

Second Year
PRE-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT- 2024
PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY COURSE OF STUDY

222 – Theological Heritage II: Early Church

Pre-class assignments are due on **June 3, 2024**, and should be submitted through Canvas

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This course focuses on the history and theology of the Church through the first five centuries. Using primary and secondary sources, students will reflect on significant individuals and events and the development of Christian doctrine during this period. Such reflection is designed to contextualize historical theology for informed appropriation and application for ministry in the modern church and other relevant ministerial settings.

Learning Outcomes:

By the conclusion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Understand and articulate the doctrine of the Trinity, alongside and amidst the historical debates in the early church around the person and nature of Christ.
2. Understand and articulate a doctrine of salvation in context of the controversies within and around the early church.
3. Understand the history and significance of the creeds and ecumenical councils.
4. Articulate the relevance of historical theology as it pertains to contemporary pastoral, ecclesial, and/or parachurch ministry.

Textbooks:

Reading Requirement – Three books are assigned as *mandatory* for reading prior to the first day of this course. While not all mandatory readings will be employed for the pre-class assignment, the body of readings are all impactful in preparing to, and later assisting with, the successful achievement of the course's desired learning outcomes. Required texts are listed below:

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. Harper Collins: New York, 2010. **(Note: only pages 1-261 will be needed for this course. Later courses will cover the remaining sections of the text.)**

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Harper Collins: San

Francisco, 1997.
Bondi, Roberta. *To Love As God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church*. Fortress Press, 1987.

Pre-Class Assignments:

***Be advised that the following two assignments MUST be completed and submitted by **Friday, June 14, 2024**. Further in-class assignments and expectations will be provided at a later date.

1. Assessing comprehension and completion of curricular material:

Justo Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1* is broken into four parts, as defined in the table of contents. For this course, *only the first two parts* are directly relevant. Choose *one* part of the text (Part I: The Early Church, pp. 7-126, or Part II: The Imperial Church, pp. 129-261) and compose a summarizing essay that meets the following guidelines:

- Identify four (4) key figures included in your selected part of the text, and narrate each figure's role, impact, and relevance in the growth of the early or imperial church. (2-3 pages)
- Identify three (3) key theological debates or controversies in your selected part of the text, narrate each side of the debate and its outcome(s), and discuss its relevance in the growth of the early or imperial church. (2-3 pages)
- Discuss in your own words the relevance of your chosen era of church history as it pertains to your current understanding of Christian theology, ministry, and witness. (1-2 pages)

The expectation is for this essay to meet a minimum length of six pages, aligned with the guidelines above. This assignment will comprise roughly 30% of your final grade, although note that the final breakdown of how you will be evaluated throughout the course will be provided at a later date. Further, while historical accuracy in line with the text is expected, your own narrations of questions of relevance to both the early church and contemporary ministry and theology will be evaluated not only for correctness but also for thoughtful engagement. Ultimately, this material will be relevant in your own ministerial lives according to how *you* interpret, contextualize, and narrate the church's histories and controversies. All this to say, think for yourself, use your own language and voice, and be honest in your writing!

2. Appropriating curricular material for your own ministry:

Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* and Roberta Bondi's *To Love as God Loves* represent different approaches to navigating the extensive theological histories of the church: Stark writes from the lens of a sociologist, contextualizing the rise of the church within a broader narrative

of human history, while Bondi writes from the lens of not only a church historian and scholar, but perhaps more importantly, from the lens of a Christian in dialogue with the history of her faith. These two texts will be immensely helpful in developing a more diverse understanding of the early church, not only in its key figures and events (i.e. the Gonzalez text), but also in how the early church has been perceived both in relation to other historical events of its epoch as well as how it has been grappled with by prominent members of the faith in modernity. Insofar as Stark and Bondi approach church history through their own academic, personal, and contextual lenses, so too will each of you as you work through the required materials in this course. Your assignment, upon completion of the required reading, is to compose a reflective essay “in conversation with the early church.” Here, I am not looking for you to summarize what you have read. Rather, I want you to think critically and thoughtfully about how what you have learned about the early church, its figures, debates, controversies, and outcomes have impacted your own learning and application as a present (and/or future) minister of the Christian faith. This essay should meet the following guidelines:

- Be grounded in, and cite, one of Stark or Bondi’s works
- Total between 800 and 1000 words
- Draw upon both your own experiences with the Christian faith as well as the experiences, trends, and evaluations that you read about in the texts.
- Write in your own words (except when properly citing the text), and thoughtfully engage with the material you have read.

As with the preceding assignment, be sure to be honest in your writing! This second assignment will comprise roughly 20% of your final grade. This assignment will be less evaluated by your ability to “stick to the text” and moreso by your willingness and thoughtfulness in thinking about how learning the historical theology has impacted your own understanding of the faith, ministry, and doctrine. As this assignment is a reflection, this can take many forms and fashions, and my hope is that you use this as an opportunity to follow Bondi’s model of “conversing” with that which intrigues you, that which surprises you, and that which challenges you amidst your studies of the material.

Guidelines & Grades:

The two pre-class essays will comprise 50% of your final grade, while in-class and concluding assignments and class participation will comprise the remaining half. A few notes on how I will evaluate your work, in line with what has been offered above:

- Historical accuracy: the Gonzalez text, alongside the supplemental readings and in-class lectures and discussions, provide you significant material regarding the facts of early and imperial church history. You are of course welcome to consult supplemental materials, provided those materials are cited properly in your work. The primary goal of this course is for you to obtain a “working” historical theology for appropriation in your own ministry, and as such, your written work should reflect an accurate historical narrative.

- Intellectual and spiritual honesty: the Bondi text in particular offers you a model of how to grapple with the historical theology and narratives of events and debates that took place in past millennia. You are not expected, nor can you, situate yourself in the contexts within which the church grew and rose to prominence, nor can you truly “pick sides” in past historical debates. What you can, and are expected to, do in this course is to authentically navigate these stories. This in practice means speaking and writing with historical accuracy, but also with honesty and authenticity. Write in your own voice, avoid copying or closely paraphrasing others’ work, and bring your own contextual lenses into your work. It is very easy to tell when a student is writing authentically and engaging thoughtfully with material outside of their own time, place, context, and experience!
- Follow instructions: the guidelines for pre-class and in-class assignments may not be as “rigid” as in other courses - that is by design! There is room for creativity and I do not expect your work to closely resemble that of your peers (if anything, that would imply a *lack* of intellectual honesty!) That said, please be sure to follow the instructions for assignment length, required components, and proper attribution closely.

More information on what will take place during the course will be provided at a later date, in advance of our first class meeting. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, concerns, or reflections on the assignments or the course in general – I’m happy to be a resource for you!