

Reformed Theological Seminary

HT5100 The History of Christianity I

2026 Syllabus

Chad Van Dixhoorn

I. Course information

Class dates: August 25–December 1 (12 weeks)

Class time: Tuesday 8AM–12PM

No class: October 6 (Fall break)

November 17 (Professor at ETS)

Dinner Discussion: TBD

5841 Woodleigh Oaks Dr., Charlotte NC 28226

Credit hours: 3

Term paper: November 8

Exam dates: Midterm: TBD

Final: Exam Period, December 3–8

Contact: Dr. Van Dixhoorn cvandixhoorn@rts.edu

PA: Faith Key fkey@rts.edu

TA: Kirby Key KKey3761@student.rts.edu

Office hours: This term I plan to be in my office frequently from Tuesday to Thursday. Contact me for either (1) personal matters, or (2) historical and theological questions. Please try valiantly to meet me during those three days, but email Faith Key for all in-person appointments or appointments at other times in the week. If you have a question about the class, please contact Kirby Key *after* reading the syllabus carefully.

II. Course catalogue description

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

III. Course overview

A. Key issues in theology and apologetics in the history of the church

The history of Christianity is, among other things, a history of ideas. These ideas shape the Christian church and contribute to our convictions as believers. This course aims to provide an overview of Church history and theology from the time of the Apostles to the opening year of the Reformation in a breath-taking thirty-nine hours of class time – supplemented, of course, by many additional hours of reading time. While obviously a whistle-stop tour, I do hope that each one of you will get a feel for the contours of the Christian faith as they were hammered out in the patristic and medieval eras.

This course aims to acquaint us with our past, and help us interpret the present. But since Christianity has been shaped as much by its failures as by its triumphs, these lectures will trace both the low and high points in the history of Christian doctrine and experience. Significant emphasis will be placed on key moments and key thinkers in church history. But we will also try to reflect on the lives of normal Christian people and ordinary Christian pastors. It was the collective experience of God's people, often in the ordinary settings of life and church-life that helped clarify the central truths of God's word in the midst of persecution, heresy, and confusion.

B. In class

It is my conviction that reformation in the church today must involve a willingness not only to hear what the Holy Spirit is teaching us today, but to listen to what he has taught our brothers and sisters in the past. In this course students will have the opportunity to read and discuss historic source material most weeks as we examine the doctrine of God, the Scriptures and their formation, and the fall of humanity into sin. We will listen to what our forebears had to say about the good news of redemption planned, accomplished, and applied. We will try to deepen our understanding of the church, Christian interaction with non-Christian and sub-Christian thought, and the formation and relevance of creeds and confessions, each from an historical and theological perspective.

While first seeking to understand the history of Christian doctrine on its own grounds and for its own sake, some lectures contain apologetic undertones and raise questions that are still relevant today: how did early Christians engage with pagan culture? How did the medieval theologians confront the teachings of Islam? And so on. Our heritage is a rich and varied one. I hope this course will equip both teacher and student alike to better articulate, defend, and live out the gospel in our pluralistic society.

C. At home

Students will have extensive take-home reading, as well as readings in class. You will be well-advised to read as soon as possible the two class texts by Chadwick (or Hall) and Southern.

PLEASE begin to read the three classic texts that we will read in full: Augustine's *Confessions*, Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*, and Anselm's medieval classic, *Why the God man?* (best known by its Latin title, *Cur Deus Homo*). If you can only read one of these texts prior to class, read Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*, for we will discuss this work first.

The number of pages read for this course, although significant, will be lower than some other three-hour classes. The main texts are an easy, even delightful read. Each of the authors has been chosen not only for his astonishing knowledge of their period, but for his ability to write in an engaging manner. Here, reading may edge toward entertainment.

The historic texts, on the other hand, are more difficult to penetrate. It is for this reason that the reading load has been adjusted downward. Here, reading will be work, but hopefully an investment that will pay long-term dividends.

Note on historic texts: Many of the works of the church fathers were translated into English in rival nineteenth-century collections, American and British. The collections prior to the time of the first council of Nicea (325) are entitled *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Those at and after the time of the council and continuing to the time of the second council of Nicea (787) are collected in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, in two different, but complementing series. The first series contains only works by Augustine and Chrysostom. The second series contains works from a wide variety of less prolific authors. Many or most of the historic sources listed below are freely available in these editions and can be found simply by searching for the title of the work. For additional texts, see <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/>. Modern, often smoother, translations with up-to-date scholarly apparatus can be found in the following series: *The fathers of the Church*; *Ancient Christian writers*; and, for Augustine's vast corpus, *The works of Saint Augustine*.

IV. Required hours (39 hours)

A. Lectures: Students will attend twelve weeks of class lecture, three hours per week (36 hrs)

B. Discussion: (1) In the first half of term, students will discuss Augustine's *Confessions*. (2) In the second half of term, students will discuss Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*.

One of these discussions will take place in our home over dinner and dessert (2 hrs). The other discussion will be student-scheduled. Which text will be discussed in our home, or in your group, will depend on whether the dinner will be scheduled in the first or second half of the term.

For the student-scheduled discussion, you will break into groups of at least four people (of your own choosing). A two-page report on behalf of the group will summarize – in point form – various observations made or questions posed by the group in its discussion (1 hr). The members of that group, as well as the fact of their attendance and participation, must be identified by the group's appointed scribe.

For the class dinner discussion, you will upload one to two pages of handwritten or typed reading notes at least one hour prior to the dinner gathering.

Attendance

Punctuality is an important part of ministry in the context in which most of you will serve. Students are expected to attend all classes and discussions. Absence from class and class dinners must be excused by the professor. Unexcused absence or repeated lateness requires the completion of an additional assignments. For sample supplementary assignments, please see the file, "Supplementary Assignments" in Canvas.

V. Assignments and Assessment

A. Reading (10% of grade)

The main incentives for reading are similar to those for classroom attendance: (1) our desire to be equipped for ministry and (2) the assumption on the part of the people whom we hope to serve that we have done the work assigned in seminary. As additional incentives, exams will test a student's reading knowledge and **each student will submit a self-report reading pledge on Canvas on the last day of the examination period.**

Grades are assigned according to percentage read and thus partial marks are awarded. Thus, for example, if you indicate that you read 90% of the assigned material you will receive a 9/10 for this part of the assessment. Please ensure, as per the honor code, that your report is as accurate as possible.

1. Required primary sources (circa 600pp.) including, but not limited to:

Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: the major works*, eds. B. Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford, 2008 edition or any edition)

The Apostles' Creed, Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, Athanasian Creed, Chalcedonian Creed. Online, or in Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), pp. 11-27.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, II.1, Question 82, in A. M. Fairweather ed., *Aquinas on Nature and Grace*, pp. 119-125. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2082.htm>

Augustine, *Confessions* (any edition of Chadwick translation), Chapters 1-10.

Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford 2008 edition or any edition). All.

W. H. C. Frend, ed., 'Martyrdom of Polycarp', in *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to A.D.337*, pp. 23-29. (provided on Canvas)

W. H. C. Frend, ed., 'Martyrdom of Justin', in *A New Eusebius*, pp. 32-34. (provided on Canvas)

W. H. C. Frend, ed., 'Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne', in *New Eusebius*, pp. 34-43. (provided on Canvas)

Justin Martyr, 'Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew', in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 194-200, 270 (chapters 1-13, and 142). ALSO read EVERY chapter heading in the 'Dialogue'. AND select five additional chapters of your choice to read ENTIRELY
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.html>

2. Required secondary sources (circa 650pp.)

*Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 300pp. Call No. **BR165 .C48**.

OR Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and practice in the early church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 250pp., larger paperback (designed to complement the *New Eusebius*) Call No. **BT25 .H34**

*Sir Richard Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the middle ages* (London: Penguin, 1970), 350pp. Call No. **BR252 .S68**.

3. Recommended reading

a. Social and political history, in chronological order:

Simon Price and Peter Thonemann, *The Birth of Classical Europe: A History from Troy to Augustine* (New York: Penguin, 2011). ISBN **9780143120452**

Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400–1000* (New York: Penguin, 2009). ISBN **9780670020980**

William Chester Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Viking, 2013). Call No. **D200 .J67**

b. Theological history

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The emergence of the catholic tradition* (Chicago: Chicago, 1971). Call No. **BT21.2 .P42**.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The growth of medieval theology* (Chicago: Chicago, 1978). Call No. **BT21.2 .P42**.

C. Examinations (60% of grade)

Students will sit two examinations, one in class, and the other during the examination period.

(1) The midterm exam (20% of the total grade) is comprised of short answers only, including fill in the blank and multiple choice and **will cover the early church only**.

(2) The final exam, scheduled during a final examination period, has two parts. The first part (20% of the total grade) consists of short answers only, including fill in the blank and multiple choice, and **will cover the medieval church only**.

(3) The second part of the final exam (20% of the total grade) consists of essay questions only, and covers the whole of the course. Thus the examined subject material for the ESSAY component of the final exam IS cumulative, unlike the short answer portion on the final exam.

Examination guides will be provided for both examinations, in Canvas, prior to each exam. They will be based on lectures *and* readings. Please do not share your examinations with future classes.

D. Course project options: (30% of grade)

OPTION 1. Research paper (DUE November 8)

This research paper should be in 12pt., Times New Roman font, full justified, 1-inch margins on all sides, double spacing, page numbers at the bottom, a title at the top of the first page, with your name, class, and date on the right top of the first page. The paper should be 12-15 pages in

length. Use footnotes (not endnotes) according to the SBL, or Chicago Manual of Style (or Turrabian); the most important thing is to be consistent with your citation style. Your paper should include a bibliography. The bibliography does not contribute to your page count, but the footnotes do. The goal of a research paper is to state and defend an argument, demonstrating facility with academic sources and showing that you are familiar with the major arguments, including those you do not agree with. In addition to grading on content, papers will be marked down for grammatical mistakes, sloppy writing, syntactical errors, improper formatting, and failure to communicate your argument clearly and cogently.

Note: Top term papers will be read at a special evening of dinner and dessert at our home in the following term, an event open to RTS students.

Students are encouraged to utilize academic journal articles for their research papers, which can be accessed at <https://rts.edu/academics/library/databases/>

OPTION 2. Reading notes: Students must write and submit two documents containing notes on the Chadwick or Hall and Southern secondary source readings. **The Chadwick or Hall reading notes are due one week before the midterm; Southern on the first day of the final exam period.** The reading notes must be 12pt., Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins on all sides, single-spaced, and not excessively indented. Students who follow the above instructions and submit 15 pages of quality notes will receive at least a B for their grade; submissions worthy of an A should exceed 15 pages and impress the professor.

OPTION 3. Dramatization: Students must research and script their own dramatization of an historical event or debate. Verbal proposals for dramatizations should be discussed with me in the weeks of class, and conceptual approval obtained. Only one proposal will be accepted per term.

Details: The dramatization or mock-reconstruction of the historical event (ca. 20-30 mins) must be followed by student-led historical and theological analysis (ca. 20 mins) and professor and audience Q&A (ca. 15-20 mins). Every student choosing the dramatization option must play a meaningful role in one or the other part in the class performance and analysis, and must share the burden of research. Dramatizations require a minimum number of people to be effective, the subject must be approved by the professor by the end of the first month of class, and only one proposal will be permitted in this course. Grades will be determined in part by self-reporting and group-reporting of the quantity and quality of work done.

Note: This event, if it takes place, will take place in Wellinghall with food provided by RTS Community Life for actors and guests, on an evening in late October or early November.

VI. Grading policies

All written work must be submitted on Canvas.

Late work is not accepted. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, **please submit incomplete work instead**. For additional help understanding the grading scale or my hand-written notes, please see the file, “Grading Policies,” in Canvas. This policy holds in all situations except in the case of extraordinary extenuating circumstance. A medical emergency is an example of an extenuating circumstance; a busy academic or work schedule is not.

Each term I will routinely choose as many as three people with whom to discuss one or more pieces of their written work. Students should expect that in this conversation I will ask about the development of their written work and discuss with the student claims made or sources used. I also reserve the right, in the event that I have any concern about AI use, plagiarism, or cheating, to substitute an oral exam for any assignment, quiz, test or exam. The length and complexity of the oral exam will depend on the scope and complexity of the assignment or assessment exercise.

RTS Extension Policy

In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor.

Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied. *All extension requests must be made **prior to the assignment deadline***. No retrospective extensions will be granted.

RTS Charlotte Classroom Technology Usage

RTS Charlotte recognizes how essential it is for students to have reliable, campus-wide access to the internet. For that reason, we have made Wi-Fi available for our student body, not only in the library and student lounges, but also in the classrooms. We know that students need to use the internet to download class materials, access files on the Cloud, and locate other important information. However, we also recognize that internet access in the classroom provides opportunity for abuse and misuse. Some students have unfortunately used their internet access to engage in many activities that distract them from the classroom lectures (e.g., surfing the web, checking sports scores, playing games). Not only does such activity hamper a student's own seminary education, but it distracts other students who can easily view the screens of nearby students. In addition, donors and classroom guests (who often sit in the back) can see this inappropriate internet usage, which reflects poorly on RTS. Classroom etiquette includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet or playing computer games or other distracting activities. In addition, students must respect standards set by individual professors regarding the use of technology during their class.

In order to address this issue, we must appeal to the integrity of the students as ones who are preparing for a lifetime of ministry to Christ and his church. We expect each student to take personal responsibility for proper classroom technology usage and to encourage others around them to do the same. All RTS-Charlotte students are accountable to the policies stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog and are therefore expected to use technology in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities. Student conduct is under the supervision of the Dean of Students.

Van Dixhoorn Classroom Technology Policy

I'm joining the ranks of those strongly discouraging laptop computers from class, although tablets are fine. Even the godliest, most focused student find screens a distraction, including the screens of others. Moreover, recent research has plausibly suggested that students learn better when taking notes by hand. If a student can demonstrate that not using a computer will cause hardship or inhibit learning, I'll happily consider their argument. Abuse of laptops (using them for a purpose other than note-taking) will result in my request that the laptop not be used by the student for the remainder of the semester. Unless there is an emergency, please also forebear the use of cell phones.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: History of Christianity I

Professor: Van Dixhoorn

Campus: Charlotte

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	1. Memorization of dates 2. Development of doctrine 3. Term paper
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	1. Weekly Bible reading assigned 2. Scripture-based devotions 3. Discuss church's interpretation of Bible throughout course
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	MODERATE	1. Focus on pre-Reformation 2. Ancient faith and practices 3. Medieval theology 4. Augustinian doctrines of grace
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	MODERATE	1. Monastic Spirituality 2. Medieval mysticism 3. Piety of St. Augustine 4. Practice of Prayer
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	1. Historic roots of faith & practice of global church 2. Multi-ethnic, cultural expressions of Christianity
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	1. Emphasis on catholic Christianity 2. Cover Church history that belongs to all Christians 3. Ecumenical Creeds
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	1. Church history illustrations for preaching 2. Models of Pastoral Care 3. Evangelism & missions