

HT6305: Life and Theology of Augustine

Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

Summer 2026

June 15–16, 18–19 (M–T, TR–F), 9:00a–4:30p

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Emails received after 3 PM, or 6 PM on class days, will receive a response on the next school day.

(1) Course Description

This course examines the life and theology of Augustine of Hippo and considers his thought in context through a chronological/biographical framework. Key teachings will include: grace and the Christian life; the interpretation of Scripture; the nature of the Church; the Trinity; and the relationship between the Church/Christian and the world.

(2) Course Format

This course will use a seminar format. Students will thus integrate the skills they have gained throughout their education in order to achieve a nuanced understanding our topic by (a) reading and annotating primary texts before each class session, and (b) bringing relevant information from those readings to our Socratic discussions (see Section 6) in order to forward our class's understanding of our topic.

(3) Course Objectives and How They Will be Measured

(a) Students will display critical thinking as they actively engage in a conversation between their peers and our texts. In doing so, students will demonstrate the ability to perform thorough, attentive, and annotative readings of texts and to draw meaningful thematic and logical connections among them.

Evaluation: Socratic Discussions, Reading Check-Ins

(b) Students will exhibit the ability to read specific passages of assigned texts closely, with an awareness of the text's historical and theological dimensions. Students will effectively present their conclusions to the class.

Evaluation: Socratic Discussions, Presentations

(c) Students will develop an aptitude for engaging in effective discussions. This includes knowing when to speak, when to listen, and how to respond thoughtfully and dialectically to peers, to the professor, and to the text.

Evaluation: Socratic Discussions

(d) Students will advance our understanding of our topic by performing extra research on one of our texts and then presenting relevant findings to the class in a clear and concise manner.

Evaluation: Presentations

(e) Students will understand and be able to articulate several specific aspects of Augustine's life and theology.

Evaluation: Socratic Discussions, Presentations

(4) Required Texts

Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*. Edited and Translated by R. W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN: 9780521468435.¹

Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780199537822.

Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*. Translated by R. P. H. Green. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780199540631.

- * Any other readings will be available on Canvas for you to print. While not required, if you have time I highly recommend you read Peter Brown's biography of Augustine, which is listed in Section 8, 'Recommended Further Reading.'
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(5) Assessments

Socratic Discussions (50%)

These discussions will form the backbone of our course. Your grade will reflect your ability to use evidence from the readings to form an insightful thesis in response to a line of inquiry. This course thus requires a significant amount of preparation as texts must be both closely read and annotated before each class session. See Section 6 for details.

Reading Check-Ins (30%)

Your preparation for Socratic discussions is crucial to your performance within them. Time spent closely reading and annotating each text is the *sine qua non* for our class. So that you can focus your time on reading, annotating, and understanding each text, I have not assigned any writing before our classes. Rather, you will simply report the percentage of reading and annotating that you completed for each class period. In the weeks leading up to our class, information on how you will report this will be posted on Canvas.

Presentation (20%)

You will be assigned one text on which you will spend a few hours performing research (in addition to your reading) for the benefit of our class. You will then present your findings to our class at one of our class meetings. In the weeks leading up to our class, more information on this assignment will be posted on Canvas.

¹ Match the ISBN number listed for each book so that you purchase the correct edition. Having the correct edition will make your participation in Socratic discussions much easier. (As of the writing of this syllabus, there are many used copies of each of these texts available online for purchase at a reduced price.)

(6) Socratic Discussions

During our Socratic discussions you will learn by testing your interpretations of the readings in collaborative and collegial dialogue. Your responsibility begins with preparing all of the assigned material in advance: reading thoroughly, carefully marking your text(s), and entering class with comments on and questions about specific passages. Substituting shortcuts, such as Cliffs Notes or Spark Notes, for engagement with the actual text will hinder your learning and the growth of your ability to read and analyze a text.

In these discussions you are also responsible for the flow of conversation; class time is not ‘owned’ by the instructor, but by all of us collectively. Your task is not simply to talk, but also to listen and respond appropriately. If you see a problem during the course of discussion, it is your responsibility to enter the field and respectfully steer the conversation in a more productive direction. We are seeking to engage in an open-ended, respectful dialogue with one another as peers. The goal is not to impress others, but to open our minds to what the texts have to teach us with regard to our lives and our ministries. We can—and should—disagree, but we must do so in a way that is marked by charity, humility, and self-awareness.

Remember too that a significant element of participating in a discussion is listening attentively and carefully. Body language communicates a great deal; sleeping during class and giving looks of disinterest are quite disrespectful and disruptive.

Participation will be graded primarily for quality. Quantity is not unimportant, but it is less important. Excellent participation in the discussion reflects careful preparation and contributes to the flow of conversation without dominating it; such a student raises one or more significant insights, making careful reference to the text. Good participation refers to the text, shows some degree of preparation, and raises good questions for discussion. Adequate participation reflects only basic preparation, makes minimal reference to the text, and the themes or questions raised are not necessarily conducive to class discussion. Inadequate participation reflects inadequate preparation and/or rarely refers to the text. For more on assessment, see the rubric in the ‘Syllabus, etc.’ module on Canvas.

(7) Technology in the Classroom

All computing devices are prohibited during class time (laptops, tablets, phones of any sort, recording devices, etc.). This guideline might appear draconian, but it exists strictly for the benefit of everyone involved. Although many may feel that their use of technology makes them better scholars, [research](#) says that [it does not](#). In fact, studies show that it significantly impairs your learning and [the learning of others around you](#). Taking notes by hand [improves recall](#) and apprehension, as does [reading on paper and not on screens](#). During class, phones will be completely silenced. Even then, if you are dependent on your smartphone, its mere presence—even if powered off—[has been proven to diminish your](#)

[cognitive capacities](#). We will thus use our brief time together to practice a little asceticism (or, if you prefer, Luddism).

- In accordance with this stipulation, you are required to have physical copies of the course texts; e-books are not allowed. You should also bring to class the requisite tools for note-taking (pen and paper).
 - Recording is prohibited, as is sharing course content through any platform (e.g., social media).
 - Of course, if you have a school-approved accommodation for the use of technology in the classroom, you are welcome to use approved devices during class. Please notify me of this accommodation via email or a personal conversation.
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(8) Recommended Further Reading

Augustinus-Lexicon. Edited by Cornelius Mayer et al. Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 1986–present.

This encyclopedia of Augustine’s thought is still in process. The work is being done in alphabetical order and has an approach that is more philological in nature than *Augustine Through the Ages*. Articles are written in English, German, and French, and thus might not be as accessible to students who do not yet have proficiency in German or French.

Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia. Edited by Allen Fitzgerald et al. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

This is an accessible scholarly encyclopedia focused on Augustine’s life and thought. The articles include brief bibliographies for further reading on each topic. This is an excellent starting point when beginning any inquiry into Augustine’s life or thought.

Ayres, Lewis. *Augustine and the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

This is the standard text on Augustine’s Trinitarian theology. If you are unfamiliar with the ideas behind the development of the Nicene Creed, I recommend reading Ayres’s *Nicaea and its Legacy* before engaging this text.

Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

This offers the best narrative of the development of Trinitarian doctrine in the Christian East. It was written in order for Ayres to provide context for his book on Augustine’s Trinitarian theology.

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Forty-Fifth Anniversary Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Brown’s biography, originally published in 1969, remains the definitive biography of Augustine. Be sure to read the lengthy epilogue, which was added in 2000. In it Brown discusses, among other things, ways in which he would reframe his presentation of Augustine based upon new

evidence discovered in the late 20th century—the Divjak letters and Dolbeau sermons.

Cameron, Michael. *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Edited by David C. Steinmetz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

This is, in my opinion, the best treatment of Augustine's method of scriptural interpretation. It is also quite accessible. Cameron intentionally wrote this text to be comprehensible to both scholars and educated laypeople.

Wetzel, James. *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Wetzel's text lays out Augustine's understanding of the will and notes the influence of Stoic philosophy in Augustine's thought. Wetzel gives an excellent and thorough account of Augustine's understanding of the will. Additionally, his focus on Augustine's use of Stoic ideas advances our understanding of Augustine's use of philosophy in his theological work, as previous literature tended to focus solely (or at least primarily) on Neoplatonism. This is a must-read for students interested in Augustine's understanding of the will and the influence of philosophy upon his theological project.

*This is a broad and (quite) brief list of readings. Please feel free to contact me in the future if you have questions about where to begin reading about other areas of Augustine's life and thought.

(9) Other Policies

(a) Attendance

Since the Socratic discussions are the backbone of our course and this is a summer intensive course, you are expected to be at all class sessions. Should you find it unavoidable to miss class, you must contact me within 24 hours of the class session, if possible. There are two types of absences. Absences are excused if you have an unavoidable emergency, such as the illness of an immediate family member, or a significant life event which you must attend, such as a wedding. Other absences will be categorized as unexcused. Your second unexcused absence, and each unexcused absence which follows, will result in a grade of 0 for that session's Socratic discussion. Furthermore, since this summer intensive course relies heavily on what we will accomplish during class, missing more than five hours of class time could make it impossible to fulfil the requirements of the course.

(b) Academic Honesty

I will not tolerate academic dishonesty. This includes plagiarism. Plagiarism is academic theft—a person steals ideas from an internet page, book, article, artificial intelligence program, or some other source and then copies or paraphrases those ideas as though they are his/her own (i.e., without citing the source). Work you submit must be your own. Any infraction will be immediately elevated to the office of the Academic Dean and I will recommend that, at the very least, the assignment be awarded a 0. A detailed discussion of plagiarism is available in the course catalogue and the student handbook.

With regard to the use of Artificial Intelligence, please consult the policies and penalties distributed by RTS to all students.

(c) Zoom Policy

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

(d) Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

(e) Late Assignments

Extensions will be granted only in cases of serious illness or family emergency. Otherwise, late assignments will receive a penalty of 10 percentage points per day.

(10) Modules (Lecture and Reading Schedule)

Monday, June 15th

1. Lecture: Introduction to Augustine's Life
2. Socratic Discussion: *Confessions*, Books I–III²
3. Socratic Discussion: *Confessions*, Books IV–VI
4. Socratic Discussion: *Confessions*, Books VII–IX

Tuesday, June 16th

5. Lecture: Augustine on the Will (Beauty and Love)
6. Socratic Discussion: *On Christian Teaching*, Pref and Books I–III
7. Socratic Discussion: *On Christian Teaching*, Book IV
8. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Book I

Wednesday, June 17th (No Class: Break to renew your mind and, if necessary, finish reading)

Thursday, June 18th

9. Lecture: Augustine's Scriptural Hermeneutic
10. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Books XI–XII
11. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Books XIII–XIV
12. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Books XV–XVI

Friday, June 19th

13. Lecture: Augustine on the Trinity (Read *Sermon 52*, available on Canvas)
14. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Book XIX
15. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Book XX
16. Socratic Discussion: *City of God*, Books XXI–XXII + Integrative Discussion

² All texts must be closely read and annotated before each class session.