

**Reformed Theological Seminary**  
**6HT502 The History of Christianity I**  
Wednesday nights, 7.30pm to 10.00pm  
Dr Chad Van Dixhoorn

**Contact**

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**Office hours:** I am happy to meet with students. Please email for an appointment time.

**Weekly library night:** Given that RTS DC does not yet enjoy its own library, I will offer a ‘library night’ and, if there is the demand, a ‘library day’ each week in our home. This will provide students the opportunity to read assigned texts that they may not wish to purchase, or to read more widely on a subject that interests them.

**Key issues in theology and apologetics in the history of the church**

The history of Christianity is, among other things, a history of ideas. These ideas shape the Christian church and contribute to our convictions as believers. This course aims to provide an overview of Church history and theology from the time of the Apostles to the birth of Martin Luther in a breathtaking twenty-five hours of class time – supplemented, of course, by many additional hours of reading time. While obviously a whistle-stop tour, I do hope that each one of you will get a feel for the contours of the Christian faith as they were ‘hammered out’ in the patristic and medieval eras.

This course aims to acquaint us with our past, and help us interpret the present. But since Christianity has been shaped as much by its failures as by its triumphs, these lectures will trace both the low and high points in the history of Christian doctrine and experience. Significant emphasis will be placed on key moments and key thinkers in church history. But we will also try to reflect on the lives of normal Christian people and ordinary Christian pastors. It was the collective experience of God’s people, often in the ordinary settings of worship, church government or pastoral counselling that helped clarify the central truths of God’s word in the midst of persecution, heresy, and confusion.

**In class**

It is my conviction that reformation in the church today must involve a willingness not only to hear what the Holy Spirit is teaching us today, but to listen to what he has taught our brothers and sisters in the past. In this course students will have the opportunity to read and discuss primary source material each week as we examine the doctrine of God, the Scriptures and their formation, and the fall into sin. We will listen to what our forebears had to say about the good news of redemption planned, accomplished and applied. We will try to deepen our understanding of the church, Christian worship, the sacraments, and the formation and relevance of creeds and confessions, each from an historical and theological perspective.

While first seeking to understand the history of Christian doctrine on its own grounds and for its own sake, most lectures contain apologetic undertones and will answer questions which are still relevant today: how did early Christians engage with pagan culture? How did the medieval theologians confront the teachings of Islam? How are we to answer critics of the Bible today?

Our heritage is a rich and varied one. I hope this course will equip teacher and student alike to be better articulate, defend and live out the gospel in our pluralistic society.

### **At home**

Students will have extensive take-home reading, as well as readings in class. They would be well-advised to read ahead in the two class texts by Chadwick (or Hall) and Southern. It may also be wise to read the two classic texts that we will read in full: Augustine's inimitable *Confessions*, and Anselm's medieval classic, *Why the God man?* (best known by its Latin title, *Cur Deus Homo*).

The students should probably purchase these texts, as well as the *New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, revised ed., 1987 or later). If this presents a problem, texts may also be read in the weekly library session(s). The number of pages read for this course, although significant, will be lower than some other three-hour classes at RTS. The main texts are an easy, even delightful read. Each of the authors has been chosen not only for their astonishing knowledge of their period, but for their ability to write in an engaging manner. Here, reading may edge toward entertainment.

Many of the primary texts, on the other hand, are more difficult to penetrate. It is for this reason that the reading load has been adjusted downward. Most of these texts will be distributed in class, usually one week prior to the class in which they will be discussed. Here, reading will be work, but hopefully an investment that will pay long-term dividends.

*Please read the first four primary source readings (the three martyrdoms and Justin Martyr's Dialogue) for the first day of class.*

### **Reading list**

#### **Secondary sources (circa 650pp.)**

\*1. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 300pp., smaller paperback.

OR Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and practice in the early church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 250pp., larger paperback (designed to complement the *New Eusebius*)

\*2. Sir Richard Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the middle ages* (London: Penguin, 1970), 350pp.

#### **Primary sources (circa 500-600pp) including, but not limited to:**

1. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in *New Eusebius*, pp. 23-29
2. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapters 1-13, and 142; then read each chapter heading in the book and then select five more chapters of your choice to read. For a free version of the text, see <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.html>.

3. *Martyrdom of Justin*, in *New Eusebius*, pp. 32-34 (class)
4. *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*, in *New Eusebius*, pp. 34-43
5. Copies of decrees, etc. in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history*, Bk X, Chs 5-7 (pp. 426-433)
6. Augustine, *On marriage and concupiscence* (selections, (3pp.))
7. \*Augustine, *Confessions*, any edition, approx. 220pp.
8. *Gospel of Thomas* (selections; in class reading)
9. Chrysostom, *On the priesthood*, (selections of 12pp.)
10. Creeds: *The Apostles'*, *Nicene*, *Niceno-Constantinopolitan*, *Athanasian*, and *Chalcedonian* (3pp.)
11. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule* (selections)
12. \*Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in, e.g., *Anselm of Canterbury: the major works*, 100pp.
13. Innocent III, *Between God and man* (pp. 1-15)
14. Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae* (selections)
15. Wycliffe, *On the church* (selections)

### **Recommended reading**

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The emergence of the catholic tradition* (Chicago: Chicago, 1971), 350pp.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The growth of medieval theology* (Chicago: Chicago, 1978), 300 pp.

**Note on primary texts:** Many of the works of the church fathers were translated into English in rival nineteenth-century collections, American and British. The collections prior to the time of the first council of Nicea (325) are entitled *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Those at and after the council and continuing to the time of the second council of Nicea (787) are collected in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Many or most of the primary sources listed below are freely available in these editions and can be found simply by 'Googling' the title of the work. For additional texts, see <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/>

Modern, often smoother, translations with up-to-date scholarly apparatus can be found in the following series: *The fathers of the Church*; *Ancient Christian writers*; and, for Augustine's vast corpus, *The works of Saint Augustine*.

### **Assessment**

#### **Examinations**

Each student's understanding of the material will be assessed by examination only. There will be two exams. (1) The first, covering the first part of the course, will be worth 30% of the course grade. This one-hour exam is designed to help students get a sense of their own comprehension of the course material and will aid students in preparing for the final examination. (2) The second, three-hour exam,

covers the entirety of the course and is worth 70% of the course grade. It is expected that most students will not need the full three hours to complete the examination.

Typical examination questions may include the following four elements:

- **Essays** (perhaps choosing two or three of four or five major themes to discuss). The students discuss the history and theology of the relevant theme and, where appropriate, the differing perspectives presented in assigned texts and class lectures.
- **Chronological arrangements** Students will be asked to recall the names of fifteen to twenty theologians or heretics and list them in order of their birth.
- **Identifications** Students will be asked to
  - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians
  - the titles of one or two books by each theologian (but no less than 15 total)
  - provide two-sentence descriptions of each title
- **Map placements** Students will be asked to
  - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians and place them in the country where they served
  - recall ten to twelve church councils and synods in the country where they were held.

All persons, councils and places mentioned in the student's answers must be those within the chronological frame of the course. The same persons can be mentioned in chronological arrangements, identifications and map placements.

## RTS Grading Scale

The seminary uses the following grading system:

<b>A</b>	<b>(97-100)</b>	<b>4.00 quality points</b>
<b>A-</b>	<b>(94-96)</b>	<b>3.66</b>
<b>B+</b>	<b>(91-93)</b>	<b>3.33</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>(88-90)</b>	<b>3.00</b>
<b>B-</b>	<b>(86-87)</b>	<b>2.66</b>
<b>C+</b>	<b>(83-85)</b>	<b>2.33</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>(80-82)</b>	<b>2.00</b>
<b>C-</b>	<b>(78-79)</b>	<b>1.66</b>
<b>D+</b>	<b>(75-77)</b>	<b>1.33</b>

<b>D</b>	(72-74)	<b>1.00</b>
<b>D-</b>	(70-71)	<b>0.66</b>
<b>F</b>	(below 70)	<b>0.00</b>
<b>I</b>	(incomplete)	<b>0.00</b>
<b>W,WP</b>	(withdraw, withdraw passing)	<b>0.00</b>
<b>S</b>	(satisfactory)	<b>0.00</b>

The grade "I" indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination. A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an "I" grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to "F."

In addition to providing a grading scale, I think it is helpful to see the elements I will be looking for in your essay questions. I have adapted the following from guidelines used for undergraduates in my previous place of employment. You may find this useful. You may find it distracting (in which case, just do your best!) It is merely an attempt to try to articulate in words some of the thoughts that a grader will have in marking your examination papers.

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Addressing the question</b>	<b>Quality of Argument</b>	<b>Range of knowledge and understanding</b>
<b>A</b>	Work which engages closely with the question and addresses its broader implications, demonstrating the ability to engage with abstract issues. The structure of the answer will allow a clear, coherent unfolding of the writer's argument. Descriptive and factual elements will be linked effectively to the argument, and their relevance to the issues under discussion made clear.	Work which displays the ability to use the knowledge at the writer's disposal to the very best effect. Linguistically and structurally the writing will be clear, authoritative and to the point. Where relevant students will be aware of scholarly debate or difference of opinion, but will go beyond merely paraphrasing the ideas of others and demonstrate their own conceptual command. In this sense work should be original rather than derivative. It may, more rarely, also be original in the sense of putting forward persuasive and well-supported new ideas or making unexpected conclusions.	Work which displays an impressively wide range of knowledge and critical understanding, drawing on evidence relevant to the question and showing awareness of the conclusions of other writers. Awareness of argument and interpretation will be held in an appropriate balance with factual information, so that the work is neither too generalising nor too weighed down by detail. Students will show the ability to evaluate the knowledge at their disposal, where necessary identifying apparent contradictions and resolving them.
<b>B</b>	Work within this class can cover a broad range of achievement. It will display understanding of the question and will deploy a range of relevant evidence in answering it. At best it will be regularly, but not consistently, analytical, perhaps failing to explore all	Work which displays the ability to deploy ideas and knowledge to create a sustained argument. The answer will shape the structure of the work rather than emerging piecemeal, but will lack the conceptual grasp of a grade A answer, demonstrating rather the ability to synthesis the view of others. At the top of the range this will be done persuasively and efficiently, but work	Work which at best reveals a high density of relevant knowledge and deploys it effectively, demonstrating an awareness of critical issues. Nevertheless the work falls short of the highest standards in some way, perhaps by an imbalance between information and interpretation. At the bottom of the scale this imbalance may be marked, or the knowledge

	the implications of the issue under discussion, or not bringing out the full relevance of the evidence cited. These weaknesses will be more marked at the bottom of grade B.	towards the bottom of the scale, although competently structured, will lack sharpness. There may be a tendency to state ideas, rather than analysing them, or the answer may rest on unsupported claims.	deployed may at times seem hackneyed and imprecise.
<b>C</b>	Work which may make some relevant points but is inadequately focussed on the specific question under discussion, leaving the reader to draw out the implications of what is being said. The structure of the answer is likely to be dictated by the information available to the writer, rather than by the requirements of the question under discussion. The implications of the question may have been overlooked or misunderstood.	Work in which the ideas and knowledge at the writer's disposal are presented as an end in themselves, rather than as an answer to the question at hand. Such argument as there is may be fragmentary or unfocussed, or may be explicitly addressed only in the opening and closing paragraphs. Stylistically as well as structurally the presentation of ideas may be rather clumsy, with points imperfectly explained. There is likely to be a sense of other people's ideas being repeated uncritically; and at worst the accretion of points may give rise to unreconciled contradictions, or raise issues which are not explored.	Work which displays a degree of knowledge sufficient to answer the question only at a relatively generalising level, in which statements are supported by trite or imprecise evidence, such as a tendency to simplify the thoughts of other writers or to stumble over factual detail.
<b>D+</b>	Work which makes little sustained attempt to develop an answer in response to the question or which does so at a superficial level. The presentation of what the writer is able to remember will, to a very marked extent, take precedence over the development of an answer in response to the question.	Work which makes only a rudimentary attempt to develop a sustained answer, with the question treated as a peg upon which to hang any available ideas. The answer is likely to take the form of bald assertions, which may themselves be trite or hackneyed but which are not developed into a coherent line of thought. Structurally and linguistically the presentation may be muddled or unclear.	Work which demonstrates either too little knowledge or too little understanding to provide an acceptable answer, or at worst to sustain a full length answer. The information deployed may be misremembered or vague, or may reveal actual misunderstanding. The views of others may be distorted.
<b>D, D-</b>	Work with only occasional glimmers of any answer, based mainly on what little the writer can remember.	Work which makes little if any attempt to develop a sustained argument. Any answer is likely to take the form of unsupported assertions. Structurally and linguistically the presentation is likely to be muddled or unclear.	Work which demonstrates only a vague knowledge or understanding, with either actual mistakes or insufficient detail.
<b>F</b>	Work which makes no sustained attempt to develop an answer in relation to the question, or where what the writer can remember does not amount to an argument.	Work which makes no attempt to develop an answer, but simply makes unsupported and often disconnected assertions. Structurally and linguistically the presentation will be muddled, unclear or otherwise deficient.	Work which demonstrates knowledge that is so deficient, vague, distorted or inaccurate, as to provide no basis for an acceptable answer.

### **Class advice**

Please come on time or, if you cannot come on time, come early.

Please come to each class prepared, with the reading finished. From the first class, I will call on students to discuss assigned material. It is a courtesy to teacher and fellow students alike if your class contributions are informed by prior study.

Please ask questions in class. I will establish the boundaries and let you know when I need to press on in delivering information and when we should stop to enjoy a discussion. But a certain amount of class time is set aside each week for discussion and I would be disappointed if we did not pack it with useful comments and queries.

Give some thought to your questions. There is no question too simple to ask (although there are many that are too difficult to answer). But please do not stop the class to regale it with stories, ride hobby-horses, play teacher to your fellow students, or ask to have a word spelled.

Please turn off cell phones. Checking your mobile phone in a class discussion or lecture is as thoughtless as checking it while holding a conversation with another person.