

CH501: The Church to the Reformation

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Jacksonville campus

PROFESSOR: Dr. Ryan Reeves

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

CLASS DAY: Sept. 16-17; Oct. 14-5; Nov. 4-5
(Friday evenings 6:30pm to 9:30pm, Saturdays 8:30am to 4:30pm)

TEXTBOOKS: Students will be required to read the following books:

Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*

Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*

Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*
(Routledge, 2002)

St. Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*

St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*

NOTE: All books can be purchased via Christianbooks: <http://gcts.christianbook.com>

OBJECTIVES: This is a survey course to introduce the student to the history of the Christian church in the early and medieval periods (100 -- 1500 A.D.) The course objective is to thoroughly acquaint the student with the historical and theological development of key figures, movements and doctrines. Special emphasis will be on reading the primary sources.

COURSE
REQUIREMENTS:

EXAMS: There will be a midterm and final exam each worth 30% of your grade (60% combined)

EXAM DATES:

-The mid-term will be held on **Friday, October 14th** at the start of Friday evening's class.

-The final will be a take-home exam. You will take the exam with an approved proctor, or you may take the final on campus (proctored by a GCTS staff person). The exam will

be due by **December 14th**. You must provide the contact info for your proctor on the last day of class or declare you will take the exam on campus.

PAPER: The paper will be worth 30% of your final grade. It will likely be 10-12 pages and more details will be coming with a final syllabus. The paper will be due **December 10th**.

READING REPORT: The reading report will make up 10% of the final grade and will be **reported on the final exam**.

Grading: The point values listed above mean that the total number of points available for the course is 100. Final letter grades will be applied with cutoffs as follows: A+ 97, A 93, A- 90, B+ 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D+ 67, D 63, D- 60, F below 60

Late work: All late work will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade per day beyond the due date, unless arrangements are made ahead of time. Extenuating circumstances will be considered as appropriate. If you anticipate a problem, contact the professor as soon as possible.

Paper

GOAL: The goal of this paper is for students to immerse themselves in the writings of one church father. The essay assignment that goes along with this reading is a reflective, critical examination of the spiritual and theological substance of your reading. To be clear: I want you to graze through the writings of just one of these great Christian thinkers; I do not want this to be an exercise in abstract thought or a mere academic exercise.

Your assignment is to engage with one figure – perhaps a Father you always wanted to learn more about – and really pour over his devotional, biblical, and theological works. Take notes on things that inspire you, ponder things that challenge you, and question things that trouble you. Christians, pastors, and missionaries have read the Fathers for centuries as part of their devotional and spiritual diet. If I can get you hooked on just one, I will have done my job!

Method: Throughout the semester, chose one figure (e.g. Augustine). Use the resources below to find his original texts online. You may choose to explore devotional material (e.g. *Confessions*), or theological texts (e.g. *Against Pelagius*), or even his sermons and biblical commentaries. You may also choose to read widely in all of these areas.

You should be sure to do some biographical work on your source as you start. New Advent has good articles on each, and they do a fair job giving you the context of major works.

Students must read no less than the equivalent of Augustine's *Confessions* – in modern editions, this comes to 350 pages. If a student chooses to read a variety of texts, they should make sure that their readings are substantial enough to reach the minimum page amount. Of course, reading beyond the minimum is encouraged.

Essay: The essay will be graded 25% for your writing style/execution and 75% on your reflections. Students are to be reflective, engaging their readings in the light of scripture and the modern world.

Two options are available for the paper topic:

First, a student may explore the overall contours of a Father's spiritual/theological ideas. Students who explore these big themes, however, should make sure that their reflections have depth and substance. It is not enough to say that Augustine believed that 'the Lord was sovereign'. Instead, they might reflect on the prevalence of suffering in Augustine's devotional writings, how he counseled his readers to face persecutions, which biblical texts seem to appear over and over, etc.

Second, students may choose one single theme (e.g. Chrysostom's teachings on salvation in his sermons on Romans) and a reflection on this alone. Approaching the essay this way will make it easier to add depth to your reflections. But students should not simply string together quotes from a Father without 'drawing all the threads together' in your reflection.

Sources:

There are several approved sources (online) for your readings. For print versions, use either the Schaff edition or any of a dozen stand alone printings of individual Fathers. Please contact the library staff for print versions of these texts, or speak to the professor about which versions you may wish to purchase.

New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>

New Advent is a Catholic site that maintains a database of nearly every text from the early church. The texts are easy to read, the biblical citations are hyperlinked in, and they even tell you if a text is 'spurious' or 'authentic'. This site, in particular, is highly recommended.

CCEL: <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>

Another popular site, though I find their page layout to be frustrating and difficult to read. Others love the convenience of being able to pay a bit for a downloadable pdf version of a text.