

Syllabus | Fall 2026*Tyler J.R. Harper, M.Div. M.Th***Description**

To be a Christian is to hold to central tenants of the faith — as expressed in creedal statements. Many who hold these common tenants express a diverse view on a wide array of theological issues. While these differences can appear far reaching and irreconcilable, they are often rooted in subtle differences in how these core tenants are understood. An awareness of what we believe in common — our *essentials* — and the paths of divergence — our *non-essentials* — can help us better understand the strengths and weaknesses of our own position and of the positions held by others. This understanding allows us to disagree with others with charity.

Topics within the seminar will include the two natures of Christ, the Trinity, and how various understandings of the Christian faith coalesce and diverge, using the idea of models to express these relationships.

The Seminar will meet four times: two 2-hour lectures and discussion seminars, and two 1-hour small group discussions, according to the schedule below.

An introductory video for the Seminar will be available by July 31.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Learn to understand the variety of theological expressions by discussing the formation of their own theological perspectives.
2. Investigate theological issues from a variety of perspectives.
3. Affirm key theological concepts of the EFCC, through engagement with key scriptural texts.
4. When Participants complete the Seminar, they will understand the development of a theological perspective and the concept of models of faith — particularly as they relate to the theological diversity of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada.

Textbooks

1. Strand, Greg and Bill Kynes, eds. *Gospel Truths: A Theological Exposition of the Statement of Faith of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada*. Minneapolis: Free Church Publications, 2011

Gospel Truths explores the breadth of the 10 statements of our Statement of Faith. This work explores the variety of beliefs by exploring the theological and Scriptural support for these beliefs. This book is helpful for understanding who we are and what we believe but was also written to guide believers into an awareness of God's greatness and grace. While this book will be referred to at times, it provides a baseline awareness that will be assumed throughout the seminar. It is recommended that you read this book before the beginning of the seminar.

2. Reeves, Michael, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012.

Few questions strike fear in the hearts of ministers as much as being asked to explain the Trinity. However, this critical doctrine shapes everything else in the Christian faith. In this short work, with straightforward language, Reeves shows how critical this doctrine is for our faith and ministry. Understanding the Trinity — as revealed in Scripture — helps ensure we are faithful to God’s self-revelation. The topics of this book will be discussed in the first session.

3. Synder, Howard A. *Models of the Kingdom: Gospel, Culture, and Mission in Biblical and Historical Perspective*. Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2001.

In this slightly longer book, Synder uses the idea models to understand the diversity of beliefs connected to the Kingdom of God along a continuum. Our theologies are shaped — in part — by our understanding of the Kingdom of God. Understanding the diversity of these biblically supported models can help us understand how we — as well as those who hold different views — can arrive at these differing views while simultaneously looking to the same Scripture. This book should be read before October 6th.

4. Barth, Karl. *The Church and the Churches*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005

While Karl Barth is known for his long and complex writings including his *Church Dogmatics*, this collection of four short speeches is clear and impactful. *The Church and the Churches* was originally written by Barth for the 1937 Edinburgh World Conference on Faith and Order, an ecumenical movement indented to unify churches around the world. In this work, Barth sounds a clarion call for church unity that is radical in its posture. In an age that sought unity by minimizing differences and doctrines, Barth calls for a unity by listening to the “Christ of scripture” within the midst of our differences. This book can easily be read in a sitting or two. This book should be read before October 6th.

5. Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, & Creed of Chalcedon (see appendix i)

These four creeds are not scripture, yet they reflect the truths of Scripture as they have been understood by believers throughout the centuries and across the world. These documents reflect the truth of God’s revelation of who God is, the two natures of Christ, the person of the Spirit and the relationship between the persons of the Godhead. These short documents should be reviewed before the first seminar, highlighting any unrecognizable concepts or terms. It is recommended to review these four creeds to be familiar with their content and the concepts within them.

Assignments

1. Read *Gospel Truths*, identifying areas of unity within ‘in essentials’ and charity within ‘non-essentials’. Are there any areas that should be treated differently? Make notes and questions for the discussion. To be completed for September 15th.
2. Map yourself on a continuum of kingdom models as described by Snyder. Think of public figures (pastors, politicians, writers, etc.); based on their public presentations, which models do they hold to? Which models are predominant within your local congregation?
3. Prepare a brief affirmation of the various significant clauses within either Statement 1 or Statement 4 of the EFCC Statement of Faith. Within this 1000-word document, you should personally affirm each key theological statement, with its significance for you personally and ministerially. Your affirmations should interact with key passages of Scripture in support of these theological statements. Please see appendix ii for the topics to be covered. Please forward this paper to the facilitator at Tyler@ChaseChurch.com. To be completed for October 27th.
4. Write a 1000-word essay stating things you have learned in this seminar and how they apply to your ministry. Forward this essay to the facilitator at Tyler@ChaseChurch.com and to the Executive Assistant at kirbyt@efcc.ca. To be completed for October 27th.

Suggested Reading

Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011.

Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York: Harper & Row, 1959

Berkhof, Louis. *The History of Christian Doctrines*. East Peoria, IL: Banner of Truth, 2009.

Bloesch, Donald. *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Methods in Theology*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1992.

Boersma, Hans. *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Muelhoff, Tim and Richard Langer. *Winsome Conviction: Disagreeing without Dividing the Church*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2020.

Neder, Adam. *Theology as a Way of Life: On Teaching and Learning the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.

Noll, Mark A. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Olson, Arnold. *The Significance of Silence*. Minneapolis: Free Church Press, 1991.

Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999

Watkin, Christopher. *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story makes sense of Modern Life and Culture*. Grand Rapids

Zimmermann, Jens. *Recovering Theological Hermetics: An Incarnational–Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Schedule

Date	Topics	Assignments Due
September 15 10:30am - 12:30pm Pacific	Theology within the EFCC —Source & content —Presuppositions Models for Understanding One another	Read: — <i>Gospel Truths</i> — <i>Models of the Kingdom</i> Be prepared to discuss outcomes of assignment #1. Are there areas that challenged you or you would like to explore more? Discuss the key concepts of Snyder. Understanding models, how they shape our thought, how they play out in ministry, and how they help us interact with one another.
September 15 or September 16 Small group meeting	Life of a Model 1. Present self-reflective map in relationship to Kingdom Models 2. Interact with those who hold to different models, understanding undying tensions and connections	Present your findings from assignment #2
October 6 10:30am - 12:30pm Pacific	A God beyond our Understanding 1. Understanding an infinite God as finite humans 2. Conclusion	Read: — <i>Delighting in the Trinity</i> — <i>The Church and the churches</i> Discuss the key concept of Barth, <i>The Church and the Churches</i> . Catching a glimpse of a God who is greater than any of our theologies.
October 6 or October 7 Small group meeting	Tension and tolerance in the community of faith	Prepare to share learnings and reflections from Reeves, <i>Delighting in the Trinity</i> and Barth, <i>The Church and the Churches</i> , focusing on how Christians can find common ground in the God of Scripture, even when we disagree on secondary issues.

Appendix i

The Apostles' Creed

While The Apostles' Creed is sometimes suggested to have been penned by one or all twelve of the Apostles, it reached its final form in the 8th century. The Apostles' Creed has been accepted by both eastern and western churches. As J.I. Packer describes this summary of the Christian faith: "If life is a cross-country journey, then the million-word-long Holy Bible is the large-scale map with everything in it, and the hundred-word Apostles' Creed is the simplified road map, ignoring much but enabling you to see at a glance the main points of Christian belief."¹ The Apostles' Creed is, "not the production of the apostles, as was formerly believed, but an admirable popular summary of the apostolic teaching, and in full harmony with the spirit and even the letter of the New Testament"².

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of the heaven and earth;

and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary;
he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried; he descended into hell
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead

I believe in the Holy Spirit;
In the holy catholic church
the communion of saints
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body
and the life ever lasting.³

¹ J.I. Packer, *I Want to be A Christian*, 20-21.

² Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1. Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
(<https://ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/creeds1/cache/creeds1.pdf>), 35

³ Adapted from *A Treasure of Early Christianity*. Anne Fremantle, eds. Scranton, PA: MacMillan Co, 1953, 327

The Nicene Creed (325 A.D.)

“The Nicene Creed is widely regarded as the basis for orthodox [correct] Christianity in both eastern and western Churches.... As part of its polemic against the Arians, the Council of Nicea (June 325) formulated a short statement of faith, based on a baptism creed used at Jerusalem. This creed was intended to affirm the full divinity of Christ against the Arian understanding of his creaturely status.”⁴

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty, the maker of all things seen and unseen.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God;
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,
 God from God,
 Light from Light,
 very God from very God,
begotten, not made;
being of one substance with the Father.
through whom all things in heaven and earth came into being;
who on account of us human beings and our salvation came down from heaven
 And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man:
 And He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and buried
 And on the third day rose again,
 And, ascended into the heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father:
 and He will come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead
 Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit.
 The Lord and Giver of life,
 Who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.⁵
 Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets

And I believe in one catholic and apostolic Church:
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
And I look for the resurrection of the dead;
And for the life of the world to come.⁶

As for those who say that ‘there was when he was not,’ and ‘before being born he was not,’ and ‘he came into existence out of nothing,’ or who declare that the Son of God is of a different substance or nature, or is subject to alteration or change — the catholic and apostolic church condemns these.⁷

⁴ Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* 4th ed.

⁵ This short clause caused the great schism of 1054, dividing Eastern and Western Churches

⁶ Adapted from *A Treasure of Early Christianity*. Anne Fremantle, eds. Scranton, PA: MacMillan Co, 1953, 328

⁷ Adopted from Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* 4th ed.

The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed, while not written by Athanasius of Alexandria, reflects his writing and shows the unique persons of each member of the Trinity while uniting their essence in the being and substance of the Trinity. This creed “has been widely used in the West among Anglicans, Catholics, and Protestants.... Parallels between [the Athanasian Creed] and letters sent from the Council of Constantinople in 382 seem to confirm the period 381-428 as the time of its writing.”⁸

Whoever will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.

Anyone who does not keep whole and unbroken will perish in eternity.

And the catholic faith is this:

that we worship one God in Trinity and, and Trinity in Unity.

Neither blending their Persons, nor dividing their essence.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is One.

The glory co-equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

What quality the Father has, the Son has and the Holy Spirit has.

The Father is uncreated, The Son is uncreated, The Holy Spirit is uncreated.

The Father is immeasurable. the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;

There is but one eternal being.

So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings

There is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty: and the Holy Spirit almighty.

And yet they are not three almighties: but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.

And yet they are not three gods: but one God.

Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord.

And yet not three lords: but one lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us,

to confess each person individually

As both God and Lord,

So catholic religion forbids us

to say that there are three gods, or three lords.

⁸ Samuel Mikolaski in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (revised)

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, neither made, nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers, one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is before, or after other:

none is greater or less than another.

In their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So, in everything, as was said before

We must worship their trinity in their unity and their unity in their trinity.

This is what it means to be saved: that one should think about the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary for eternal salvation

To believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ,

the Son of God is both God and man:

God, of the substance of the Father,

begotten before the worlds;

and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world.

Completely God and completely human

With a rational soul and human flesh

Equal to the Father in his divinity, less than the Father in his humanity

Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two but one.

Yet Christ is not two, but one.

He is one,

Not by the conversion of his divinity being turned into flesh,

But by God's taking humanity to Himself.

He is one, not by the blending of his being, but the unity of his person.

For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh,

So too the one Christ is both God and human.

He suffered for our salvation,

He descended into hell, rose again from the dead on the third day,

and ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty,

from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

At whose coming the dead shall bodily rise

And give an account of their deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life,

And those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith:

One cannot be saved without believing it faithfully.⁹

⁹ Adopted from A Treasure of Early Christianity. Anne Fremantle, eds. Scranton, PA: MacMillan Co, 1953, 329-331.

The Creed of Chalcedon

—The Chalcedonian Definition of the Christian faith (451)

“The Council of Chalcedon (451) laid down an understanding of the relation of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ which became normative for the Christian church, both east and west. Notice how the council is adamant that Christ must be accepted to be truly divine and truly human, without specifying precisely how this is to be understood.”¹⁰

Following the holy Fathers, we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of once substance with us in relation to his humanity, and is like us in all things apart from sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was begotten of the Father before time in relation to his divinity, and in these recent days, was born from the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos*, for us and for our salvation. In relation to the humanity, he is one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the only-begotten, who is to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. This distinction of natures is in no way abolished on account of this union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature is preserved, and concurring into one Person and one Substance, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two person, but remains one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord,, Jesus Christ; even as the Prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers was handed down to us.”¹¹

¹⁰ Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* 4th ed, 281

¹¹ Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* 4th ed, 281-282.

Appendix ii

Please choose one of the follow articles, engaging and affirming each of the five key statements.

Article 1:

God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.

(1) We believe in one God, (2) Creator of all things, (3) holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in (4) a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (5) Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

Article 4:

God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.

(1) We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, (2) fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (3) He lived a sinless life, (4) was crucified under Pontius Pilate, (5) arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.