

UPPER MIDWEST COURSE OF STUDY SCHOOL
Morningside College Campus
Fall 2014

COS 212 Theological Heritage: Early & Medieval
Fall 2014 Syllabus
Class Sessions: September 12-13, October 17-18

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Course Description

This course reflects critically on significant individuals, decisive events, and fundamental tenets of the Christian faith as found in the early church and in medieval Christianity. The course is intended to acquaint students with the Christian heritage and to help them enter into the church's ongoing task of interpreting, articulating, and enacting the gospel for contemporary life. Some attention to primary documents is included.

Course Objectives

1. Examination of an emerging Christian orthodoxy in dialogue and debate with Gnosticism, Montanism, Marcionism, and Greek philosophy
2. Study of major theologians and church leaders whose writings focus on key doctrinal issues (for example, Origen, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas)
3. Engagement with pivotal theological concerns in their historical context (for example, faith and reason, predestination, eschatology)
4. Focus upon the distinctive aspects of Eastern Orthodox theologies compared with Roman Catholicism
5. Exploration of major theological developments in medieval Christianity
6. Appreciation and appropriation of the relevance of historical theology for pastoral ministry

Course Textbooks

Fry, Timothy, ed. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. The Liturgical Press, 1981. ISBN 0-8146-1272-5

Gonzales, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity. Volume 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. HarperOne, 2010 (second edition). ISBN 978-0061855887 It is important to get the second (or revised) edition, not the earlier 1984 version. The revisions are substantial and important, and the page numbers are different.

Placher, William C. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Volume 1: From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1988. ISBN 0-664-24057-7

Outline of Class Sessions

First Session (September 12-13)

See Reading Assignments listed below
Paper assignments submitted two weeks *before* class session

Introductions and Organization of Course
Why Study History?
Overall Summary of Christian History and Time Periods
Early Christian History: Challenge and Response
Constantine, Church, and State
Development of Doctrine of the Trinity
Monasticism: Bridge between Early and Medieval

Second Session (October 17-18)

See Reading Assignments listed below
Paper assignments submitted *at* class session

Transition between Early and Medieval Christianity
Augustine of Hippo: Bridge between Early and Medieval
Themes in Medieval Christianity
Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism
Popes and Monks
Crusades
Thomas Aquinas
Reformers Before the Reformation

Reading Assignments prior to the first class session (September 12-13):

Read Gonzalez, pp. xiii-240, 277-281 (Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1-23, plus the few pages in Chapter 27 about Benedictine Monasticism). This will provide an overall historical narrative of the early church through its first 400 years (but saving Augustine for the next class).

Read Placher, pp. 48-75 (Chapter 3). It is hard to read a whole group of short primary readings, on different topics, at one time. ("Primary" readings are writings by the people in Christian history themselves, such as Tertullian or Athanasius. "Secondary" readings are writings by an historian who was not there but who summarizes the story for us, like Gonzalez.) So that it will not be too overwhelming, this assignment focuses on the pages that pertain to arguments about the Trinity and about Christology in the early church. However, if you are eager, feel free to read some of the other documents in Placher prior to p. 48, as further examples of writings by some of the people who are discussed in Gonzalez.

Read the entire *Rule of St. Benedict*. Don't panic! It is quite brief, more like a booklet than a book, and it contains the basic document on which Benedictine monasticism is based. You might be surprised by some of the rules and advice you find there. Monasticism begins in the early church and becomes very significant in medieval Christianity, so it is a topic that helps bridge the two periods of our course, early and medieval.

Paper Assignments to be submitted EARLY (August 29), two weeks prior to the first class session:

- 1) *What Good is History?* Persons preparing for ministry usually see the immediate relevance of studying subjects like biblical studies, preaching, and counseling. Sometimes they are not so sure about the relevance of studying the history of Christianity. At the beginning of this course, before we have any class sessions, write about your thinking on this issue. Is an acquaintance with the history of Christianity important for someone in Christian ministry? If yes, what are the reasons? If no, what are the reasons? There is no right or wrong answer here. This paper will be graded pass/fail. The only way you can fail this paper is not to write it. It will give us a chance to reflect on what we think about history, and why, at the very beginning of the course. Please be candid. Even though it is true that I am a professor of Christian history, I do not think I am very defensive about it. In fact, I hated history in high school and college.
Two pages.
- 2) *Early Christian Challenges.* Based upon the reading assignments above, what do you think were the three most significant challenges faced by the early Christian church in its first 400 years? In your own words, describe each of the three challenges, including some historical details, and describe how Christians responded to each one. Gonzalez does not provide us with any convenient list of three challenges. Each of us, reading this history, may come up with very different lists of what we consider the three major

challenges in early Christianity. You will *not* be graded on what you think are the three major challenges. You *will* be graded on how accurately you describe the challenges and responses, whatever ones you choose. **Five pages.**

- 3) *Was Constantine Good for Christianity, or Not?* When Constantine became the first Roman emperor to accept Christianity, most people would assume that his influence was a great step in the advancement of Christianity. Yet some people are not so sure. What do you think? Based upon the reading assignments above, how do you assess the influence of Constantine upon Christianity? If you think it was mixed, do you think it was mostly positive or mostly negative? Explain, in your own words, including historical details to support your view. **Three pages.**
- 4) *The Trinity.* Imagine that you have been asked to lead a session of an adult Sunday School class in your church. The topic is the Trinity, and people in the class want to know where the idea of the Trinity came from, how and why it developed, and what it means. Based upon the reading assignments above, in your own words, write out what you would say to your Sunday School class, to help them understand. **Three pages.**
- 5) *A Personal Evaluation of Benedictine Monasticism.* Having read the *Benedictine Rule* and a few pages in Gonzalez about what became of it, what is your personal evaluation of the *Benedictine Rule* in particular, and the general idea of monasticism in general? Does it contain aspects that interest you and that you believe might be helpful for the Christian life? Are there aspects with which you disagree, or about which you have serious questions? What is your overall evaluation? Include *specific* examples from class readings in developing your answer. As in paper #2 above, you will *not* be graded on your personal viewpoint about monasticism. You *will* be graded on the extent to which you include specific examples from the class reading, accurately. **Three pages.**

The first five papers are due **Friday, August 29**, two weeks prior to the first class session. They will be graded and returned to you at the first class weekend. You may send the papers electronically, as attachments, to my Morningside College email address, forbes@morningside.edu. If you choose to send paper copies (which is fine), please begin each paper on a new page, and then staple all five papers together into one packet. The papers (paper copies) should be mailed to Dr. Forbes at the Morningside College address on this syllabus, to arrive by the due date. See general suggestions for writing assignments later in this syllabus.

As you can tell, most of the reading and writing for this class is front-loaded, prior to the first class session. The reading and writing assignments prior to the second class session are a little shorter, because preparation time is more limited, but they allow us to spread the work somewhat throughout the course, and the grading of the first papers allows students to make improvements in their later writing.

Reading Assignments prior to the second class session (October 17-18):

Read Gonzalez, pp. 241-445 (Chapters 24-35). The first part is mostly about Augustine, one of the most important theologians in all of Christian history, and a figure who stands

at the transition between early and medieval Christianity. The rest of the narrative takes us into the Middle Ages. The medieval period was about a thousand years long, so trying to cover it all in a little more than 100 pages is a challenge! Appreciate Gonzalez for valiantly trying to give you a condensed version.

Read Placher, pp. 100-121, 139-143, 156-164 (Chapter 5, the last two short readings in Chapter 6, and the writings by Thomas Aquinas in Chapter 7). There are so many interesting documents here, but I am trying to keep the length of readings reasonable, so I have chosen just three samples: some writings by Augustine, some writings by Thomas Aquinas, and an argument between two medieval monks about whether the bread and wine in communion become the actual body and blood of Jesus, or not. Feel free to sample any other documents that interest you, either now or after the course is concluded.

Paper assignments to be submitted at the second class session (October 17-18):

- 6) *Why Do People Think Augustine Was So Important?* As you did for Paper 4, imagine yourself in charge of another adult Sunday School class, and this time the topic is Augustine of Hippo. People in the class say to you, "I've heard the name, but I have no idea why he was supposed to be so important. Do you think he was? Why or why not?" What do you say in response? Based upon the readings for this class session, in your own words write out what you would say to the members of your Sunday School class, in a way they could understand. **Three pages.**
- 7) *Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.* Back again to that adult Sunday School class. Now that you are an expert on the history of Christianity, they want you to explain both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy to them, the similarities and the differences. What are some ways that the two Christian groups are similar to each other, especially when compared to United Methodists like us? What are significant ways that they are different from one another? Make reference both to beliefs and to practices. Based upon the reading assignment for this class session, write out, in your own words, what you would say to your Sunday School class, in a way they would understand. **Three pages.**
- 8) *Concluding Reflections.* Having completed all class readings, as we near the final class session, write a concluding personal opinion paper discussing your overall reactions to the historical information and issues encountered in this course. Answer some or all of the following questions. What, if anything, surprised you most? What interested you most? What topics or themes would you like to investigate further? Do any aspects of the history of Christianity inspire you? Do any aspects of the history of Christianity stand as negative examples for you? Have any of the readings, discussions, or lectures had an impact on your understanding of Christianity? Have any of your perspectives changed, or been strengthened? Will what you have learned in this course influence your ministry in any way? Returning to the first opinion paper you wrote in this course (Why Study History), would you change or add to anything you wrote at that time? Like the first paper, this discussion paper will be graded pass/fail, but satisfactory completion of this paper is a minimum requirement for passing the course. **Three pages.**

9) **General Recommendations for Writing**

(with thanks for material borrowed from my Morningside colleague, Dr. Tinklenberg, and from other syllabi of previous Course of Study courses)

- a) Type your papers. Use standard fonts (Times New Roman or Arial), standard size (12 point), and double-spacing. Spell and grammar check everything you finish. Grading of your papers will include grammar and spelling, as well as content.
- b) Begin each new paper assignment on a new page, if you send or bring paper copies. If you send your papers electronically, please create each paper as a separate document. Be sure that your name, the class name and number, and your paper topic are placed in the upper left hand corner.
- c) If you submit paper copies, please staple papers for a class session together, in the upper left hand corner. Do not submit your papers in three-ring binders or in plastic/paper report covers. (They simply make the papers more bulky, more slippery, and thus, more difficult to carry.)
- d) If you quote from any source, you must use quotation marks and provide bibliographic information. Even if you paraphrase, or if you change a few words and do not quote exactly, you still must properly cite any information you glean from a source. To the greatest extent possible, *use your own words*.
- e) All of the paper assignments in this class can be based simply upon the readings assigned for this course. Additional research from other sources is not expected or required. When you quote or refer to class readings in your papers, we will make the citations very easy. Simply place the book's author and the page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence, and that will be good enough, like this (Gonzalez, 76). No bibliography or Works Cited page will be required in the case of class readings.
- f) However, additional research is not forbidden. If you choose to use and refer to sources beyond our class texts, then you must include not only a citation (such as the parenthesis above), but you also need to place the Works Cited bibliographic information at the end of the paper. MLA and University of Chicago styles are the two standard citation styles in Religious Studies and Theology. If you are unsure how to cite sources properly, consult a standard style guide, or contact me if you have questions. I am not a terrible stickler on citation details, but we all should give credit when we borrow the work of others, and we should be able to use a standard citation form that is recognizable. Plagiarism, claiming someone else's words or ideas as your own, without proper credit, is nothing less than theft. It is a serious ethical issue and may result in failure of the course and notification of the Course of Study director.
- g) To varying degrees, these papers ask for combinations of two things: 1) summaries of historical information in your own words, and 2) your personal interpretations, reactions or opinions. The first and last papers, relying most on your personal viewpoints, will be graded pass/fail so that I am not in a position of grading your views. For all the other papers, I try to be careful to concentrate my grading on how accurately you summarize historical material, whether the paper answers the assigned question or topic, and the quality of your writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, sentence structure, etc.). I believe that there is a great difference between education

and indoctrination, and I hope that this course will be safe and open enough that students will feel free to engage in a lively exchange of views.

- h) These papers should be *formal* writing, which is different from the style we use when we text, or send email messages, or write old-fashioned paper letters. In those forms of *informal* writing, we often use abbreviations and slang and incomplete sentences, and we often write as if we were talking. Formal writing is different from that. Professors sometimes vary in their expectations for formal writing, so I will try to be clear about mine. One is that you should *write in complete sentences*, a second is that you should *avoid contractions*, and a third is that you should *avoid slang*. So, please do not write incomplete sentences. Instead of writing “don’t” write “do not.” And instead of words like “ok” find an alternative, like “acceptable.” However, I disagree with some high school English teachers who tell you that, in formal writing, you should never write in the first person. For these papers, that is *not* the case. It is fine to write words such as I, my, and mine in expressing your opinions and beliefs.

Course Grades

Papers 1 and 8 (graded pass/fail) must be completed satisfactorily (pass) as a minimum requirement for passing the course.

Then, the resulting course grade will be determined on a 200 point scale from the following sources:

Paper 2	50 pts
Paper 3	20 pts
Paper 4	20 pts
Paper 5	20 pts
Paper 6	20 pts
Paper 7	20 pts
Attendance and Participation	50 pts

Individual scores, and the total course grade, will be based on percentiles:

A	90 to 100%	Exceeds expectations for Course of Study
B	80 to 89%	Expected quality for Course of Study
C	70 to 79%	Passing work but not of expected quality
D	60 to 69%	Inadequate work but basic tasks completed
F	below 60%	Fail