

09HT5100 History of Christianity 1
Fall 2026
Dr. Michael Allen

Catalog Description

This general introduction to Christianity in the early and medieval periods focuses on key Christian doctrines and great leaders from Justin Martyr to Martin Luther who made contributions of lasting significance to the Christian Church.

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 (Irenaeus, Origen, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas, and so forth);
- understand and assess the development of Christian doctrine through the centuries;
- read primary sources from a variety of centuries, genres, and styles (including confessions of faith, doctrinal treatises, controversial tracts, etc.).

Instructor

Michael Allen, Ph.D.

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Feel free to contact me whenever needed (preferably via email). When in doubt about protocol or anything regarding class material, write and ask. Also, feel free to stop by my office whenever the door is open.

Textbooks

The following books are required reading:

1. 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.
2. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (trans. John Behr; Popular Patristics Series 44b; Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011). ISBN #9780881414271. Approx. 60 pages.
3. 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.

4. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (trans. Abraham Malherbe and Everett Ferguson; Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist, 1978). ISBN #9780809121120. Approx. 115 pages.
5. Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). ISBN# 9780199537820. Approx. 300 pages.

For reading *Confessions*, three translations are acceptable for use in class: by Henry Chadwick (listed above), by Maria Boulding (in the New City Press Works of St. Augustine for the 21st Century edition), or by Sarah Ruden (in the Modern Library edition). Each has its strengths and weaknesses, but they are all good to use. Do **not** use any other translation.

A number of other required readings will be posted in PDF format on Canvas. Students are required to check the modules page on Canvas every week to find assigned readings as well as lecture outlines. Occasional, recommended (non-required) readings will also be posted. You are advised to download them for future reference.

Requirements

1. Reading

Reading must be completed before the class session in which it is to be discussed. Class discussions will focus on readings, so you must be prepared to talk.

Theology is an activity done largely through the process of good reading. Read carefully. Read charitably. Read with others. Read with the expectation that you will learn from others, even when you disagree with their main point. Read even when a text is dense and difficult, for you will learn perseverance and fortitude here. Read that which seems trite and obvious, asking how others might object or criticize. Most importantly, read because God was willing to reveal himself in written words, and because we can best witness to God's grace with corresponding words. Read because words matter in God's economy of grace.

2. Topical Discussion Questions

Throughout the course all students will respond to a number of topical discussion questions on the Canvas course page. They will come in two forms.

a. Student-to-Student Posts

Students will post at least five times in the Student to Student Form at any point during the term. These posts can address readings, class discussions, or lectures. They are opportunities for students to interact with one another beyond our class meetings.

b. Reading Briefs

Students will respond to eleven specific questions by providing written briefs on assigned texts. In these cases, students are expected to prepare a brief on the text. 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.

A reading brief will be required prior to each of our live Zoom Classes, as preparatory work meant to help you be ready for discussion of the assigned text.

3. Weekend Intensives

We will gather over two weekends to begin and end the semester. We will meet on Friday, August 28 and Saturday, August 29 and we will meet again on Friday, November 6 and Saturday, November 7. Students will attend these sessions and participate actively.

4. Zoom Classes

We will meet twelve times throughout the term on Zoom for live lecture, for discussion of assigned readings, and for discussion of course material. Students will attend those sessions and participate actively. Students are expected to keep video on during Zoom meetings.

Twelve weekly sessions will occur on Mondays from 5-6 p.m. Note the dates we will convene in the semester below.

5. Lectures

Further lecture material will be required on certain weeks. These lectures will provide wider historical survey to help contextualize the readings and live lectures. Links to each lecture will be provided on the Canvas Modules page. Lectures may also be accessed on the RTS Mobile App.

6. Final Paper

Students will write a 1500–2000-word paper that offers analysis of some theme in Augustine's *Confessions*. The paper will demonstrate attentive care in showing the development of the theme in the book as well as its significance for early and/or medieval Christianity more broadly.

Papers are to be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. (EST) on Wednesday, December 11.

The Grading Structure

Grades will be assessed as follows:

Topical Discussion Questions	50%
Final Paper	50%

Attendance and participation may be used to bump a grade up or down at the professor's discretion. Students missing multiple classes or not engaging in discussion appropriately should expect to see their grade drop.

The grading scale can be found in the Academic Catalog. As laid out in the catalog, a "B" is the work normally expected of a student. An "A" is given for someone who consistently outperforms expectations, and a "C" is given for persons who only minimally and occasionally meet expectations. Read the Academic Catalog to see what grades reflect.

Academic Honesty (adapted from Dr. Timothy Phillips of Wheaton College)

1. The assignments are designed to extend and deepen your comprehension and appreciation of Christian theology and to increase your facility with theological method. The processes of defining a topic, researching the results of others' studies, critiquing those studies, and organizing your conclusions in a clear and cogent presentation provides valuable skills for your various leadership ministries. The use of sources is an essential step in appropriating the learning of the Church's tradition in its relationship to cultures to help us understand and faithfully practice Scripture.
2. Using information obtained from a source without indicating it (whether by footnote, parentheses, or bibliography or some other appropriate reference, depending on the type of assignment) is plagiarism (intellectual thievery and lying). This applies to **any** information that you gain from someone that is not "common knowledge." It does **not** apply **only** to exact quotations or precise verbal allusions. Altering the wording does **not** remove the obligation to acknowledge the source.
3. Cheating is the presentation of someone else's work, which the student ought to have done personally. This includes submitting answers to test questions derived by some means other than that intended by the instructor. It also includes turning in written assignments composed in whole or in part by someone else.
4. Cheating or plagiarism results, at minimum, in the disqualification of that unit of the course affected. A student caught plagiarizing or cheating will forfeit that project. A second offense will result in the forfeiture of the

course. Punishments may be more severe than the minimum depending upon the specific situation.

Please also note the RTS AI Policy Statement regarding constraints for use of AI technologies.

Technology Requirements

In order to access Canvas, students and faculty need a reliable high-speed internet connection and an up-to-date browser (Chrome, Firefox recommended). Additional software and hardware needs include:

- Computer – Microsoft Windows or Mac OSX
- An active e-mail account (provided by RTS)
- Word processing (Written assignments are submitted as MS Word or PDF) (RTS provides a Microsoft user license to all active students)
- Zoom conferencing software

Additionally, some basic skills are necessary for using Canvas and Zoom

- Browse the internet by entering a web-address
- Navigate Canvas & Zoom using a computer, tablet, or mobile device
- Upload and download a file

For any Canvas-related issues, you can call or email the DE Students Service Departments (dess@rts.edu) or the DE Canvas Administrator (canvas.admin@rts.edu). After hours, you have access to 24/7 support through the Canvas Help Desk (Instructure).

The Schedule

Weekend 1 (August 28-29)

Introduction to Historical Theology; Early Christians; Irenaeus, Origen, and the Gnostic Challenge

Read Didache (PDF on Canvas) and Irenaeus, *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*

Lecture: Christian Historiography

Weekly 1 (September 14)

Christian Life: Conversion

Read Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instruction* (PDF on Canvas)

Lecture: The First Christian Apologists

Weekly 2 (September 21)

Christian Life: Martyr Stories

Read Martyr Stories (PDFs on Canvas)

Lecture: The Persecution of the Early Church

Weekly 3 (September 28)

Trinitarian Debates

Read Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*

Lecture: The Canon

Weekly 4 (October 5)

Christological Debates

Read Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ* (only orations 1-3)

Weekly 5 (October 12)

God and the Creeds

Read Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ* (only orations 4-5)

Weekly 6 (October 19)

Asceticism

Read Basil “Exhortation on the Renunciation of the World” and Gregory of Nyssa’s “On Virginity” (PDFs on Canvas)

Weekly 7 (October 26)

Spirituality and Scripture: Gregory Nyssa’s *Life of Moses*

Read *Life of Moses*

Weekly 8 (November 2)

Augustine

Read *Expositions of the Psalms* (PDFs on Canvas)

Lecture: The Problem of the Lapsed

Weekend 2 (November 6-7)

Augustine

Medieval Scholastic Theology

Thomas Aquinas

Read Peter Lombard, excerpts from *The Sentences* (PDFs on Canvas) and

Thomas Aquinas, excerpts from *Summa Theologiae* (PDF on Canvas)

Weekly 9 (November 16)

East and West

Read Anselm, “Why Did God Become Man?” (PDF on Canvas).

Lecture: The Crusades

Lecture: Eastern Orthodox Spirituality

Lecture: How Papal Primacy Developed

Weekly 10 (November 23)

The Bible in Early and Medieval Christianity

Read *Confessions*

Lecture: Wycliffe and Hus

Weekly 11 (November 30)

Augustine and His *Confessions*

Read *Confessions*

Weekly 12 (December 7)

Final Paper Review

Read *Confessions*

Additional Bibliography

Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (eds.), *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community* (London: Routledge, 1998).

John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2 vols. (The Formation of Christian Theology; New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

The Way to Nicaea (The Formation of Christian Theology; New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

Paul Blowers and Peter Martens (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 A.D. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Justo González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1: *The Early Church to the Reformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Revealing Antiquity 20; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 100-600* (The Christian Tradition 1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

The Growth of Medieval Theology, 600-1300 (The Christian Tradition 3; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

The Spirit of Eastern Christendom, 600-1700 (The Christian Tradition 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

The First Thousand Years (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

The Spirit of Early Christian Thought (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1990).

Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

*More specialized bibliographies will be provided with lecture outlines



Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: HT5100
 Professor: Allen
 Campus: NYC
 Date: Fall 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <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> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		<u>Rubric</u> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
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	Reading briefs and final paper test ability to communicate in written form.
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.)	Strong	Lectures and readings focus upon biblical exegesis as shaping the history of Christian thought in its various literary genres.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Historical analysis of precursors to the Reformed church frequently turns to note occasions of later development.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimum	Regular reading of classic devotional/spiritual literature.

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.	Strong	Readings, lectures, and final paper address the construction of principles and a moral imagination that is conformed to Holy Scripture as its final authority and informed by the Christian witness of the past.
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	Readings and lectures address instruction of Christians from beyond the Reformed world.
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	Readings, lectures, and final paper address issues which inform pastoral counsel