

History 500 Ancient and Medieval Christianity **Spring 2017 Course outline**

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Introduction

This course will examine the history of Christian thought from the beginnings of the Common Era until the high middle ages, with special attention to the formative centuries of the patristic period. The course is designed to be primarily a history of Christian thought to enable future ministers and other Christian leaders to know the basic grammar of Christian speech, some of the contours along which it evolved, some of the detours it sought to avoid (that is “heresies”) on the way to being able practitioners of Christian speech themselves. No course could cover such an expanse of time in the depth and breadth it deserves. So this course will attempt both to hit the highlights of doctrinal history (the formation of the canon, the relationship to Judaism, the rise of monasticism, the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, plus a few key thinkers in the middle ages). Students will spend extra time in the thought of Sts. Augustine, Gregory Nazianzen, Cyril of Alexandria, Anselm, and Julian of Norwich, with special emphasis on their doctrines of God, Christ, salvation, and the church.

Alisdair MacIntyre speaks of a tradition as an argument about what the tradition is. If you care about the future shape of Christianity—you’re in, here’s your seat at the table. If you don’t, we understand. But as a steward of this memory your role at the table is to conduct others (namely all the baptized) into their place in the argument. Herbert McCabe argues that “We don’t know what Christians will believe in the 24th century, but we know they won’t be Arians or Nestorians.” Those roads have been cut off. Countless open roads remain. Why were those roads cut off? In what form do old heresies reemerge? And what are the faithful roads that remain—and how can we walk them in ways informed by Nicaea and Chalcedon? And why would we want to do that?! (or do we?).

Competencies

1-To be able to read, evaluate, summarize, and engage with a sophisticated document in the history of Christian thought. Students will not read everything (no one has!). But they should be able to identify an author’s key set of concerns, his or her community, its antagonists, and the goal for which she or he writes.

2-Basic familiarity with the timelines and locations of the history of the church, the rise of our creeds, the key crossroads and reasons one route was taken over another, and ongoing problems (such as ecclesial divisions east and west, Chalcedonian and not, etc). We will demonstrate this in this course with a midterm and a final, but students will demonstrate their familiarity more deeply over the course of their ministries.

3-Ability to put the church fathers and mothers to use. The course will use “story questions” from hypothetical ministry contexts and ask students to integrate their primary and secondary reading into a contemporary doctrinal and pastoral context. Knowledge of history is necessary but not sufficient. We have to know how to deploy that knowledge for the healing of the wounds in our community and world.

Assignments: For all students:

- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Thoughtful, engaged participation in class discussion and activities
- Completion of assigned readings
- Four reflections on the primary sources we’ll read during the semester. These will be not more than one thousand words each. Students will be asked to summarize the author’s argument using salient examples (students will get to skip one of the five primary authors to focus on the other four)
- Midterm and final which will be a combination of memory work (dates, names, relationships) and, more importantly, essay questions.

Required Texts

Primary

Anselm “Why God Became Man” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford World’s Classics 2008), 260-356.

Augustine *Confessions* trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press 2009).

Julian of Norwich *Showings* in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. Edmund Colledge (Novalis 2002).

St. Cyril of Alexandria *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John A. McGuckin (St. Vladimir’s 2015).

St. Gregory Nazianzus *On God and Christ* (St. Vladimir’s, 2002).

William Placher *Readings in the History of Christian Theology Vol. 1 From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* (Westminster/John Knox 1988). ISBN 0664240577

Secondary

David Hart *The Story of Christianity* (Quercus 2008). ISBC 1847241409 (there is a Kindle version of this book, but the visuals are really helpful!).

Alister McGrath *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. 2nd edition (Wiley-Blackwell 2012) ISBN 0470672862 pp 1-76. McGrath is a theologian more than a historian, and only the patristic portion of this book is necessary, though the medieval material (pp 77-123) is valuable as well.

Recommended Texts

Gary Anderson *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Westminster, 2002).

Roberta Bondi *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Fortress, 1991).

John Bossy *Christianity in the West* (Oxford University Press 1985).

Peter Brown *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago, 2014).

___ *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Fortress, 1984)

Justo Gonzalez *The Story of Christianity. Vol 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (HarperOne, 2010).

Margaret Miles *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

Robert Payne *The Holy Fire: The Story of the Early Centuries of the Christian Church in the Near East* (St. Vladimir's 1997).

Jaroslav Pelikan *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine Vols 1 & 2* (University of Chicago, 1975 & 1980).

___ *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (Yale, 1999).

___ *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (Yale, 1998).

Rodney Stark *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Harper San Francisco 1997).

Robert Wilken *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (Yale, 2003).

___ *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (Yale, 2005).

Rowan Williams *Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (Cowley 2003).