

CH 501: Patristic Church History

Cranmer Theological House (Atlanta)

January 8–10, 2027

Instructor: The Rev. Dcn. Kyle Hughes, Ph.D., Lecturer in New Testament and Early Christianity

khughes@christthekingatl.com

330-212-0292

Course Description

This course is an introductory survey and analysis of the development of the early Christian Church covering the patristic era from the sub-apostolic age through the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers.

Course Rationale

This course is designed to introduce the student to the important Church Fathers, events, and issues of the early Church as a foundation for other theological and pastoral studies and for pastoral ministry. Particular attention will be paid to the following topics that continue to have immense relevance for the Church and her ministry today: the spread of the Church, the life of the early Church, the theology of the Church Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils, and the relationship between Church and State.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Trace the historical development of early Christianity with reference to Jewish and Roman contexts, with special attention to factors contributing to the spread of the Christian religion
- Trace the theological development of early Christianity with reference to topics such as patristic spirituality, biblical interpretation, doctrines of God and Christ, sacramental theology, ecclesiology, and the relationship between Church and state
- Connect patristic Church history with contemporary pastoral concerns, theological controversies, and Church practices
- Integrate Scriptural, creedal, historical, and theological sources into clear, well-reasoned written and oral arguments concerning patristic Church history

Required Texts

The following texts are required for purchase:

- Behr, John, trans. *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching*. Popular Patristics Series. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. [50 pp]
- Behr, John, trans. *St. Athanasius: On the Incarnation*. Popular Patristics Series. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011. [110 pp]

- Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. Revised by W.H.C. Frend. Penguin, 1967. The following sections only: [~125 pp]
 - (I) Ch. 1-3
 - (II) Ch. 7-11
- Holmes, Michael W., trans. *The Apostolic Fathers in English*. Baker Academic, 2006. The following selections only: [~150 pp]
 - (I) Didache, Epistle of Barnabas
 - (II) Letters of Ignatius, Letter of Polycarp, Diognetus
 - (III) Martyrdom of Polycarp, 1 Clement
- Johnson, Maxwell E., trans. *Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. Popular Patristics Series. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 2017. [137 pp]
- The following books are recommended for your research paper. Consider purchasing and reading one that you think will be particularly helpful for your topic.
 - Fogleman, Alex. *Knowledge, Faith, and Early Christian Initiation*. Cambridge University Press, 2025.
 - Jaeger, Warner. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. Harvard University Press, 1961.
 - Kruger, Michael J. *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church*. IVP Academic, 2018.
 - Laistner, M. L. W. *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*. Cornell University Press, 1951.
 - Presley, Stephen O. *Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World Like the Early Church*. Eerdmans, 2024.
 - Sittser, Gerald L. *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian 'Third Way' Changed the World*. Brazos, 2019.
 - Stark, Rodney. *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*. HarperOne, 2011.
- Additional excerpts from various texts will be found in a course reader distributed to students in class.

Course Requirements

1. **Participation (10%).** Regular and on-time class attendance is a necessary part of the learning experience, particularly in an intensive schedule such as we have in this class. Absences seriously impact the ability of the student to contribute to and learn from the class and should be avoided. Naturally, in the case of emergencies, the student should reach out to the professor as soon as possible. Beyond this, students must be prepared to engage in informal classroom discussion, evidenced by a familiarity with the contents of the required texts, having a copy of the texts with you in class, and contributing constructively to the classroom discussion.

- a. Note: This includes participation in the two pre-course book discussions. Pedagogically, the purpose of these sessions is 1) to keep you accountable for starting on the readings; 2) allow us to do a general overview of the course content before diving deeper in primary sources during the later readings and in-person class days; and 3) foster community and fellowship among our students and with the instructor.
2. **Reading & Commonplace Book (30%).** To receive full credit for your reading you must read all the assigned texts fully, thoughtfully, and on time. At the end of the course, you will turn in what percentage of the reading you completed on time or late (see final page of this syllabus). Late readings are penalized by a 50% reduction. See below for the reading schedule. To be considered on time, you must complete the readings before the class in which they will be discussed (see schedule below). The final date for accepting any late reading is Feb. 10, 2027.
 - a. Note: As you read, engage with each text by keeping what is often called a “commonplace book.” For each of the six books assigned for this class, copy out at least five short passages that you find intriguing, controversial, puzzling, or otherwise provocative. You can do this by hand in a journal or type it; either way, bring your commonplace book to class so we can use it as a springboard for discussion. It is best practice to note the reference (page or section number) with each passage.
3. **Paper #1: Pastoral Letter (20%).** You will write a 1,000 word essay in the form of a letter to an imagined evangelical friend or family member who is not happy that you have become an Anglican. In this letter, you must argue that the decisions of the early Church, in terms of Creeds, Councils, liturgies, etc. are relevant and normative for the Church today, aiming for both theological precision as well as pastoral sensitivity.
 - a. Note: This does not need to be an academic paper in terms of footnotes and a bibliography. But it might be helpful to quote from primary sources we have studied in this class (simply cite parenthetically).
4. **Paper #2: Research Paper (40%).** You will write a 5,000 word research paper that argues for the relative importance of the various factors that contributed to the spread of Christianity in the ancient world and then analyzes how this understanding of the growth of the early Church might be a light to guide the Anglican Church today (the more you can put this in the context of your own parish or ministry context, the better). Make sure to address cultural, political, and moral factors as appropriate.
 - a. Note: This paper must conform to the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian), 17th edition, using footnotes and a formal bibliography. At minimum, you should make use of three primary sources and three secondary sources.

Class Schedule (tentative)

Date	Topic	Reading Due	Papers Due
11/11/26	Overview of Historical and Theological Context (I)	Chadwick, Part I (ch. 1-3)	-
12/21/26	Overview of Historical and Theological Context (II)	Chadwick, Part II (ch. 7-11)	-
1/8/27	1. Prolegomena: The Study of Patristics 2. Christians and Jews <i>Apostolic Fathers (I)</i> 3. Christians and Pagans <i>Apostolic Fathers (II)</i> 4. The Spread of the Church <i>Apostolic Fathers (III)</i> 5. Orthodoxy and Heresy <i>Irenaeus of Lyons</i>	Apostolic Fathers PPS Irenaeus of Lyons	-
1/9/27	6. Early Sacramental and Liturgical Theology <i>Cyril of Jerusalem</i> 7. Constantine and Imperial Christianity <i>Eusebius of Caesarea</i> 8. The Origins of Christian Monasticism <i>Desert Fathers</i> 9. Scripture in Early Christianity <i>Origen</i> 10 Early Christian Pneumatology <i>Gregory of Nazianzus</i>	PPS Cyril of Jerusalem	-
1/10/27	11. The Trinitarian Controversy <i>Athanasius</i> 12. The Christological Controversies <i>John of Damascus</i> 13. Asceticism and Social Justice <i>Basil of Caesarea</i> 14. Trajectories West and East <i>Augustine of Hippo & Gregory of Nyssa</i> 15. The End of the Patristic World	PPS Athanasius	-
1/20/27	-	-	**Pastoral Letter DUE
2/10/27	-	*Reading self-assessment DUE	**Research Paper DUE

Policies

Late Work

Except for unusual circumstances, students will receive full credit for their assignments only if they complete them on time. Usually, late work will receive a late penalty depending how late. However, students are encouraged to contact the instructor, if they are going to be late. I am more concerned that you learn, and so, I am often willing to be flexible on the due date, if there are good reasons. This policy helps students to plan ahead responsibly, a characteristic that students must cultivate as they prepare to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace. This policy also makes class times more edifying since class lectures and discussions are directly related to the assignments in the course schedule.

Missing Class or Arriving Late

Students must inform the instructor of any absence or planned late arrival prior to the start of class. Students should not miss class unless it is under extenuating circumstances (e.g. sickness, childbirth, dismemberment, or death, but NOT job stress, excessive homework, children's events, forgetfulness, or procrastination).

Academic Integrity & Intellectual Honesty

As regards appropriation and recognition of others' intellectual property, I (the student) agree that all the written material I submit will be my original work. I acknowledge that 1) academic dishonesty includes cheating on assignments or exams, plagiarism, fabrication of research, multiple submissions of work in different courses, misrepresentation of academic records, the facilitation of academic dishonesty and depriving others of necessary academic resources, and 2) that if discovered, this may result in the failure of the assignment and/or the course, at the discretion of the professor. The use of generative AI for research, composition, and editing written work (apart from things like spell check or grammar check built into word processing programs or basic search engine results) is strictly prohibited.

Internet/Computer Use

Out of respect for instructors and in order to cultivate a healthy discussion-oriented classroom experience, students are prohibited from using the internet during class. Points will be deducted from the classroom participation score of students caught on the internet. Repeated offenders will incur additional penalties. Computers are also not allowed in class. Students should plan to take notes by hand and use physical copies of the assigned texts. If there are special reasons for why a student needs a computer, then please contact the instructor.

Availability

Meetings by appointment; email khughes@christthekingatl.com.

Grading Scale

A+ = 100 B+ = 91-92 C+ = 83-84 D+ = 72-73

A = 95-99 B = 87-90 C = 76-82 D = 68-71

A- = 93-94 B- = 85-86 C- = 74-75 D- = 66-67

(Student Handbook 2014-2015, p. 12)

Appendix: Reading Self-Assessment

Text	% on time	% late
Apostolic Fathers (required portions)		
Irenaeus		
Athanasius		
Cyril		
Chadwick		

Supplementary Bibliography

The following books are additional recommended resources that you may wish to consult as you study the Church Fathers.

- Anatolios, Khaled. *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Baker Academic, 2011.
- Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Behr, John. *The Way to Nicaea*. Vol. 1 of *Formation of Christian Theology*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.
- Benedict XVI. *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*. Ignatius, 2008.
- Danielou, Jean. *The Bible and the Liturgy*. Liturgical Studies. University of Notre Dame, 1956.
- Downs, David J. *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity*. Baylor University Press, 2016.
- Hill, Charles E. *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*. 2nd ed. Eerdmans, 2001.

- Hughes, Kyle R. *How the Spirit Became God: The Mosaic of Early Christian Pneumatology*. Cascade, 2020.
- Hughes, Kyle R. *Scripting the Son: Scriptural Exegesis and the Making of Early Christology*. Studies in Early Christology. Cascade, 2024.
- Jensen, Robin M. *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions*. Baker Academic, 2012.
- Leithart, Peter. *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*. IVP Academic, 2010.
- McGowan, Andrew B. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*. Baker Academic, 2014.
- McGuckin, John Anthony. *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*. Westminster John Knox, 2004.
- Meeks, Wayne A. *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*. Yale University Press, 1993.
- Mitchell, Margaret M., and Frances M. Young, eds. *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- O’Keefe, John J., and R. R. Reno. *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Paget, James Carleton, and Judith Lieu, eds. *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*. Vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. The University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Presley, Stephen O. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*. Baker Academic, 2025.
- Wilhite, David E. *The Gospel according to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts*. Baker Academic, 2015.
- Williams, D. H. *Defending and Defining the Faith: An Introduction to Early Christian Apologetic Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*. Yale University Press, 2003.
- Young, Frances M. *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*. Hendrickson, 1997.
- Young, Frances M., Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, eds. *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Young, Frances M. *Scripture, the Genesis of Doctrine*. Vol. 1 of *Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity*. Eerdmans, 2023.
- Young, Frances M. *Scripture in Doctrinal Dispute*. Vol. 2 of *Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity*. Eerdmans, 2024.