



Birmingham Theological Seminary  
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Birmingham, Alabama 35243  
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## Early & Medieval Church History Syllabus

**Semester:** Fall 2024

**Course:** HT1300 Early & Medieval  
Church History

**Day & Time:** Mondays, 5:30-7:30 PM

**Room:** A201

**Professor:** Dr. Ben Birdsong

**Credits:** 2

**Email:** ben@benbirdsong.com

**Phone:** 205-907-6623

**Course Note:** This is the first of two survey classes that cover the field of church history with Reformation and Modern Church History being the second class. These classes do not have to be taken in order.

**Course Description:** This course presents a survey of the history of the Christian church from the first century to the end of the fifteenth century. We will survey the major movements, doctrines, persons, and institutions that arose within the church and their effect on the development of the church. Our emphasis will be the development of a doctrinal understanding in the church as well as careful study of selected key individuals whose lives should inspire us to biblical faithfulness today.

### Course Objectives:

- Name and discuss major events and major contributions of main persons in the history of the Christian church from the first through the fifteenth century.
- Understand major theological developments in the history of the Christian church from the first through the fifteenth century.
- Become familiar with some of the more important theological terms and concepts and thus be better equipped to understand and engage intelligently in theological discussion.
- Be able to define the major heresies and schisms in the history of the Christian church from the first through the fifteenth century.
- Be spiritually enriched through an encounter with the work of great Christians in the history of the Christian church from the first through the fifteenth century.

### Required Texts:

- Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (311 Pages)
- Eusebius. *The History of the Church*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1990. (480 Pages)

- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. New York: Harper One, 2010. (528 Pages)

### **Collateral or Recommended Texts:**

- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Hill, Jonathan. *The History of Christian Thought*. Oxford: Lion, 2003.
- Placher, William C. and Derek R. Nelson. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology: Volume 1: From It's Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015.

### **Course Requirements and Assessments:**

In preparation for class discussion, reading assignments should be completed before the class that they are noted on the syllabus.

**All papers should be submitted in Microsoft Word Document format by email to [ben@benbirdsong.com](mailto:ben@benbirdsong.com) by the end of the class period on the due date.**

**Weekly Reading Reflections** will be a single-page response to the week's assigned readings. Summarize the main points of the reading that impacted you and discuss how the ideas/themes of the reading have shaped today's church or have been forgotten by today's church. These reading reflections are due to the professor via email at the beginning of class.

**Response Paper to Augustine's *Confessions*** will be a 10-12 page paper. The paper should include at least 8 additional sources. You will select one of the topics below related to this work:

- *Confessions* is Augustine's spiritual autobiography. How does Augustine's understanding and approach to a Christian "testimony" relate to how we would define a conversion story in the church today? Are there elements in Augustine's faith journey that might not be as prevalent in a modern-day testimony?
- Sin, temptation, and the body become primary themes for Augustine in *Confessions*. How does Augustine seek to define these three ideas? How do they relate together both theologically and personally for Augustine? How have his ideas helped shape the church on these topics?
- How does Augustine's view of God change as he goes on his own spiritual journey? Are there certain attributes of God that he tends to relate to more in different seasons of his journey? Why do you think this is the case? How do circumstances change our own view of God and His attributes?
- What people and ideas influenced Augustine's own theological understanding in *Confessions*? What approach did he take in determining which voices to follow and which to avoid? How have his decisions in these areas been reflected through others figures in church history?

- Examine Augustine's comments about women and women's roles in the *Confessions*. Where do women appear (and not appear) in the text? What does Augustine see as the proper relationship between men and women? How might his view of sexuality and experiences with sexual brokenness influence his ideas about women?

**Biographical Presentation** will be a creative and engaging oral presentation of 5-7 minutes explaining the significance of a figure in Early and Medieval Church History from the list below (if you want to present a person not on this list, email the professor a proposal with the name and reason you want to study this person).

We understand that, due to the fall, there are no perfect people, so each presentation should include both the positive and negative impacts of the person's life and ministry.

An **informative handout is required**, and other visual aids are encouraged if they add to your presentation (multimedia presentation tools are great but do not show video clips). On the back of the handout, provide a list of references you used in gathering information (list at least three reliable academic sources other than texts assigned for this class). Be prepared to field questions from the professor and other students at the end of the presentation.

**NOTE: You should send a list of three people in order of your preference to the professor by email no later than September 23rd.** Requests will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis, so earlier requests will receive preference. Requests may begin to be sent after the end of our first class time on Monday, September 9<sup>th</sup>. If you include a name not on the list below, include a brief explanation of the reason this person is worthy of a presentation in an Early and Medieval Church History class.

Possible presentation subjects:

- Ambrose
- Arius
- Athanasius
- Augustine
- Basil
- Clement
- Cyprian
- Gregory of Nyssa
- Gregory of Nazianzus
- Ireneaus
- Jerome
- John Chrysostom
- John Huss

- John Wycliffe
- Julian
- Macrina
- Origen
- Pelagius
- Pliny
- Polycarp
- Tertullian

**Midterm Exam** of short-answer and essay questions will be administered to gauge the student's level of comprehension of the material covered throughout this course in the readings, lectures, and presentations. This exam will be open book and open notes and will be taken online to be submitted by 9:00 PM CST on October 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Final Exam** of short-answer and essay questions will be administered to gauge the student's level of comprehension of the material covered throughout this course in the readings, lectures, and presentations. This exam will be open book and open notes and will be taken online to be submitted by 9:00 PM CST on the final day of class.

## GRADING WEIGHT & COMMENTS

COURSE REQUIREMENT	GRADE WEIGHT	COMMENTS
Weekly Reading Reflections	15% of Grade	Due to the professor by email the beginning of class weekly.
Midterm Exam	20% of Grade	Administered online through Google Forms. Due by 9:00 PM CST on October 28 <sup>th</sup> .
Response Paper to Augustine's <i>Confessions</i>	25% of Grade	Due Monday, November 18 <sup>th</sup> .
Biographical Presentation	20% of Grade	Presentation dates to be assigned.
Final Exam	20% of Grade	Administered online through Google Forms. Due by 9:00 PM CST on the final day of class.

## **BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards:**

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. All papers are to be #12 font Times New Roman and Double-Spaced. Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Please see the BTS Turabian Style Guide for more information on turning in papers and assignments.

The BTS Turabian Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Writing Center webpage: <https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

## **BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy**

In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

## **Course Schedule:**

DAY	DATE	AGENDA/TOPIC	DUE ON THIS DAY/DATE
Monday	9/9	Class Introduction Syllabus Review	
Monday	9/16	The Early Church The Church Fathers	Reading (Eusebius, Chapters 1-2) Reading (Gonzalez, Chapters 1-4)
Monday	9/23	Jewish Persecution Rome vs. the Church	Reading (Eusebius, Chapters 3-6) Reading (Gonzalez, Chapters 5)
Monday	9/30	Early Heresies Defenders of the Church	Reading (Gonzalez, Chapter 7)
Monday	10/7	The Latin Fathers Tertullian Ireneaus Cyprian	Reading (Eusebius, Chapter 7-9) Reading (Gonzales, Chapters 9-12)
Monday	10/14	Development of the Canon Biblical Authority Arian Hersey Athanasius	Reading (Eusebius, Chapter 10) Reading (Gonzales, Chapters 8, 13-17)

DAY	DATE	AGENDA/TOPIC	DUE ON THIS DAY/DATE
Monday	10/21	<b>Fall Break</b>	<b>No Class</b>
Monday	10/28	Apollinarian and Nestorian Controversies Chalcedon	Reading (Gonzalez, Chapters 18-23, 28)
Monday	11/4	Midterm Exam (Online)	Midterm Exam is due at 9 PM on 10/28.
Monday	11/11	Augustine Augustine vs. Pelagius	Reading (Gonzalez, Chapters 24-26)
Monday	11/18	Augustine's <i>Confessions</i> Discussion	<b>Augustine Confessions Paper Due</b> Reading (Augustine, Confessions, Entire Book)
Monday	11/25	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>	<b>No Class</b>
Monday	12/2	Scholasticism Forerunners of the Reformation	Reading (Gonzalez, Chapters 27, 29-38)
Monday	12/9	Final Exam- Online	Final Exam is due at 9 PM on 12/9.

### Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to three classes with impunity.

### Class Policies and Procedures:

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- All assignments must be submitted by email by 11:59 (CDT/CST) on the due date.
- Late assignments will incur a -3 point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.
- Missed tests/exams may only be made up with an excused absence, preferably in advance of class. Excused absence tests/exams must be made up before the final day of the semester.

### Video Conference Policies and Procedures:

- Please utilize the BTS "Best VC (Video Conference) Practices" information for the course.
- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.

- In Video Conference, it is preferable for the student to keep their video on (when possible) so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in follow-up and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

### **Course Bibliography / Extended Bibliography**

*The Apostolic Fathers: Early Christian Writings*. Trans. Maxwell Staniforth. New York: Penguin Books, 1968. A collection of translations of writings from the Apostolic Fathers of the early church.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Saint Augustine's classic spiritual autobiography. An excellent biography of the thoughts and life of Augustine.

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1967.

Eusebius. *The History of the Church*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1990. Eusebius' writings and reflections on the development of the early Christian church.

Fitzgerald, Allan D. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. A systematic encyclopedia of Augustine's writings.

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. New York: Harper One, 2010. Gonzalez presents a concise overview of early and medieval church history with succinct highlights of major figures, events, and doctrines.

Hardy, Edward R. *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954. A selection of translations of original writings from the later church fathers.

Hill, Jonathan. *The History of Christian Thought*. Oxford: Lion, 2003. Hill provides concise overviews of major people, doctrines, and events throughout church history.

Kerr, Hugh T. *Readings in Christian Thought: Second Edition*. Nashville: Abington Press, 1990. A collection of selected writings from major figures throughout church history.  
Lightfoot, J. B. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978. A collection of translations of writings from the Apostolic Fathers of the early church.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 4 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1983. An excellent work on the history of the church.

Placher, William C. and Derek R. Nelson. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology: Volume 1: From It's Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. A compilation of segments from original writings from early and medieval church history.

Schaff, Phillip. *History of the Christian Church*. 6 vols. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910. A classic multi-volume set on the history of the Christian church.



### GRADING CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A to A-	B to B-	C to C-	D to D-
Correct spelling and grammar/punctuation	Minor errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation	Multiple errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation per page	Difficult to read due to English writing errors
Smooth writing that provides for effective and efficient reading	Writing is acceptable, but not as organized and coherent	Writing is not smooth, sometimes confusing and inconsistent	Writing lacks clarity, focus, structure, and is incoherent
Person and format are proper for assignment	Person and format are inconsistent	Person and format are not appropriate	Person and format are totally inappropriate
Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriately used, cited, and clearly supports main argument	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriate but need more depth and use of critical thinking	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are inadequate for main argument and do not reflect understanding	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are improperly used, over used, under used, or cited in error
Paper completely conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper generally conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper somewhat conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper does not conform to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>

## BTS Outcomes Evaluation

Outcome	Rank	Rational (one sentence)
Scripture	5	Students will engage with scripture as it shapes the history of the church and defines church doctrine.
Reformed Theology	5	Students will understand the development of reformed theology through the lens of church history.
Local Church	5	Students will consider how the issues and challenges of church history apply to the local church today.
Wisdom	4	Students will grow in their personal wisdom and character development as they learn from the examples of figures from church history.
Discipleship	4	Students will grow in their own discipleship methods as they understand how discipleship methods helped to shape Christians in past generations.
Communication	4	Students will grow in their communication skills as they present figures from church history to the class.
Worldview	5	Students will grow in their understanding of a biblical worldview as they see how figures from church history applied biblical truth to their own lives.
Leadership	5	Students will grow as church leaders from seeing the leadership successes and failures of Christians throughout church history and as they seek to apply the lessons of history to their current ministry contexts.