

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HIS/THE/MHT 502 Ancient Christianity to the Challenge of Islam (100-800 A.D.)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of how early Christians perceived the mission of God in the world, involving the examination of the expansion and cultural contexts of ancient Christianity, theological and missiological developments, schools of biblical interpretation, liturgies, renewal movements, and significant challenges to the integrity of the faith. The latter include Gnosticism; doctrinal disputes; political, social and cultural dynamics; and the rise of Islam and the Muslim conquests. The course ends with a discussion of contemporary relevance and applications.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course, each student should be able to:

1. Discuss the history of Christianity in its diverse cultural settings to 800 A.D.
2. Analyze the contributions of key personalities and movements to the development of Christianity.
3. Explain how diverse cultural contexts both enriched and challenged the witness of the faith.
4. Analyze new understandings of the mission of the church that arose and the patterns of evangelization that were subsequently adopted.
5. Discuss important theological issues that contributed to the further articulation of Christian doctrine.
6. Discuss the changing nature of Jewish-Christian relationships.
7. Trace developments in liturgy and how they impacted the life of the churches.
8. Explain how early schools of biblical interpretation arose and their impact on the life and teachings of the churches.
9. Analyze the contemporary relevance of early writings that defended the faith before different audiences.
10. Discuss the historical roles of women in ministry.
11. Analyze the reasons why Islam could conquer the heartland of Christianity.
12. Discern patterns for personal and corporate renewal today.
13. Relate one's own story to the larger story.

TEXTBOOKS

CODE: Textbooks that will also be used in the River 3 course are marked with a single asterisk (*); books that will be used in both River 3 and River 4 are marked with two asterisks ().**

**Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

*Coakley, John W., and Andrea Sterk, Eds. *Readings in World Christian History*, Vol. 1: *Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004.

*Irvin, Dale T., and Scott W. Sunquist. *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1: *Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001.

**Leith, John H., ed. *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd Ed. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

**Riddell, Peter G., and Peter Cotterell. *Islam in context: Past, Present, and Future*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

**Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

*Placher, William C., ed. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology*, Vol. 1: *From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. The student is expected to attend all class sessions. Absences should be for extreme circumstances only. The limits established by the Seminary will be observed. "Barring a serious medical emergency, credit cannot be granted for courses in which a student has been absent beyond the equivalent of more than two weeks."
2. The student will participate in four online email discussions during the term in response to questions posed by the professor and announced in class. The student will be responsible to respond to the question and to at least one posting by a fellow student, and provide the professor a printout of the correspondence within one week from the posting of the question. The discussion will focus on an aspect of the classroom presentations that allows the student to further their understanding by interaction with their colleagues.
3. The student will submit eight two-page focus papers based on assigned readings during the term. The topics and due dates are announced on the "Course Outline, Pre-Session Assignments, and Exam Schedule" section of the syllabus. (Each one is due at the beginning of class on the assigned date.) These essays allow the student to interact with the reading assignments for the scheduled lecture topics and respond cogently to them. The two-page length expectation should be seen as the maximum allowable length. (Focus papers should begin with a brief statement of purpose, be double-spaced, and carefully proofread. They should NOT include footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography.)
4. The student should come to each class session prepared through the assigned readings to participate in the presentation. To assist the student in this, unannounced quizzes will be given at the beginning of some of the sessions. The lowest score on the quizzes will be dropped when averaging the grade for the course.
5. The student will sustain successfully a midterm examination and a final examination covering the lecture material, assigned readings, and other information presented during the class sessions (for example, debates and films). The midterm exam will be given at the 8:55 A.M. meeting of the class on October 20; the final exam will be given Wednesday, December 15, from 10:15 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. The exams will be a mixture of objective and subjective questions and may not be taken off-schedule unless an emergency arises.

GRADING PROCEDURE

Online email discussions	10%
Focus papers	30%
Quizzes	20%
Examinations	40%

Grades are recorded and averaged on the basis of the following grade scale: A=12; A-=11; B+=10; B=9; B-=8; C+=7; C=6; C-=5; D+=4; D=3; D-=2; F=1.

All assigned work for the course must be submitted for the student to receive a passing grade for the course. The grade of I (Incomplete) may be granted only for extenuating circumstances upon the written request of the student. Except in the case of severe extenuating circumstances, the course grade will be reduced by one letter.

COURSE OUTLINE, PRE-SESSION READING ASSIGNMENTS, AND EXAM SCHEDULE

CODE: Bray—B; Coakley and Sterk—CS; Irvin and Sunquist—IS; Leith—L; Olson—O; Placher—P; Riddell and Cotterell—RC. The numbers “1.” and “2.” refer to first session (8:55-10:10 a.m.) and second session (11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m.).

Sep 3	1. Introduction to the course 2. Christianity in 100 A.D. <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—vii-46; CS—23-37; O—11-27	GBM/JHR
Sep 8	1. Pastoral and ecclesiastical issues—the Apostolic Fathers 2. Contd. <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—50-73; CS—3-5, 12-16; O—25-53; P—15-18 <i>Focus paper:</i> The issue of church leadership in the <i>Didache</i> .	GBM
Sep 10	1. Mission and evangelism in Christianity 2. Christian initiation and the charismata <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—74-97	GBM
Sep 15	1. Formation of the NT Canon 2. Early biblical interpretation <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> B—7-76; CS—66-67; O—124-135	JHR
Sep 17	1. Challenges to the faith 2. The Apologists <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—99-114; CS—5-12, 37-43, 53-57;	JHR

O—54-67; P—18-21, 30-36

Focus paper: The most important apologist of the second and third centuries.

Sep 22	1. Irenaeus and the apostolic tradition 2. Early creeds before Nicea <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—115-153; L—1-28; O—68-78; P—24-29	JHR
Sep 24	1. Nature and method of theology 2. Theological authority	JHR
Sep 29	1. North African Theologians 2. Contd. <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> O—79-123; P—43-47	JHR
Oct 1	1. Liturgical developments in the 2 nd and 3 rd centuries 2. Montanism <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> CS—17-22; P—21-22	GBM
Oct 6	1. Persecutions, catacombs, and “communion of the saints” 2. Monasticism <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> CS—110-112, 122-163, 176-187 Focus paper: The monastic call and service to the church.	GBM
Oct 8	1. Conversion of Constantine 2. Emergence of “Christendom” <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—155-172; CS—87-97	GBM
Oct 13	1. Jewish-Christian relations 2. Contd.	Lois Olena
Oct 15	1. Schools of biblical interpretation: Alexandria and Antioch 2. Contd. <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> B—77-128; CS—68-76 Focus paper: The central issues in the debate on biblical interpretation between Alexandria and Antioch.	JHR
Oct 20	1. Mid-term examination (8:55-10:10 a.m.) 2. Liturgies from the 4 th century: Models for church today?	JHR GBM
Oct 22	1. Theology in poetry: Ephrem the Syrian 2. Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—195-208; CS—82-84, 113-117	GBM
Oct 27	1. Development of the doctrine of Christ (NT to Nicea) 2. Contd. <i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—173-194; CS—98-101; O—137-172; P—48-55	JHR

Focus paper: The arrival at a theological consensus at the Council of Nicea.

Oct 29	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Doctrine of Christ (Nicea to Chalcedon)2. Monophysites, Nestorians, and Monothelites <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> CS—165-174; L—28-36; O—173-249; P—55-81</p>	JHR
Nov 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Augustine and theology in the West2. Nature of humankind and sin <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—220-236; P—100-105</p>	JHR
Nov 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pelagius, Augustine, and the doctrine of salvation2. Council of Orange <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> CS—206-210; L—37-53; O—278-289; P—106-121</p> <p>Focus paper: The idea of the freedom of the will in the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy.</p>	JHR
Nov 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pseudo-Dionysius and the Negative Way of prayer2. Advocates of the Positive Way of prayer <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> P—82-88</p>	GBM
Nov 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Patrick and the conversion of Ireland2. Mission and Celtic evangelism <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS-236-239; CS—221-228</p>	GBM
Nov 17	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Women in ministry2. Contd.	Barbara Cavaness
Nov 19	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Gregory the Great and the evangelization of England2. Conversion of the Franks <p>Mission and the challenge of contextualization</p> <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—323-334</p>	GBM
Nov 24	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Christianity in North Africa, Egypt, and Ethiopia2. Character of Latin, Greek, and Syriac churches <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—209-219, 289-304; CS—107-109, 188-193</p> <p>Focus paper: Commonalities in the evangelization and contextualization of Christianity in Ethiopia, Georgia, and Nubia.</p>	GBM
Dec 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Constantinople and Greek Christianity2. Theology and evangelism in art <p>Iconography and the Iconoclastic Controversy</p> <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> IS—240-259; CS—289-297; L—53-56; O—290-303; P—88-90</p>	GBM

Dec 8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mohammed and the teachings of Islam 2. Factors behind the Muslim conquests and the decline of Christianity in the heartland 3. Christianity in the heartland <p><i>Pre-assigned reading:</i> RC—7-80 <i>Focus paper:</i> “Allah”—the God of both Muslims and Christians?</p>	GBM
Dec 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gospel and culture to 800 A.D.: Reflections and applications 2. Contd. 	JHR/GBM
Dec 15	Final exam (10:15-12:45 p.m.)	

RESOURCES

Suggested sources for primary and secondary materials can be found in the bibliographies of the required textbooks for the course.

Prepared by Gary B. McGee and James H. Railey, July 14, 2004.