

HT502 History of Christianity I Fall 2026 (v. 040626)

J. V. Fesko

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Day: Wednesdays

Time: 1pm – 4pm

Room: TBD

TA: Ray Shores, shoresray@gmail.com

Catalog Description

This general introduction to Christianity in the early and medieval periods focuses on key Christian doctrines and great leaders from the Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.

Course Objectives

The students will grow in their ability to

- Analyze texts, ideas, and debates in their historical contexts
- Appreciate the interplay between culture and ministry in various times and places
- Gain familiarity with major theologians from the ancient and medieval eras
- Understand and assess the development of Christian doctrine through the centuries
- Read primary sources from a variety of centuries, genres, and styles

Electronics

Computers, laptops, smart phones, and recording devices are not allowed in class. Students may use “dumb tablets,” such as Kindle Scribes, reMarkables, or Booxs. Failure to follow this policy will result in points deducted from the participation grade.

Course Requirements

Participation (10%): attend and actively participate in lectures and class discussions.

Unexcused absences result in a five-point deduction for your participation grade. Being late to class results in a three-point deduction per incident. More than three unexcused absences results in an F for participation. Excused absences are those that are cleared with the professor ahead of time due to illness or extenuating circumstances. Note the following grading rubric:

A (100-94)	B (93-86)	C (85-78)	D (78-70)	F (69 – 0)
Asked clear and cogent questions; was respectful of others. Attended class. Participated in discussions. Did not misuse technology.	Participated in discussions; shared questions and comments. Was respectful of others. Was late to class.	Listened mainly; occasionally asked a question or offered a comment. Was respectful of others. Misused technology. Was late to class.	Questions or comments were off topic. Was disrespectful of others. Or, dominated class time by not permitting others to ask their questions. Misused	Failed to attend class—missed more than three lecture periods total without an excused absence.

			technology. Was late to class.	
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Course Readings (10%): completion of all assigned reading. Report the percentage of your completed reading on CANVAS. Course readings include all assigned textbook reading and PDFs available through CANVAS.

Reading Briefs (30%): Students are expected to prepare a brief on each text read. The purpose of the brief is to summarize the thesis, outline, and argument of that text, as well as to state one's own analysis of it (in the form of questions, confirmations, objections, etc.). Briefs may include quotations from various points in the text (so long as page numbers are referenced). Briefs should be no more than 350 words. They should be written in complete sentences and edited carefully. Students should have access to their briefs for class each week and upload their brief to CANVAS.

Final Exam (50%): Students will sit for a two-hour exam that covers questions drawn from lectures and assigned readings. The final exam is scheduled for December 8-10, 2026. Students will take the exam during this period via CANVAS.

Required Textbooks

Holy Bible (any version).

Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr; Popular Patristics Series 17 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997). ISBN 9780881411744. Approx. 60 pages.

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. John Behr; Popular Patristics Series 44b (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011). ISBN 9780881414271. Approx. 60 pages.

Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ*, trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams; Popular Patristics Series 23 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002). ISBN 9780881412406. Approx. 124 pages.

Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008). ISBN: 978-0140449969. Approx. 108 pages.

Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2003). ISBN: 9780486431857. Approx. 139 pages.

Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man* (trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, et al.; New York: Hackett, 1998). ISBN 978-0872203969. Approx. 34 pages.

Recommended Textbook

Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, vol. 1, *From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). ISBN 978-0310516569

Lecture Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH			
01	Aug 26	Introduction The Early Christians	“The Didache” (PDF) Recommended: Ferguson, 27-69
PATRISTIC CHURCH			
02	Sep 02	Origen, Irenaeus, and the Gnostic Challenge	Irenaeus, <i>On the Apostolic Preaching</i> Recommended: Ferguson, 85-104, 122-46
03	Sep 09	Conversion and Martyrdom	Chrysostom, “Baptismal Instruction” and excerpts from Brian Litfin (ed.) <i>Early Christian Martyr Stories</i> (PDF) Recommended: Ferguson, 159-86
04	Sep 16	Trinity and Christology I	Athanasius, <i>On the Incarnation</i> Recommended: Ferguson, 191-98
05	Sep 23	Trinity and Christology II	Gregory of Nazianzus, <i>On God and Christ</i> , pp. 25-149 Recommended: Ferguson, 199-226, 255- 68
06	Sep 30	Asceticism and Monasticism	Benedict, <i>Rule of St. Benedict</i> , pp. 1-108 Recommended: Ferguson, 227-33
07	Oct 07	READING WEEK	
08	Oct 14	Augustine I	Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , bks. I-III, VIII (PDF)
09	Oct 21	Augustine II	Augustine, <i>City of God</i> , bks. XI.i-iv; XIV; XV.i-ii; XX (PDFs) Recommended: Ferguson, 268-85
MIDDLE AGES			
10	Oct 28	Controversies and the Crusades	Dictatus Papae; Urban II Speech; Donation of Constantine (PDFs) Recommended: 379-82, 399-406, 413-25
11	Nov 04	Medieval Monasticism	Anselm, “Why Did God Become Man?” (PDF)

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SYSTEM

			Recommended: Ferguson, 445-72
12	Nov 11	Scholasticism	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> (PDFs) Recommended: Ferguson, 427-44
13	Nov 18	NO CLASS	
14	Nov 25	Medieval Mysticism	Á Kempis, <i>The Imitation of Christ</i>
15	Dec 02	Wycliff, Hus, and the Renaissance	Mirandola, <i>On the Dignity of Man</i> , pp. 1-34. Recommended: Ferguson, 505-28

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: HT502 History of Christianity I

Professor: J. V. Fesko

Campus: Jackson, MS

Date: Fall 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv 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 MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	STRONG	Students are required to participate in discussions as well as write briefs that analyze assigned readings.
Scripture	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.)	MODERATE	This course focuses on the history of doctrine, which involves the history of exegesis.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	MODERATE	This course examines the development of doctrine, which constitutes many of the key building blocks for Reformed theology.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	STRONG	A key point of this course is to learn humility and charity by studying early church doctrine and gleaning knowledge from it.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	MODERATE	One of the course's foci is learning from the church's past errors so as not to repeat them in the present.
Winsomely Reformed	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	If we learn how challenging it was to develop orthodox doctrine, then the aim is to be humble as we propagate it.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	MODERATE	This course examines various examples of applied ministry.