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REFORMED  THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
GLOBAL

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HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY I  
DR. S. DONALD FORTSON, III

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# Course Overview

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## Course Description:

00HT5100 History of Christianity I, 3 hours  
Lecturing Professor and Professor of Record:  
Dr. S. Donald Fortson, III

This general introduction to Christianity in the early church and medieval era focuses on the key persons, movements, and ideas that have made significant contributions to the history of the church. Special attention will be given to exploring how experiences and insights from the Christian past inform contemporary faith and practice. As an outcome of the course, students should have a general grasp of Christian history during these periods and a basic knowledge of the major personalities and ecclesiastical issues of the first 1500 years of church history.

## Course Objectives:

The over arching aim is to provide tools to students in order that they might better understand the major movements in church history as well as the major leaders. Below are some other objectives:

- Learn how the early church developed.
- Understand the development of some of the major doctrines.
- Discover how the church has historically handled heresy.
- Learn from the great leaders of the church.

## Required Textbooks:

Bettenson, Henry. *Documents of the Christian Church*. 4 ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1943.

Dowley, Tim, ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002.

Maier, Paul. *Eusebius: The Church History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007.

McGrath, Alister. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. 2 ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

[These books may also be available in ebook format through various retailers]

### *Online Student Handbook:*

The Online Student Handbook (can be [downloaded here](#)) has been designed to assist you in successfully navigating the Distance Education experience, whether you are taking a single course or pursuing a certificate or degree program. In it you will find valuable information, step-by-step instructions, study helps, and essential forms to guide you through every aspect of your distance education opportunity from registration to graduation. Please use this resource as your first-stop reference manual.

### *Summary of Requirements:*

1. Listen to all recorded Lectures
2. Complete all Readings
3. Participate in Forum Discussions (with other students and the professor)
4. Take the Midterm Exam
5. Take the Final Exam
6. Submit Biography Paper
7. Submit Reading Report
8. Submit Mentor Report/Course Application Paper

# Meet the Professors

## *Lecturing Professor:*



**Dr. S. Donald Fortson, III**, Professor of Church History and Practical Theology, also serves as the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program in Charlotte. Don, an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, brings his experience as a pastor to RTS, having served churches in St. Louis, MO; Dallas, TX; and Charlotte, NC. He received the M.Div. and D.Min. degrees from Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, GA), and the Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Fortson has published several articles and books on American Presbyterianism which was the area of his doctoral research.

## *Professor of Record:*



**Dr. R. Michael Allen** joined the faculty of RTS-Orlando in 2015 and serves as Associate Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology. He teaches core courses related to systematic theology and historical theology.

Dr. Allen's research interests range widely over the various topics of Christian doctrine and eras of church history. He is eager to guide students to grow in their ability to retrieve theological riches from the past for the sake of renewing contemporary reflection, worship, and witness. In this vein, he is committed to Reformed catholicity as a confession and a posture for doing theology and approaching ministry today. He is presently writing a volume on sanctification that is not only rooted in Reformational teaching on Christ and grace but also attuned to patristic and medieval thought about the moral life and the lived nature of Christian holiness, as well as a spin-off volume regarding the need to recover and reform

patristic, medieval, and Puritan teaching on heavenly-minded eschatology and its ethical implications in an age and church so focused upon naturalistic problems and blessings. With Dr. Scott Swain, he serves as general editor of the T & T Clark International Theological Commentary series and the New Studies in Dogmatics series for Zondervan Academic.

He grew up in both the South and then in South Florida. Prior to joining the faculty at RTS, he taught undergraduate and graduate students at Wheaton College and then taught at Knox Theological Seminary for five years, where he held the D. James Kennedy Chair of Systematic Theology and also served as Dean of the Faculty. He is a teaching elder in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Allen and his wife, Emily, have two sons, Jackson and Will. He enjoys playing and watching basketball, reading, and drinking sweet tea.

# Grades

## *Forum Discussion (15%):*

The student is required to interact in two (2) forums:

1. Student-Professor Posts (15 total posts)
  - A. Personal Introduction Forum: The student is required to post a brief personal introduction to the professor/class. Suggested details include your vocation, where you live, your church background, why you chose RTS, and what you hope to gain through the course (1 required post).
  - B. 5 Topical Discussion Q&A Forums: The student is required to answer each topical discussion question with one (1) response. The professor will acknowledge the student's answer and will follow up with a subsequent question to which the student must also answer with one (1) response. Each topical discussion question, therefore, requires two (2) total posts/responses from the student (Total of 5 forums x 2 posts = 10 total posts).
  - C. Student-Professor Forum: The student is required to post four (4) times in this forum. Posts in this forum should focus on course-related content such as research paper topics, lectures and reading assignments, or other academic issues related to the course.
2. Student-Student Forum (5 total posts)
  - A post may be either a new topic or a response to an already existing topic.

## *Examinations (Midterm 20%, Final 20%):*

There are two examinations for this course. The midterm exam will cover all the lectures and readings from Lessons 1-6; the final exam will cover all the lectures and readings from Lessons 7-11. Both exams will include essay questions from the required reading and lectures, as well as short-answer sections on important dates, people, and ideas. Students should use the Lesson Review Questions and Topical Discussion Questions to guide them in their study for the exam.

The exams for this course are to be taken online in the Learning Management System (LMS). After clicking on the exam link you, will be given detailed instructions about the exam. Please read these instructions carefully before entering the exam. Please note that you are required to have a proctor for all exams. Please see the proctor policy in the Global Student Handbook.

## *Biographical Paper (25%):*

Each student will choose an individual from Christian history that lived before the Protestant Reformation and write a 10 -12 page typed paper on this person. At least one major biography (200 page minimum) on the person should be read. The paper should include commentary on the person's contribution to the church and reflection on insights from the person's life that might be useful today. See section titled "[Biography Paper Instructions](#)" in this syllabus.



### *Reading Report (15%):*

The student must complete all of the required reading. Reading assignments are broken down week by week within the LMS. The Reading Report will indicate the amount of required reading that has been completed during the semester and must be filled out and submitted at the end of the course with your final exam and Biographical Paper.

### *Mentor Report OR Course Application Paper (5%):*

If you are enrolled in an **RTS Global** degree or certificate program submit a mentor report. Every portion of the form (goals, summaries, assessments, and signatures) should be filled out completely by both the student and the mentor to receive full credit. You can download the Mentor Report form in your Canvas classroom. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

If you are receiving your degree through another **RTS campus** (Orlando, Jackson, Charlotte, et. al.), or special student (e.g. from another seminary), submit a 250-word summary of how you perceive what you have learned in this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life. Course Application Papers (CAP) that fall well-short of 250 words will receive a grade deduction. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

### *Assignments:*

Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall, using the upload links provided in the LMS. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time; no late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

### *Contact Information:*

Reformed Theological Seminary, Global Education

2101 Carmel Road

Charlotte, NC 28226

Campus: (704) 366-4853

Toll Free: (800) 227-2013

E-mail: [dess@rts.edu](mailto:dess@rts.edu)

Web site: [rts.edu/campuses/online/](https://rts.edu/campuses/online/)



# Lessons

## Lesson One

Christianity and History

## Lesson Two

The Character of Primitive Christianity

## Lesson Three

The Persecution of the First Three Centuries

## Lesson Four

The Church Sets Standards

## Lesson Five

The Catholic Tradition

## Lesson Six

The Great Ecumenical Councils

## Lesson Seven

St. Augustine and African Christianity

## Lesson Eight

Monasticism, Missions, and the Dark Ages

## Lesson Nine

The Traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy

## Lesson Ten

The Life and Times of the Medieval Church

## Lesson Eleven

Reform Movements in Medieval Christianity

# Biography Paper Instructions

## Choosing a Biography

Students are free to select from a wide array of biographies. One may choose an early church father, a martyr, a medieval scholastic or mystic, a Christian emperor, a Pope, a Christian king, a monk, reformer, or any significant Christian that lived before Martin Luther. There are many options; use the Dowley text and course lectures to help you make a good choice. Autobiographies, such as Augustine's Confessions, do not qualify for this assignment. Do not use a biography you have read before; learn about someone new.

You may select an individual for whom there is not a full 200-page biography or you may not be able to get your hand on the one you want. One option is to read a shorter biography and then read some of that person's writings up to the 200 page minimum requirement. For example, if you find a 100 page biography, you will need to supplement that with another 100 pages (at least) of his/her writings.

Students are welcome to use multiple sources for the biography paper but this is not necessary. One 200-page biography will fully satisfy the assignment.

## Where to look

If you live near a Bible College, Christian University or Seminary, you will find a wealth of options in these libraries. Public universities and public libraries will also have a few biographies of famous Christians like Augustine, St. Patrick, Francis of Assisi, or Thomas Aquinas. If your home church has a library, you may find something there. Also, your pastor may have a few Christian biographies in a personal library.

Students may also wish to consider purchasing a good biography that would be a useful addition to their own library. There are many places to look and one should not have a problem locating an acceptable biography.

## How to Write the Paper

The basic pattern of the paper should be to tell the person's story utilizing the biography you have read. You may choose to emphasize the person's life story or his/her writings in the paper – a good paper should have some of both. If one is using the person's writings as a significant part of the reading, the paper should reflect this.

It is not necessary to use footnotes for summaries of historical information if one is using only one book as the primary source. However, if there are direct quotations from this one book, page numbers should be indicated. If one is using multiple sources, footnotes would be proper to indicate the source of specific information. A bibliography should be attached even if it is only to list one source.



## Course Objectives Related to Student Learning Outcomes

Course: History Of Christianity I  
Professor: S. Donald Fortson, III

<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b> In order to measure the success of the curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the outcomes.		<b>Rubric</b> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<b>Mini-Justification</b>
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	1. Memorization of dates 2. Development of doctrine 3. Biographical studies
<b>Scripture</b>	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Minimal	1. Weekly bible reading assigned 2. Scripture-based devotions 3. Discuss churches interpretation of Bible throughout course
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Minimal	1. Focus on pre-Reformation 2. Ancient faith and practices 3. Medieval theology 4. Augustinian doctrines of grace
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	1. Monastic Spirituality 2. Medieval mysticism 3. Piety of St. Augustine 4. Practice of Prayer
<b>Desire for Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	None	
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	1. Emphasis on catholic Christianity 2. Cover Church history that belongs to all Christians 3. Ecumenical Creeds
<b>Teach</b>	Ability to teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	1. Church history illustrations for preaching 2. J. Chrysostom's preaching style
<b>Church/World</b>	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	1. Weekly application discussion Questions 2. Discernment of what's important
<b>MAR Specific SLO</b>	An ability to integrate such knowledge and understanding into one's own calling in society	Minimal	1. Expansion of Early Church 2. Missionary monks