

# Early Christian Theology

## CH/TH 3EX3/5EX5/6EX6

McMaster Divinity College

Fall term 2022

Monday

2:00pm-3:50pm

Instructor: James R. Payton, Jr.

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**Specializations: CW/CC/PS**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course examines how Christian theology was articulated and presented in the early Church. We will read and critically consider a careful study of how the Church fathers approached theology, what they emphasized, and how they set it forth. We will also read the first great theological treatise produced in the post-apostolic Church and will consider and discuss an extensive collection of excerpts from the Church fathers' works, seeking to understand the Church fathers on their own terms. With all this we will go on to reflect on the significance of early Christian theology for later theology and for life in the Church today.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

*Knowing...*

- to acquaint students with the approaches to and emphases in early Christian theology
- to enable students to develop basic familiarity with the Church fathers' writings
- to help students appreciate the significance and importance of early Christian theology for the history of theology

*Being...*

- to stimulate an appreciation for the theology articulated within early Christianity
- to develop a sense of being rooted today in and indebted to the theology set forth in Christian antiquity

*Doing...*

- to develop in each student an ability to assess theological writings from a historical perspective
- to help students acquire the ability to enter into and express in a historically responsible fashion the ways the Church fathers viewed and taught the Christian faith

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

### Textbook:

- Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (InterVarsity Press, 2002).

### Primary sources:

- James R. Payton, Jr., *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of "Against Heresies"* (Pickwick Publications, 2011).
- James R. Payton, Jr., ed., *A Patristic Treasury: Early Church Wisdom for Today* (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2013. [Abbreviated as *APT* in readings assigned in class schedule.]

\*All students are expected to complete all assignments based on the instructions provided in Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History*, and well as the MDC Style Guide.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## METHOD:

### Instructor's Presentations:

The instructor will offer a presentation in the introductory class. In subsequent classes, his presentations will usually focus on adding to or offering background for the materials being discussed in that class. Some presentations will elaborate on significant foci and concerns in early Christian theology.

### Readings:

All assigned readings are to be completed before the class begins. Students should bring their copies of the assigned readings with them and be prepared to discuss them in class. These readings are the foundation of the class: we will discuss them in almost every class session.

### Discussions:

In each class, students should be prepared to discuss the readings insightfully, bringing questions and offering comments about them. Sometimes the instructor will offer questions to provoke further reflection on the readings or will point to implications of a reading which have not yet come up in that class's discussion. On days when papers are due, students will be invited (and expected) to discuss, informally, what they have found and/or learned in preparing their papers. Participation in all these discussions will be counted toward the discussion/participation grade.

### Format:

This class will meet in person at McMaster Divinity College (with livestream available if and as needed).

## MDiV/MTS REQUIREMENTS:

**Expectation Paper:** Students will prepare (and discuss in class) a **2-3 page paper** laying out what they expect in this class. Dig down into your sub-conscious assumptions about studying the theology taught in Christian antiquity, recognizing that it may well not be the same as what you personally hold today—and identify what you expect could, should, or might happen as you engage in this study. **Due September 26.**

**Irenaeus Paper:** Students will prepare a **5-6 page paper** presenting Irenaeus’s teaching on one of the topics listed below. Citations are expected to *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith* (and should be made in the body of the paper, rather than as footnotes); citations should follow the system used in the book (book number: chapter, section), rather than page numbers. **Due \*October 12\*.**

### *Topics:*

- (1) The importance of the apostolic tradition
- (2) The Adam/Christ parallelism (cf. Romans 5 & 1 Corinthians 15)
- (3) Sin and its consequences
- (4) The significance of the incarnation
- (5) How Christ accomplishes salvation

**Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of **8–10 journal articles** (whether scholarly journals or Christian/denominational magazines) **or chapters in edited volumes** related to (for CC and PS students) the challenge of “deconstruction/reconstruction of faith” and how early Christian theology could serve that struggle or (for CW students) to the contemporary concern for *ressourcement* and why early Christian theology is important for that endeavor (including its limitations). Each annotation should be approximately 100 words, so the completed assignment should be approximately 1000 words. (The annotations should be single-spaced.) **Due November 7.**

**Patristic Perspective Paper:** Students will prepare an **8-10 page paper** on one of the topics listed below. Students should read through *A Patristic Treasury*, finding the selections relevant to the topic they choose, and write a paper setting forth the Church fathers’ views on that topic. (Citations should appear as footnotes for this paper.) **Due December 5.**

*N.B.:* This paper must include, on the last page, a list of the selections the student has identified as relevant to the topic treated; those selections are to be listed in the following format: name of the Church father, title of work and location (*i.e.*, section/chapter/paragraph, etc.), and (in parentheses), page in *A Patristic Treasury* (abbreviate to: *APT* followed by page number[s]).

### *Topics:*

- (1) Divine Incomprehensibility
- (2) Division and Unity in the Church
- (3) The Cross (of Christ, and the sign)
- (4) Faith and Works
- (5) Sin and Temptation
- (6) Baptism
- (7) The Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist)

**Discussion/Participation:** Students will be expected to participate regularly, extensively, and insightfully in class discussions.

## GRADING:

- **Expectation Paper: 5%**
- **Irenaeus Paper: 25%**
- **Literature Review: 20%**
- **Patristic Perspectives Paper: 35%**
- **Discussion: 15%**

## DPT REQUIREMENTS

- **Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately **15–20 sources (c. 4000 pages)** related to the patristic content of the course and how it might relate to your research project; each annotation should be approximately 100 words. (The required texts and primary sources for the course can be included as part of this book list.) The literature review will be approximately **2000 words**. This assignment is **due \*October 26\*** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **\*\*Research Presentation:** Students will present to the class the research they are working on for the major paper described below. This will include an introduction describing what is being investigated, the area of the student's DPT practice-led research, and the patristic source(s) being used. The bulk of the presentation will lay out what a careful consideration of the early Christian source(s) offers as insight or contribution for the student's particular research program. The presentation should be approximately 25 minutes in length, with 10–15 additional minutes for class discussion. This assignment is **scheduled for November 14** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **\*\*Major paper:** Each student will prepare a major paper of approximately **5000 words** on a topic related to course content, dealing with at least one primary early Christian theological source, and related to your area of DPT practice-led research. This paper should reflect both theological depth and insight regarding that relationship. Use and document (via footnotes) a minimum of 15 scholarly resources. This assignment is **due December 5** and will account for **40%** of the final grade.
- **Class participation:** Students will be expected to participate in class discussions. This will account for **10%** of the final grade.

## MA/PhD REQUIREMENTS

- **Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of **10–12 volumes and 10–12 journal articles or chapters in edited volumes (5000–6000 pages)** related to the topic of the course; each annotation should be approximately 100 words. (The required texts and primary sources for the course can be included as part of this book list.) The literature review will be approximately **2000 words**. This assignment is **due \*October 26\*** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.

- **\*\*Research Presentation:** Students will present to the class the research they are working on for the major essay described below. This will include an introduction describing what is being investigated (and why it is important), the approach taken to examine the question, and the results of the investigation. The presentation should be approximately 30 minutes in length, with 10 additional minutes for class discussion. This presentation is **scheduled for November 14** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **\*\*Major essay:** Each student will prepare an academic thesis paper of approximately **6000 words** on the topic presented in class, to be written at the level of a peer-reviewed journal article. The focus of the paper should be on some facet of early Christian theology. This assignment is **due December 5** and will account for **40%** of the final grade.
- **Class participation:** Students will be expected to participate in class discussions. This will account for **10%** of the final grade.

\*\*The focus for each of these papers, including early Christian theological sources, emphases, and the theme of each paper will be chosen in consultation with the professor.

## 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>. Papers submitted will be processed through Turnitin.
- 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 U.E. (2021), NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).
- Essays must be submitted via Avenue to Learn at least 30 minutes before the beginning of the class on the day they are due. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 5% per day (not including Sunday) 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.
- 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.

Further, failure to abide by the “Usage Guidelines” posted on Avenue to Learn by the instructor 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., flu or Covid 19 symptoms).

**CLASS SCHEDULE** (dates when assignments are due are marked with an asterisk [\*]):

Sept. 12 Introduction to the class

Sept. 19 Hall, “Preface” & “Preparing to Learn Theology with the Church Fathers” (26pp.)  
*APT* 11-58

**\*Sept. 26\* Expectation Paper due**

Hall, “Christ the Son, Begotten and Not Made” & “The Mystery and Wonder of the Trinity” (48 pp.)  
*APT* 59-106

Oct. 3 Hall, “Christ Divine and Human” & “On the Holy Spirit” (40 pp.)  
*APT* 107-159

{Oct. 10: no class [Thanksgiving Holiday]}

**\*Oct. 12\* Irenaeus Paper due**

Oct. 17 Hall, “Sin, Grace and the Human Condition” (36 pp.)  
*APT* 163-225

{Oct. 24: no class [MDC Hybrid Week]}

**\*Oct. 26\* DPT/PhD Literature Reviews due**

Oct. 31 Hall, “God’s Transcendent Providence” (24 pp.)  
*APT* 226-297

**\*Nov. 7\* Literature Review due**

Hall, “God’s Wise and Loving Providence” (24 pp.)  
*APT* 298-355

**\*Nov. 14\* DPT/MA/PhD Research Presentations**

Nov. 21 Hall, “The Sacred Scriptures” & “One Holy, Apostolic Church” (42 pp.)  
*APT* 365-410

Nov. 28 Hall, “The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting” (25 pp.)  
*APT* 411-465

**\*Dec. 5\* Patristic Perspective Paper due**

**DPT Major Paper due & MA/PhD Major Essay due**

***Bibliography for Early Christian Theology***

- Anatolios, Khaled. *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Arand, Louis A., trans. *St. Augustine: Faith, Hope and Charity*. Ancient Christian Writers, No. 3. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1947.
- Ayres, Lewis. *Augustine and the Trinity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies (Selections)*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990.
- Beaven, James. *An Account of the Life and Writings of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons and Martyr*. London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1841 (Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints).
- Behr, John. *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*. Christian Theology in Context. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nicene Faith, Part One: True God of True God*. The Formation of Christian Theology, volume 2, part 1. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nicene Faith, Part Two: One of the Holy Trinity*. The Formation of Christian Theology, volume 2, part 2. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Way to Nicaea*. The Formation of Christian Theology, volume 1. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.
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- Bercot, David W., ed. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers*. Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.
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- Bévenot, Maurice, S.J., trans. *St. Cyprian: The Lapsed; The Unity of the Catholic Church*. Ancient Christian Writers, no. 25. Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957.
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- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000.
- Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*, rev. ed. The Penguin History of the Church, vol. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Chase, Frederic H., Jr., trans. *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*. The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, vol. 37. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958.
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- Chryssavgis, John. *The Way of the Fathers: Exploring the Patristic Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Company, 2003.

- Cohick, Lynn H., and Amy Brown Hughes. *Christian Women in the Patristic World: Their Influence, Authority, and Legacy in the Second through Fifth Centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.
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- Damick, Andrew Stephen. *Bearing God: The Life and Works of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the God-Bearer*. Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2017.
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- DelCogliano, Mark, trans. *St. Basil the Great: On Christian Doctrine and Practice*. Popular Patristics Series, no. 47. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012.f
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