61-218. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213/npnf213.iii.v.i.html>

---. *Homily on Our Lord*. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213/npnf213.iii.viii.ii.html>

Aphrahat the Persian, *Demonstration 17*: Of Christ the Son of God. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf213/npnf213.iii.ix.viii.html>

Week 5:

Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*. Preferred: Trans. Stephen M. Hildebrand. Crestwood, NY: 2011. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208/npnf208.vii.ii.html>

Week 6:

Gregory of Nazianzus, *Five Theological Orations*. Preferred in: St Gregory the Theologian, *On God and Christ*. Trans. Frederick Williams. Crestwood, NY: 2002. Public Domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207/npnf207.iii.xiii.html>

Week 7:

Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205/npnf205.viii.i.i.html>

Week 8:

Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils*. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209/npnf209.ii.iv.ii.html>

Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 52. Trans. Edmund Hill, *Sermons III: 51-94*. Pp. 50-65. Someone has made a digitization of the sermon in question: <https://standingonshoulders.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/augustine-sermon-52.pdf>

Week 9:

Cyril of Alexandria, Letters to Nestorius:

-First Letter to Nestorius: <http://www.voskrese.info/spl/cyr1.html>

-Second Letter to Nestorius: <https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/cyrilofalex_second_letter_to_nestorius.htm>

-Third Letter to Nestorius: <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/jesus/third-letter-to-nestorius>

-Letter to John of Antioch: <http://www.voskrese.info/spl/cyr4.html>

Council of Ephesus, decree against Nestorius: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214/npnf214.x.xi.html>

Week 10: Latin Christology and the Council of Chalcedon

Leo the Great, *Tome* (*Ep*. 28): Preferred: trans. Bronwen Neil, *Leo the Great*. New York, 2009. Pp. 94-103. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212/npnf212.ii.iv.xxviii.html>

---. Select sermons on the Nativity. Sermons 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28. Preferred: trans. Jane Patricia Freeland and Agnes Josephine Conway. Washington, DC, 1996. pp. 77-121. Public domain: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212/npnf212.ii.v.x.html>

Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith. *The full definition from the council acts, including preamble, will be distributed by Dr Hoskin*.