

**United Methodist Course of Study
Wesley Theological Seminary
Upper New York Satellite School**

COS-222 Theological Heritage 2: Early Church

Meeting Dates: October 18-19, November 15-16, 2019.

Instructor: Dr. John R. Tyson (Jtyson@crlds.edu)

Course Objectives:

1. Participants will become familiar with leading theological figures, documents, movements, and contexts of the early periods of the Christian Church.
2. Participants will engage in a learning process that will include historical and application.
3. Participants will develop understanding of the development of the theological heritage in the early period of the Christian Church to the extent that this Understanding may undergird contemporary ministry and further study.

Required Readings:

1. Gonzalez, Justo. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody, MA. Prince Press, 1999). ISBN: 1565635221 **OR** Gonzalez, Justo, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1990) ISBN: 0060633158. [When available, the complete hardback 2 volumes in one edition from Prince Press is sometimes less expensive than purchasing the first volume separately in paperback. Check with Christian Book Distributors, on line, for the hardbound edition.]
2. C.S. Lewis, ed. *St. Athanasius On The Incarnation* (St. Vladimir's Press) ISBN: 0-913836-40-0
3. Pine-Coffin, R.S. translator. *Saint Augustine Confessions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961). ISBN:0192833723.
4. Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church 4th edition* (Oxford University Press, 2011), ISBN: 0199568987
5. Carretto, Carlo. *I, Francis*. (New York: Orbis Books), 2004.
6. Bondi, Roberta. *To Love As God Loves* (Fortress Press, 1987)

NOTE: It is important that you purchase the Pine-Coffin edition of Augustine's *Confessions* so that we have a common text version from which to work in class. It is readily available at Amazon.com – if you are having difficulties finding it locally.

Recommended but not Required:

John R. Tyson *The Great Athanasius* (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
ISBN:10-1625647522)

E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church: Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages*
(Abingdon) ISBN: 0-687-00603-1

John R. Tyson *Faith, Doubt & Courage* (Wipf & Stock, 2nd Edition , 2013)
ISBN-10: 1625642660

I. Assignments to be completed BEFORE Session One, October 18-19, 2019 (to be read prior to attending the class)

A. Readings:

1. Gonzalez, pp. xiii.-220 (or through the end of Pt II, in Volume I)
2. Bettenson, through “part I,” (up to page 92).
3. Augustine’s *Confessions*, read through Book VIII (or page 179). We will work with portions of this text in class. **Note:** issues re. sin & grace
4. Bondi, *To Love as God Loves* (entire book).
5. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, pp. 3-64. **Note** – Christology
6. Women in the Early Church (a handout)

B. Written Work: To be completed during the On-line portion of the class, and submitted during the first class session (Oct. 18-19, 2019):

1. Write a 2-4 page reflection paper based on your reading in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Roughly one half of your paper should be a summation of what you read, and one half should be a reflective analysis of what you read. In your essay answer questions like: In what sense is this work a confession? How does this work illustrate Augustine’s profound theology of sin and grace. Why do contemporary Christians continue to find encouragement in reading this work? Point to particular passages from Augustine *Confessions* to support your generalizations. (25 pts)

2. Write 2-4 page reflection paper based on your reading in Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation*. Roughly one half of your paper should be a summation of what you read, and one half should be a reflective analysis of what you read. In your essay answer questions like: Set in the context illustrated by Bettenson pp. 31-47, why did Athanasius consider the incarnation (“taking flesh”) of the Second Person of the Trinity to be one of – if not THE – central affirmation of Christian faith? How does he describe and present this holy mystery in ways that are meaningful to his readers? Does this consideration and conversation continue to have significance for Christian believers today? Why? Why not?

3. Choose TWO (2) of the following essay options and write a well-thought-out essay reply to each (25points per essay). Use both primary (Betteson, Athanasius) and secondary sources to shape and illustrate your views.

1) Several significant crises befell the early church which shaped Christianity remarkably; what were these crises and how did they shape the life of the church? How did the early church respond to theological diversity, social pressure, cultural diversity and persecution? How are these like problems the church faces today?

2) How would you describe the “conversion of Constantine”? Was it a political convenience or a spiritual transformation? Why? Was the legalization and eventual establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire good or bad for Christianity? Why?

3) Consider the spirituality of the early church mothers and fathers (Bondi); what were its main themes? How might these continue to inform and shape our lives of faith today?

4) What role(s) did women play in the early church (Rom. 16, etc.) and why (or how) did women’s leadership develop and then ultimately become curtailed? What do we learn about issues of inclusion and leadership in the church from examining this history?

II. Assignments to be completed BEFORE attending Session Two: November 15-16, 2019 and brought to class with you.

A. Readings:

1. Gonzalez, pp. 232-412 (Parts III, and IV, in Volume 1)
2. Bettenson, “Part II,” (up through page 159).
3. Carretto, entire book – read devotionally, reflectively
4. Anselm & Abelard on Atonement Theory (handout)
5. Women in the Medieval Church (handout)
6. Five Religious Options for Medieval Women (handout)

B. Written Work: Take notes on your readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Some of our discussion and other class activities will focus upon the following topics, so be especially familiar with their significance:

1. Required Essay: Write a 3-4 page paper on the fictionalized work *I Francis*. In your paper discuss Francis of Assisi, (as presented by Carlo Carretto) and Francis’s contribution(s) to the medieval Christian church. Based on your various readings about Francis (bring in other resources if you wish) assess how realistic this fictional portrayal of St. Francis is. What would Francis (as presented by Carretto) be saying to and doing in the church today? Was this a helpful “read” for you? Why? Or Why not? What does St. Francis, as you understand him, have to say to contemporary Christians?

II. Essay Options: Select **THREE (3)** of the following essay options and write a well-thought-out reply to each question that meets the various specifications raised by the question. Support your generalizations with particular examples from your primary (Bettenson) and secondary source (Gonzalez) texts. You may use in-text notation eg. (Gonzalez, 211, Bettenson, 101, etc.).

1. In what sense was the reign of Charlemagne a re-enactment of the of age Constantine? In what ways did the European culture (Holy Roman Empire) contribute to the formation of the Medieval Christian (Roman Catholic) church? How did the church's marriage political and religious authority play itself out in matters like the church life, feudalism, crusades & inquisition? What were the pros and cons of the church's involvement in world politics?

2. Based on your readings (and the handout provided in last session) compare and contrast the theology of the cross in Anselm and Abelard. Focus your attention upon: 1) importance of the atonement ("reconciling death of Christ"). 2) the historical context and methodology of each writer, and 3) their respective approaches for explaining the atonement. 4) Which approach to understanding the atonement (Anselm or Abelard) do you favor for use in your own thinking and ministry? Why?

3. Why was Thomas Aquinas considered to be the best example of what scholasticism was all about? Describe Aquinas' "great synthesis." What was so "great" about it? How did it influence subsequent generations? Do you see these impulses in the modern church? Where? How?

4. The medieval church was a powerful religious and cultural force – "the glue" that held the medieval world together. Examine the role of the medieval church from the standpoint of 1) theology, 2) sacraments & worship, 3) education & culture 4) evangelism and social work, and 5) women's roles. Compare & contrast to our contemporary church? Gains? : Losses?

5. Based on your readings (and handouts) explore the life and religious options available to women in the medieval church. What forces shaped women's lives? What opportunities did the church open to them? At what personal cost to them? What compelling contributions did women like Catherine of Sienna and Julian of Norwich make that continue to shape our lives and ministries today?

Grading:

In this course the two written assignments will each count for 1/3 of the participant's total grade. Class discussion and participation will count for the additional 1/3 of the total grade.

Class Participation:

1. The UM Course of Study requires that students attend all class sessions of a course in order to receive credit for the course. No “cuts” or “excused absences” are allowed for church, community, family, or other business. In extreme cases, such as serious illness or a family emergency, please confer notify Wesley’s COS office as soon as possible. 202-885-8688 ssheppard@wesleyseminary.edu

2. Timely, careful reading and completion of the assignments in preparation for class participation.

3. Circumspect verbal contribution to class discussions, and respectful attention to the contributions made by others. It is the duty of each class member to contribute to class discussions without monopolizing this shared time we have with each other.

Please feel free to contact me at Jtyson@crcds.edu if you have any questions or problems relating to the course.