

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

Christianity from Christ to Constantine — BS-3455

Spring 2020

Monday / Thursday, 11:10am—12:30pm

DSPT Room 2

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Office hours: Tuesday 12:30–1:30, and by appointment

Course description

This course is an exploration into the writings of the early Church, using the primary sources of texts from key figures within the Church's early centuries and Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*. Following the story of a non-entity on Good Friday that converted the world's greatest empire within three centuries, this course traces the continuation of the Christian movement from the Book of Acts up through the conversion of the Emperor in the fourth century, as it sought to embody, uphold and spread the gospel amidst persecutions and internal challenges to the faith. Employing a seminar format, this class will shed light on how the teachings of Scripture were understood and lived out among the earliest generations of Christians, the ways in which early Christianity corresponded and contrasted with the cultures, values and religions of the ancient world, and how studying these writings can help us better understand our own mission as heirs to the faith of these earliest believers. This class is for MDiv and MA/MTS students, and evaluates with a research paper (40%) and presentation (10%), reading responses (25%), and class discussion (25%).

Required Textbooks

Maier, Paul L. *Eusebius: The Church History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2007. \$14.12. ISBN: 978-0825433078.

Louth, Andrew. *Early Christian Writings*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987. \$10.29. ISBN: 978-0140444759.

Ferguson, Everett et al. *Gregory of Nyssa: Life of Moses*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978. \$16.41. ISBN: 978-0809121120.

Suggested Textbooks

Behr, John. *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching*. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's, 1997. \$15.59. ISBN: 978-0881411744.

Behr, John. *On the Incarnation: Saint Athanasius*. Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's, 2012. \$15.30. ISBN: 978-0881414271.

Optional Textbooks

Benedict XVI. *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008.

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd Ed. Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.

Ferguson, Everett. *Church History, Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2005.

Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.

Stark, Rodney. *The Triumph of Christianity*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.

Online Resources:

Christian Classics Ethereal Library: <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>. Includes entire Ante-Nicene Fathers series, which has older but very serviceable translations and commentary for nearly all texts before AD 325, along with the Post-Nicene Fathers, which includes Eusebius' history. An invaluable resource.

Early Christian Writings: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com>. A useful source with a wide variety of early texts and fragments, along with apocryphal and gnostic sources. Often has numerous English translations for each source, biographical information from older scholarly work, and Greek and Latin texts.

New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/index.html>. Similar to the first two, contains a large number of texts and helpful biographical introductions.

Tertullian.org: <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm>. A Tertullian-focused site which hosts a number of other early Christian works not listed in the Ante-Nicene Fathers series.

Student Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Be introduced to the major figures and writings in Christian history from the post-apostolic times up to the early 4th century.
- Learn how the Scriptures and apostolic traditions were first understood by the earliest generations of Christians.
- Become familiar with the distinctive features of Christianity relative to the common religious and ethical viewpoints in the ancient Greco-Roman world.
- Learn to recognize the dependence of Western ethics and values upon ideas first articulated within the early Christian period.
- Come to understand how early Christian thought represents a common inheritance for Christians of all kinds, and can benefit the Church's theology, worship, and ministry today.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who completes this course will be able to:

- Recognize the major the theological voices within the early centuries of the Church who helped to give shape to the Christian faith.
- Describe the distinctive features of the Christian message from studying the imprint it made upon its earliest communities.
- Discuss how the beliefs and values of early Christians compared and contrasted with those of the ancient Greco-Roman world.

- Identify how contemporary values sometimes regarded as self-evident are often historically rooted in early Christian ideas.
- Articulate the benefits of patristic study for the Church's theology, worship, and ministry today.

Methodology

Class meetings will consist of lectures, class discussions, and student presentations. Out-of-class assignments will include reading, writing reading responses, and writing a major paper.

Course Requirements

1. Class discussion: Class attendance is mandatory. Students must be punctual and prepared for each class by having studied the reading and completed any other assignments. This course is dependent upon students keeping up with the reading and actively engaging with the sources and one another in discussion, and students should be prepared to be called on, even when they have not raised their hand. Students are strongly advised to be vigilant in completing their readings, as they know neither the day nor the hour when they will be called upon.

2. Reading responses: All assigned readings must be completed before each class. At the end of each class, students will hand in a summary/response for each reading that need not exceed one page, though these can be as long as students wish. These summaries will not be graded for style, but are solely intended to ensure that the readings have been completed. A bullet-point format works well, but students may write the assignment however serves them best; however, the response must make clear that the text has been read. Assignments will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, except that late assignments will receive a 50% deduction.

3. *Sed Contra* paper: Each student will write a *Sed Contra* paper of approximately 4 single-spaced pages (around 2000 words) on a disputed question in the early Christian writings that is agreed upon with the professor. The format of the paper is outlined at the end of the syllabus (see "Major paper: *Sed Contra*"). Papers are to be carefully proofread, and failure to follow the given format will result in being required to rewrite the paper with a penalty of one letter grade. Final papers will be due at the end of the course.

4. Presentation: Related to this assignment, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation of their *Sed Contra* papers, followed by 5-10 minutes of responding to questions from the class. This will give the class an opportunity to explore the significance of the question and test the presenter's arguments, and allow the presenter to further refine their work for the final version of the paper (which will be turned in at the conclusion of the course).

Grading Procedures and Rubric

Class discussion: 25%

Reading responses: 25%

Sed Contra paper: 40%

Presentation: 10%

- A Excellent work; student demonstrates excellent understanding of the material.
- B Very good work; student demonstrates strong understanding of the material.
- C Fair work; student demonstrates adequate understanding of the material, though with room for improvement.

- D Poor work; student demonstrates some barely adequate understanding of the material, with substantial room for improvement.
- F Student demonstrates inadequate understanding of the material.

Grade scale

A 100 – 93	B- 82 – 80	D+ 69 – 67
A- 92 – 90	C+ 79 – 77	D 66 – 63
B+ 89 – 87	C 76 – 73	D- 62 – 60
B 86 – 83	C- 72 – 70	F 59 and below

Course Schedule

NB: Each primary source has a time estimate (via wordcounter.net) of how long each will take to read. While these estimates may be on the low end (as they do not incorporate time for reflection), they will at least give students an idea of the time needed to complete each reading.

Week 1: Christ (c. BC 2-3 – AD 30)

Monday, Feb 3

Course introduction and overview

HW: Read Eusebius 1

Thursday, Feb 6

Discussion: Eusebius 1

HW: Read *Didache* (0:11)

Week 2: The Ascension to the Jewish War (c. AD 30 – 70)

Monday, Feb 10

Discussion: *Didache*

HW: Read Eusebius 2

Thursday, Feb 13

Discussion: Eusebius 2

HW: Read *1 Clement* (0:52), *2 Clement* (0:16)

Week 3: The Destruction of Jerusalem to Ignatius (c. AD 70 – 125)

Monday, Feb 17: Presidents day, no class

Thursday, Feb 20

Discussion: *1 Clement*, *2 Clement*

HW: Read Eusebius 3

Week 4: The Destruction of Jerusalem to Ignatius, cont. (c. AD 70 – 125)

Monday, Feb 24

Discussion: Eusebius 3

HW: *Epistles of Ignatius* (Ephesians, Magnesians, Romans, Smyrnaeans; 0:31); *Epistle to Diognetus* (0:16)

Thursday, Feb 27

Discussion: *Epistles of Ignatius, Epistle to Diognetus*

HW: Read *Apology of Aristides* (0:26), Polycarp, *To the Philippians* (0:10), *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (0:13)

Week 5: Ignatius to the Apologists (c. AD 125 – 180)

Monday, March 2

Discussion: *Apology of Aristides, To the Philippians, Martyrdom of Polycarp*

HW: Read Eusebius 4

Thursday, March 5

Discussion: Eusebius 4

HW: Read Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (selections, ch. 1-31; 0:53); Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha* (0:24)

Week 6: The Apologists (c. AD 125 – 180)

Monday, March 9

Discussion: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (selections); Melito, *Peri Pascha*

HW: Read Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* (1:20); *2 Apology* (0:17)

Thursday, March 12

Discussion: Justin Martyr, *1 Apology, 2 Apology*

HW: Read Minucius Felix, *Octavius* (1:20)

Week 7: The Apologists to Persecution in Gaul and Easter controversy (c. AD 180 – 200)

Monday, March 16

Discussion: Minucius Felix, *Octavius*

HW: Read Eusebius 5

Thursday, March 19

Discussion: Eusebius 5

HW: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book III (2:30)

Week 8: Spring break

Monday, March 23: No class

Thursday, March 26: No class

Week 9: Persecution in Gaul and the Easter controversy, cont. (c. AD 180 – 200)

Monday, March 30

Discussion: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book III

HW: Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (1:11)

Thursday, April 2

Discussion: Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*

HW: Clement of Alexandria, TBD (c. 1:00); *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (0:19)

Week 10: Tertullian to the Decian persecution (c. AD 200 – 250)

Monday, April 6

Discussion: Clement of Alexandria, TBD; *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*

HW: Eusebius 6

Thursday, April 9

Discussion: Eusebius 6

HW: Tertullian, *Against Marcion* Book II (1:10); *Prescription Against Heretics* (1:08)

Week 11: Tertullian to the Decian persecution, cont. (c. AD 200 – 250)

Monday, April 13: Easter Monday, no class

Thursday, April 16

Discussion: Tertullian, *Against Marcion* Book II; *Prescription Against Heretics*

HW: Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* (selections; c. 0:30); Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* (0:30)

Week 12: Schisms and Heresies (c. AD 250 – 300)

Monday, April 20

Discussion: Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* (selections); Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*

HW: Eusebius 7

Thursday, April 23

Discussion: Eusebius 7

HW: Origen, *Against Celsus* Book I (1:50)

Week 13: “The Persecution in Our Times”: Diocletian (c. AD 300 – 310)

Monday, April 27

Discussion: Origen, *Against Celsus* Book I

HW: Eusebius 8

Thursday, April 30

Discussion: Eusebius 8

HW: Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (1:45)

Week 14: Final Persecutions and the arrival of Constantine (c. AD 310 – 315)

Monday, May 4

Discussion: Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*

HW: Eusebius 9

Thursday, May 7

Discussion: Eusebius 9, student presentations

HW: Read Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* Book I (1:16)

Week 15: Victory of Constantine (c. AD 315 – 323)**Monday, May 11**

Discussion: *Proof of the Gospel* Book I, student presentations

HW: Read Eusebius 10

Thursday, May 14

Discussion: Eusebius 10, student presentations

HW: Read Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* (2:15 total; first part)

Week 16: Epilogue: A visit to Gregory of Nyssa's Bible study**Monday, May 18**

Discussion: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* (first part), student presentations

HW: Read Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* (second part)

Thursday, May 21

Discussion: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* (second part), student presentations

HW: Finish *Sed Contra* papers

Major paper: *Sed Contra*

The *Sed contra* assignment is an opportunity for students to develop and employ their exegetical, research, and theological reasoning skills. In this assignment, students will seek to answer a disputed question in early Christian studies (of their own choice) following the general structure of a Summa article. The purpose of this exercise is for students to closely examine and reflect upon the text(s) in question, and to engage critically with both traditional and modern interpretation in the selected area.

(NB: While this assignment adopts the structure of a Summa article, the purpose is not to reproduce an article in philosophy or systematics, but to use St. Thomas' methodology as a tool for critically engaging with a particular question in early Christian studies. Thus, while logic should not be neglected, priority should be given to historical and textual considerations in formulating your answer and responding to objections.)

The five parts of the assignment's structure are as follows:

- **Question** (*Quaestio*): The question you will be answering -- i.e., "Whether Barney the dinosaur is a product of the jurassic period," etc. Students will get approval on their question from the professor before beginning research.
- **Objections** (*Videtur quod*): Concise presentations of the strongest arguments against your own position. Each should be distilled to a few sentences, and three to five objections total should be included.
- **On the contrary** (*Sed contra*): A brief, punchy statement of your own position; generally one to three sentences.

- **Answer** (*Respondeo quod*): A presentation of the argument and evidence for your own position. The arguments may be enumerated, and the response should be well-structured and carefully reasoned. This is the largest single section, and should comprise two to three paragraphs.
- **Replies to objections** (*Ad... dicendum quod*): A response to each of the prior objections, each of which should generally comprise one to three sentences (though additional space may be used if necessary).

Assignments will be evaluated along the following criteria:

- **How relevant is the question?** An excellent article will be on a disputed question, with some significance beyond the immediate field of study (rather than one that is not actually disputed by anyone, and/or largely irrelevant).
- **How strong are the objections?** An excellent article will identify the strongest arguments for the opposing side of the question, and state them in a manner that is precise and compelling, showing that the student has mastered the counter-evidence and listened well to both sides of the question. NB: Your own argument will only be as strong as the opposing evidence you admit from the other side!
- **How compelling is the positive statement?** An excellent article will be able to provide a well-structured, well-reasoned, and persuasive statement of their own position on the question. This will take the form of the initial statement (*Sed contra*) and the arguments for this position (*Respondeo*). Thorough research and engagement with relevant Scripture / commentaries and academic sources / theologians is key here.
- **How well are the objections answered?** An excellent article will provide compelling responses to each objection, showing how their weight can be allayed by other means.
- **How well does the presenter answer questions?** Students will present their articles to the class and answer follow-up questions; an excellent presentation will show mastery of the material in their responses.