Introduction to Theology (Lutheran Focus)

Fall 2020
COURSE SYLLABUS
DEPARTMENT: CH/ST
Credit Hours: 3

Instructor: Dr. R. David Nelson, Grand Rapids, MI
Phone: 616-951-2557 (cell) [in case of emergencies; please email first]
Email: david.nelson@tsm.edu; rdavidnelson@gmail.com [checked regularly, except for on Sundays]

WELCOME TO STUDENTS
Welcome to the first of a two-course “Introduction to Theology (Lutheran Focus)” sequence. I look forward to getting to know you during this fall semester. As we explore Christian theology together, our guide will be our own Prof. David S. Yeago, who has graciously agreed to let us use a pre-publication edition of his forthcoming book, *The Apostolic Faith*. We also will read an article I wrote several years ago, and an important text from St Athanasius, a fourth century theologian who played a critical role in the debates over the doctrine of the Trinity. We will cover three major theological topics this term: prolegomena (the “first words” of theology), the doctrine of God, and Christology.

A word about me: I am senior acquisitions editor for Baker Academic and Brazos Press, and the editor of the quarterly journal *Lutheran Forum*. I have taught for NALC since the fall of 2018. I also have taught courses in theology, church history, and Bible for Samford University, Cornerstone University, and the Institute of Lutheran Theology. My PhD in systematic theology is from King’s College, University of Aberdeen. I am married to Dacia, and we have three children.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
[from the NALS/Trinity Academic Catalogue]: An introduction to the practice and tradition of Christian theological reflection from a Lutheran perspective. The goal of the course is that students grow in their ability to articulate Christian teaching and a Christian view of the world clearly, scripturally, critically, and in accord with sound doctrine, in receptive conversation with saints and teachers of the Church, past and present. This course addresses the character and norms of Christian theology, the doctrine of God, and the person and work of Christ. Prerequisites: ST540 and ST550.

[Further Details]: The two *Introduction to Theology* courses are the third and fourth courses in the theology sequence in the NALS curriculum, following *Creeds and*
Catechisms (ST540) and Lutheran Confessions (ST550). The prior courses examined the apostolic rule of faith and its reception and elaboration by the Wittenberg Reformation. However, the Creeds, Catechisms, and Confessions do not extract the meaning of Holy Scripture so that we can now receive the Bible’s witness without engaging it for ourselves. Both Fathers and Reformers understood the rule of faith and church doctrine as orientation and formation intended precisely to enable fruitful participation in the church’s ongoing engagement with God’s inexhaustible word. This course will introduce students to the practice of Christian theology as an enterprise of reflection on the word of God carried out within and for the sake of the communion and mission of the church of Jesus Christ.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

ST660 OL is designed to meet the following course objectives:

1. You will understand more clearly the context, subject-matter, goals, and norms of classical Christian theology.
2. You will grasp more clearly the scriptural basis and gospel meaning of ecumenical Christian doctrines about God and Christ.
3. You will be able to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity.
4. You will be able reflect and write about the mystery of Christ, informed by Scripture, church doctrine, and the tradition of Christian theology.
5. You will grow in your ability to interpret Scripture theologically.

These objectives are included within the broad Ministry Learning Objectives of Trinity School for Ministry, included here:

1. The student will recognize and identify the biblical theology evident in the course work.
2. The student will be able to articulate an Anglican understanding of biblical, historical, systematic, and pastoral theology. Students of other traditions, especially those in the Lutheran and Presbyterian programs, should be able to articulate the theological perspective of their own tradition.
3. The student will be able to effectively communicate the Christian message to a diversity of people in order to advance the mission of God.
4. The student will be prepared to effectively lead in a variety of Christian communities.

MDiv: The student will be prepared to effectively lead in a variety of Christian communities. Where appropriate, the student will be able to articulate connections between their ministry context (parish, para-church, etc.) and the course material. The student will be able to articulate engagement in their spiritual formation through the coursework, as explicated by the Student Formation paradigm.
MAR: The student will be equipped to apply scholarship to the life of the church in his or her chosen theological discipline.

STM: The student will be equipped to successfully pursue further independent research and post-graduate study in his or her chosen theological discipline.

Our course will serve these ends in multiple ways. (1) It will attempt to show how the doctrine of the church arises from Scripture and leads back to Scripture. (2) It will articulate Lutheran concerns in the context of Scripture, the wider catholic tradition of the church, and modern ecumenical conversation. (3) It aims to enable students to communicate the Christian message more articulately, more scripturally, and more richly.

FORMAT
Asynchronous online courses require attention, dedication, discipline, and time. According to Trinity’s “Requirements for Online Learning,” to succeed in this class you will need:

- Motivation, self-discipline and the ability to engage with others in thoughtful, challenging, Christian dialogue.
- A schedule that permits 8 to 12 hours per week of reading, studying, and writing per course.
- Willingness to engage in an extensive amount of reading and writing.
- The ability to obtain textbooks and other resources
- Basic skills in typing, emailing, and creating/attaching electronic files.

A few comments on what you can expect as the semester unfolds: I will schedule phone conversations with each of you at two points during the semester – during the first two weeks (so that we can get acquainted with each other), and during the final week before exams (so that we can tidy up any messes and bring the course to a proper end). Throughout the semester we will consider various issues from the textbook readings in weekly discussion forums (see below). On Monday of each week during the semester (unless otherwise noted in the course schedule), I will record and post a 45- to 60-minute audio lecture covering the week’s reading and theme. During the week, I expect you to read the assigned selections from the course texts, listen to the audio lecture, and complete any assignments listed on the schedule.

COURSE TEXTS

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Participation and discussion forums** (20%): (1) As the semester unfolds, I will develop a sense for how hard you are working for the course and reserve the right to assess your class participation points accordingly. (2) Throughout the semester, we will all participate together in regular forum-style conversations on issues emerging during the readings. One of us will kick-off the forum with a question or comment on that week’s reading. The rest of us will respond throughout the week as we wrestle with the issues. Each week, everyone should make 2 contributions to the discussion (if you’re asking a kick-off question, that question counts as a contribution). The forums will close on Friday of each week at 5:00 pm. If you are asking the opening question, please try to do so on Tuesday (which means you’ll need to complete the assigned reading early that week!). At the beginning of the semester I will start a sign-up sheet for the questions during the first week of the semester.

2. **Reading Summaries** (5% each; 20% total): Four times during the semester, you will complete a 2-3-page, double-spaced summary of a particular reading. Notice the due dates for these summaries on the schedule. Your summary should contain: (1) a few paragraphs summarizing the content of the text; (2) one or two concluding paragraphs highlighting the significance of the text and any ongoing questions. Reading summaries are due on the following Fridays at 5:00 pm: **September 25, October 9, October 30, and December 11**.

3. **Short Paper on the Trinity** (15%): You will submit a short paper of 5-7 pages stating as precisely as possible the doctrine of the Trinity. The paper is due Friday, **October 23**, at 5:00 pm.

4. **Short Exegetical Paper** (15%): You will submit a brief exegetical sketch of 5-7 pages on an agreed upon text. The goal will be to bring theological learning to bear on the interpretation of Scripture, and at the same time allow the particularity of the text to inform theological understanding. See the appropriate handout for more information. The paper is due Friday, **December 4**, at 5:00 pm.

5. **Final Paper** (30%): Each student will write a final reflection paper of 16-18 pages answering the questions: “Who Is Jesus Christ and Why Does He Matter?” The object of the paper will be to integrate Scripture, the course material, and other insights in a disciplined theological meditation (not a personal testimony) on Christ and aspects of his inexhaustible significance. The final paper is due Friday, **December 11**, at 5:00 pm.
Note: All papers must conform to SBL specifications, as found in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014). A summarized version of the guidelines can be found [here](#).

Different classifications of students have different expectations:

- MAR, MDiv, & Diploma should have between 135-150 hours of total work per course
- STM should have between 145-160 hours
- DMin should have between 150-175 total hours

“Total work” includes the length of lectures, amount of reading, amount of writing (both papers and discussion boards), and any live sessions. A website to calculate how many total hours can be found [here](#).

For guidelines on student work totals, please keep the following in mind:
- 20 pages of reading = 1 hour
- ½ page of writing = 1 hour (discussion boards should be considered writing)
- Lecture hour = 1 hour
- Live discussion hour = 1 hour

**COURSE EVALUATION**

Your grade for ST660 will be assessed according to the following scale of percentages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Summaries</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Paper on the Trinity</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Exegetical Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trinity’s Grading Scale:

- **A** (95+)
- **A-** (90-94)
- **B+** (87-89)
- **B** (84-86)
- **B-** (80-83)
- **C+** (77-79)
- **C** (74-76)
- **C-** (70-73)
- **D** (below 70) → **failure**
F (below 60) → failure

B: Work will demonstrate broad (sufficient information is covered) and deep (supporting material is offered) coverage of the material. Information will be accurate and there will be a clear and coherent structure. Coverage of the material and comments will be reasonably competent without being exceptional.

C: Work will demonstrate reasonable coverage of the material but will lack breadth and depth of analysis. There will not be serious inadequacies in the information presented, but the overall structure will be characteristically unclear, narrow, and shallow and void of imaginative and interesting analysis.

D: Work will be notably defective according to the criteria outlined above.

F: Work will demonstrate a complete failure on the part of its author to interact with the material in accordance with the criteria outlined above.

A: Work will demonstrate exceptional coverage of the material. What distinguishes work in this category from a “B” is the author’s ability to develop the material in breadth and depth beyond what is necessary for a good understanding of it. The author will engage with the material in a way that is often though not always marked by creativity, exceptional insight, and/or extensive research.

COURSE DESIGN
Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments:

Week 1: August 31-September 4
Prolegomena to Lutheran Theology; Nelson (all)
***Schedule Introductory Phone Call
***Forum Discussion Sign-up

Week 2: September 8-11
The Apostolic Faith – an Introduction; Yeago chapter 1
***Forum Discussion responses due Sept. 11 (5:00pm)
*Sep 8 Last Day to Drop a Fall semester class for a 100% Refund; Last Day to Change from Credit to Audit for Fall semester class

Week 3: September 14-18
The Centrality of Jesus of Nazareth; Yeago chapter 2
***Forum Discussion responses due Sept. 18 (5:00pm)
*Sep 15 Last Day to Drop a Class for a 75% Refund*

Week 4: September 21-25
The God of Israel; *Yeago chapter 3*
***Reading Summary #1** due on Sept. 25 (5:00pm) on one of the following: Nelson, Yeago chapter 1, Yeago Chapter 2
***Forum Discussion** responses due Sept. 25 (5:00pm)

*Sep 22 Last Day to Drop a Class for a 50% Refund*

Week 5: September 28-October 2
The Doctrine of the Trinity; *Yeago chapter 4*
***Forum Discussion** responses due Oct. 2 (5:00pm)

Week 6: October 5-9
The Mystery of the Triune God 2; *Yeago chapter 5*
***Reading Summary #2** due on Oct. 9 (5:00pm) on one of the following: Yeago chapter 4, Yeago chapter 5
***Forum Discussion** responses due Oct. 9 (5:00pm)

Week 7: October 12-16 – READING WEEK at TSM
Introduction to Christology; *Athanasius (all)*
***No Recorded Lecture this week***

Week 8: October 19-23
The Son of God Incarnate 1; *Yeago chapter 6, 225-247*
***Short Paper on the Trinity** due Oct. 23 (5:00pm)

Week 9: October 26-30
The Son of God Incarnate 2; *Yeago chapter 6, 247-262*
***Reading Summary #3** due on Oct. 30 (5:00pm) on one of the following: Athanasius, Yeago chapter 6
***Forum Discussion** responses due Oct. 30 (5:00pm)

Week 10: November 2-6
Jesus Messiah and the Reign of God 1; *Yeago chapter 7, 263-284*
***Forum Discussion** responses due Nov. 6 (5:00pm)

Week 11: November 9-13
Jesus Messiah and the Reign of God 2; *Yeago chapter 7, 284-304*
***Forum Discussion** responses due Nov. 13 (5:00pm)

Week 12: November 16-20
Jesus Crucified and Risen 1; *Yeago chapter 8, 305-332*
***No Recorded Lecture this week***
***Forum Discussion** responses due Nov. 20 (5:00pm)
Week 13: November 23-27 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
***No assigned readings
***No Recorded Lecture this week

Week 14: November 30-December 4 – LAST WEEK OF CLASSES for Fall semester
Jesus Crucified and Risen 1; Yeago chapter 8, 332-351
***Schedule End of Semester Phone Call
***Short Exegetical Paper due on Dec. 4 (5:00pm)
***Forum Discussion responses due Dec. 4 (5:00pm)

December 11 – All coursework due
***Final Paper due by 5:00 pm on Dec. 11
***Reading Summary #4 due on Dec. 11 (5:00pm) on one of the following: Yeago chapter 7, Yeago chapter 8

COURSE AND SCHOOL POLICIES

Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is a violation of an author’s/artist’s intellectual property rights and is a serious offense. Please see the Academic Catalog for a full explanation of Trinity’s plagiarism guidelines and note, as stated there, that every student is expected to be fully aware of the guidelines. A student who plagiarizes will automatically receive a failing grade on the assignment and risks failing the course. If a student does not know whether or not they may be engaging in plagiarism, they are encouraged to speak to Leslie Thyberg, our Learning Skills Coordinator.

Late Assignments:
Work turned in late (quizzes, exams, etc.) for any reason, barring documented medical emergency, will be accepted up to 3 days after it was due, with a grade level reduction (an A becomes a B, etc.). Any work turned in 3 days after the due date cannot be counted for credit.

Missed Class Policy:
Online learning doesn’t hold the same time constraints as traditional, residential learning (that is, you rarely have to be in the same virtual “place” at the same time as your professors or classmates). However, each course is designed with a progression of learning experiences that are meant to be done in order and in the same rough time span as your fellow students. So, while “missing” class in the traditional sense is a non-issue online, being absent from the course still is. Absence from an online course means missing scheduled deadlines (assessments, assignments, live sessions, discussions) as well as non-interaction with learning materials (lectures, readings, etc.). Just as in a regular classroom, students are expected to make up work that they miss; students are
expected to let the professor know ahead of time when they are going to miss deadlines (when possible).

Being absent from a course for three weeks (consecutive or not) is grounds for administrative withdrawal, which will be noted on the student’s transcript.

**Incompletes:**
Incompletes are not normally given and are granted only in the most serious of cases. They are not granted as a way to extend the semester due to incomplete work. In order to request an incomplete, the student must obtain the necessary form online, complete the relevant sections, and submit it to the professor who will list the specific assignments to be completed with due dates. The date for submission of all materials cannot be beyond six weeks from the last day of class (see the Academic Calendar). The form will be submitted to the Academic Dean for final approval. *It is strongly recommended that students submit an Incomplete Appeal to their professor and the Academic Dean well before the deadline listed in the Academic Calendar. There is no guarantee that the professor, Academic Dean, or Registrar will be in the office on the day of the deadline.*

**ATS Review of Student Work:**
Samples of student work may be used as part of an on-going assessment of courses and degree programs by Trinity School for Ministry/North American Lutheran Seminary and the Association of Theological Schools. Students’ names will be removed from any work used for this purpose.

**Learning Materials:**
All learning materials (handouts, study guides, etc.) are the property of the instructor. All materials produced in the Trinity Media Center (video and audio lectures) are the property of Trinity School for Ministry. Please contact the appropriate owner for reproduction guidelines, as well as usage outside Trinity School for Ministry.