COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course offers an in-depth study of early Patristics. It focuses on the second century, during which Christianity emerged from the efforts of the apostles and sought to articulate the apostolic message with fidelity and clarity, both for itself and for its surrounding culture. Extensive reading of primary sources and careful consideration of secondary ones in a seminar format invites a high level of student participation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Knowing…
- Learn the significance of this period for the history of Christianity.
- Learn and wrestle with the scholarly dissonance regarding Christianity in the early patristic period.
- Learn key figures who contributed to the articulation of the Christian faith during the second century.
- Learn and discern the varieties of patristic contributions from this formative period.

Being…
- Develop a sense of how deeply the Christian faith is rooted in second-century patristic teaching.
- Develop the ability to enter the intellectual world of the second-century Church fathers and “think their thoughts after them.”

Doing…
- Read and intelligently discuss assigned readings.
- Engage in scholarly and professional interaction with colleagues in collegial fashion.
- Prepare and present a scholarly research paper on a topic rooted in primary sources from the second century.
REQUIRED READINGS:

Preliminary reading:


By the beginning of the course, students should have read this volume (or another careful scholarly treatment of ancient church history, through the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West), to provide them with a general familiarity with that history (which will be assumed as we move into the class sessions). If they have not done so, they should count on adding it to the readings for the second class session (January 17), but this book will not be discussed in that session.

Textbooks:


Primary sources:

METHOD:

Instructor’s Presentations:
In the initial class session, the professor will make a presentation for orientation purposes, to describe the significance of early patristics, as well as the opportunities and challenges of the discipline, and to explain how the class will proceed. In subsequent class sessions, presentations by the professor will be only for getting discussion of the assigned readings underway or for focusing on another issue or question in the readings which has not yet been addressed in the class session.

Readings:
All readings assigned for a class session are to be completed before the class session begins. Students should bring their copies of the assigned readings for the session with them for ready reference as the class interacts with the readings.

Discussions:
Students are expected to engage consistently and insightfully in the discussions. They should come with observations about or questions regarding what they have read and be ready to engage with each other and the professor in a close interrogation of and careful listening to the readings.

REQUIREMENTS

- **Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of 8-10 volumes (including the textbooks) and 12-15 journal articles or chapters in edited volumes (6000 pages) related to the topic of the course; each annotation should be approximately 100 words. The literature review will be approximately 2000 words. This assignment is due February 21 and will account for 25% of the final grade.

- **Appraisal Paper:** Students will prepare a paper offering an assessment of the controversy in second-century patristics regarding “multiple Christianities,” drawing from and reacting to the textbook presentations in Kruger, Ehrman, and Hill. Students should treat this as if it were to be a scholarly presentation to interested graduate students in theology who are unfamiliar with early patristics but have heard of the dissonance in the field and are interested in having it sorted out and commented on for them. Use footnotes to cite sources. This paper should be 8–10 pages (approximately 2000–2500 words). This presentation is scheduled for March 14 and will account for 25% of the final grade.

- **Research Essay:** Each student will prepare an academic thesis paper of approximately 5000 words on a topic within second-century patristics. The focus for this paper will be chosen in consultation with the professor. The paper is to be written at the level of a peer-reviewed journal article. This assignment is due April 4 and will account for 40% of the final grade.
• **Class participation:** Students will be expected to participate extensively and insightfully in class discussions. This will account for **10%** of the final grade.

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

• Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one’s academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty — [https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations](https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations).

• McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

• Essays must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the day they are due, in hard copy. All other essays will be considered to be late. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 5% per day (not including weekends) if they attach to their essay a letter explaining the genuine emergency that delayed them. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will not receive comments and constructive criticism from the professor.

• The essay should be handed directly to the instructor. To avoid any potential problems, students are advised to keep their working notes and a copy of their paper until a final mark has been received.

• All written work must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. Failure to use appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

• Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins.

• Please do not attend class if you are ill and contagious (e.g., the flu or symptom of Covid 19).

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

Jan. 10 Introduction and orientation

{Chadwick}

Jan. 17 Second-century settings … and the earliest Apostolic fathers

K: 1–39   B: 1–70   H: Introduction, Didache, 1 & 2 Clement
Jan. 24  How Christianity was viewed … and Apostolic fathers taught by St. John
K: 40–74   B: 71–92   H: Ignatius, Polycarp

Jan. 31  Worshipping Jesus, & alternatives … and Apostolic fathers defending the faith
K: 75–134   Papandrea   H: Epistle of Barnabas–Papias (the rest of H)

Feb. 7  The “Great Church” … and early apologists
K: 135–166   ANF 2: Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras

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K: 135–166   ANF 2: Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras

Feb. 14  The structures and arguments of the apologists Justin Martyr and Tatian
B: 93–110   Justin Martyr, “The First Apology”   ANF 2: Tatian

Feb. 21*  *Literature Review Due*
Christianity as a textual culture … and an extraordinary exegete from Asia Minor
K: 167–231   Melito of Sardis

{Feb. 28}  {Reading week}

Mar. 7  The greatest theologian of the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons
B: 111–133   Irenaeus of Lyons

Mar. 14*  *Appraisal Papers Due* … and discussion of the problem

Mar. 21  Into the third century … and the school of Alexandria
B: 135–206   ANF 2: Clement of Alexandria, “The Instructor”

Mar. 28  The conflict with Modalism … and Latin theologizing in North Africa
B: 207–241   ANF 3: Tertullian, “Prescriptions against Heretics,” “Against Praxeas”

April 4*  *Research Essays Due* … and discussion
Concluding remarks
• In addition to the Selected Bibliography for Early Patristics listed subsequently, students may want to consult the excellent bibliographies offered in the textbooks by Kruger (at pp. 232–248) and by Behr (pp. 243255).

Please note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Selected Bibliography for Early Patristics


