

6HT502 - Historical Theology I: Christianity from the Beginnings to the Reformation

Reformed Theological Seminary – Washington, DC (3 credit hrs).

9:00-5:00, June 7 - June 11, 2010

Class Location: West End Presbyterian Church, 9008 Quioccasin Road, Richmond, VA 23229

Instructor: Dr. Timothy McConnell (tim@studycenter.net); (434) 817-1050.

Center for Christian Study, 128 Chancellor St., Charlottesville, VA 22903.

Synopsis: Historical theology is the discipline of learning the basic doctrines of Christianity in their setting in history, as they were first argued. In this course, students will learn enough history to outline the arguments over the doctrine of God, the Trinity, Christology, and the Holy Spirit as they emerged in the Patristic Period up to the eve of the Reformation. Christian doctrine emerges out of careful argumentation over the meaning of Scripture. Along the way, students will encounter the issues of canonization of the Bible and the rejection of protest exegesis (Gnosticism). The net result is an introduction to the basics of Christian theology in historical setting, preparing the student for strength in further study of systematic theology or church history. Students should come to this class with a basic background in the Bible and the history of western civilization.

“The path to theological maturity leads necessarily through the study of the Christian past, and this requires a kind of spiritual and intellectual apprenticeship. Before we become masters we must become disciples. From the great thinkers of Christian history, we learn how to use the language of faith, to understand the inner logic of theological ideas, to discern the relation between seemingly disparate concepts, to discover what is central and what peripheral, and to love God above all things. Before we learn to speak on our own we must allow others to form our words and guide our thoughts. Historical theology is an exercise in humility, for we discover that theology is as much a matter of receiving as it is of constructing, that it has to do with the heart as well as with the intellect, with character as well as with doctrines, with love as well as with understanding.” Robert Louis Wilken

Course Requirements:

Final Paper (7-10 pages)	40%
Final Exam	35%
Three 1-page Responses	15%
Class Participation	10%

Reformed Theological Seminary determines grades on a graduated scale (97-100, A; 94-96, A-; 91-93, B+; 88-90, B; 86-87, B-; 83-85, C+; 80-82, C; 78-79, C-; 75-77, D+; 72-74, D; 70-71, D-). See Catalogue, p. 45.

Required Texts:

Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale, 2003).

Edward Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

St Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 1980).
Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New City Press, 2002).
All assigned readings found in the class online toolkit.

Recommended Texts for Further Study:

Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).
John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2 vols (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).
Jean Danielou, *Gregory of Nyssa: From Glory to Glory* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).
Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann's, 2003).
J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th Edition (Edinburgh: Continuum, 2000).
Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).
Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word, 1995).
Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).
Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995).
Rowan Williams, *The Making of Orthodoxy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word, 1995).
Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

Agenda:

The course will run through seven units. Readings must be done beforehand, and you will not be able to keep up with these readings if you neglect them prior to the course. In other words, do the readings PRIOR TO THE COURSE. The schedule will be (roughly): Monday, Units 1-2; Tuesday, Units 3-4; Wednesday, Unit 5; Thursday, Units 6-7; Friday, Unit 7.

The **Final Exam** will be Friday from 3:00 to 5:00. The **Final Paper** is due two weeks later, sent in by email to the instructor (or mailed).

Unit 1 – Introduction, The Beginnings of Christianity: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; The Doctrine of God: Ignatius of Antioch; Martyrdom and Witness; Logos Theology: Justin Martyr and the Apologists; Clement of Alexandria.

Read: Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Ephesians, Letter to Romans*; Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*

Behr, *The Scriptural Christ*; McGrath p. 1-10, 17-27; N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; (Litfin, *Ignatius of Antioch*); McGrath, 86-93; Wilken, *Founded on the Cross of Christ*, 1-24.

**note: readings in parenthesis are optional.

Unit 2 - The Trinity. Irenaeus of Lyons; Origen of Alexandria; Moving toward Nicaea; Athanasius of Alexandria; Arius; Council at Nicaea 325.

Read: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies (extracts)*; Origen, *On First Principles* 1.pref – 1.3; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Hardy)

Wilken, *Seek His Face Always*, 80-109. Litfin, *Athanasius*, 165-187.

Unit 3 - Trinity and Creation. Aetius and Eunomius; Basil of Caesarea and the Cappadocians; Constantinople 381; Creation ex nihilo; Canon and Creed

Read: Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*.

McGrath, 61-72; Torrance, *The Almighty Creator*, 76-109; Wilken, *The End Given in the Beginning*, 136-161; McGrath, 27-32; Carson/Moo/Morris, *New Testament Canon*, 487-500; (Behr, *Tradition and Canon*, 17-48).

Unit 4 - Christology. Jesus Christ in Two Natures; Apollinaris and the Cappadocians; Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria; Council at Ephesus 431. Council at Chalcedon 451; Maximus the Confessor.

Read: Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*, 160-176 (Hardy). Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, *Letters*, 346-354 (Hardy); *The Tome of Leo; The Chalcedonian Decree*

McGrath, 32-33, 51-61; Litfin, *Cyril of Alexandria*. Wilken, *Not My Will But Thine*, 110-135.

Unit 5 - Original Sin and Saving Grace. Augustine of Hippo. Origins of Christian Mysticism. Origen; Gregory of Nyssa; Pseudo-Dionysius.

Read: Augustine, *Confessions*, Books 1-10; Origen, *Prologue to Commentary on the Song of Songs*; Gregory of Nyssa, *Extracts—From Glory to Glory*.

McGrath, 72-85; Wilken, *The Knowledge of Sensuous Intelligence*, 291-312; (*Epilogue*, 313-321).

Unit 6 - The Christian Monastic tradition; From Monks to Scholars; Medieval Scholasticism; Anselm of Canterbury; Thomas Aquinas

Read: Basil of Caesarea, *The Ascetical Life, Renunciation of the World, and The Equipment of the Monk*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* selections (disregard footnotes).

Wilken, *Happy the People Whose God is the Lord*, 186-211; McGrath, 94-108; 113-123; (123-126); 127-139.

Unit 7 – Eve of Reformation: Popes and Crusades; From John Wycliffe to Erasmus of Rotterdam; Martin Luther’s Reformation

Read: Erasmus, *Handbook for the Militant Christian, Part One*, p. 28-40 (skip introduction; read sections 1-2; sections 3-7 are optional). Martin Luther, *Freedom of the Christian*. (skip intro letters).

Shelley, 183-193, 224-233; McGrath 116-117, 146-150. (McGrath, *Dangerous Idea: Chapter 1-The Gathering Storm*). McGrath, 156-176; 184-195; Shelly, 237-246. (McGrath, *Dangerous Idea: Chapter 2-The Accidental Revolutionary*).

Teaching Philosophy:

This course is a reading course at the master’s level. I put my confidence in the readings, and in the importance of learning to read material that comes to us from these different ages in history. The point of the lectures is to fill historical gaps, to pull out and examine the particular theological movements that the readings engage, and to give the student enough preliminary information to allow him or her to read the primary material effectively. Please do try to read as much of the primary material as you can. It will serve you well in the long term, as well as in the grading.

Evaluations:

Final Exam. A study guide will be distributed when the class begins. There are a great deal of terms and definitions required for studying this period of history, and the exam will focus primarily on these. McGrath p. 24-27, 37-38, 344-354, will help you a great deal.

Responses. Each student will turn in one page responses to three different primary source readings (i.e., readings from ancient Christianity). Double spaced. The response should introduce the author, outline the major argument, and set its importance in history including a date and the context surrounding the work and (optionally) its importance to

your own faith in Christ. One of these three MUST be either on Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, or Augustine, *Confessions*.

Final Paper. An essay of 7-10 pages length, double spaced, on a topic agreed upon beforehand with the professor, or selected from below. An 'A' paper will focus on the primary source material, draw outside material from the students own research, and interact with secondary source material referenced in this syllabus. It should be footnoted. Pay particular attention to the Bible and its use in the argument.

Topics:

- (1) Why is martyrdom an important aspect of early Christian history and doctrine?
- (2) According to Athanasius, why did God become human in Christ?
- (3) Was the argument over the Holy Spirit important to understanding the nature of the Trinity? How did Basil contribute?
- (4) What is conversion? What does Augustine's conversion teach the Church about the power of God?
- (5) Is Gregory of Nyssa's *Answer to Ablabius: Why We Should Not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods* (Hardy) a good defense of the doctrine of the Trinity?
- (6) Is the Chalcedonian Decree an adequate explanation of the doctrine of Christology? Does it satisfy the Gospel witness to Jesus Christ?
- (7) What role does justification by faith play in the Reformation?
- (8) According to Anselm, why did God become human in Christ? What were some competing theories of the atonement to his?
- (9) How did the axiom *Sola Scriptura* shape Protestantism?

TPM.