Reformed Theological Seminary
6HT502 The History of Christianity I (3 credits)
Syllabus 2014

I. Course information
Time: Mondays 7:00pm -10:00pm
Dates: September 8 – December 8
Final exam: December 15

Instructor: Dr Chad B. Van Dixhoorn
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Office hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 10:00am – 12:00pm; or by appointment

Dinner: Each term my wife hosts a class dinner at our home at 6.00pm (spouses and special others are welcome). After dinner we hold class in our home (348 Ayr Hill Ave. NE, Vienna VA 22180; 703.255.2935).

II. Course overview
A. Key issues in theology and apologetics in the history of the church
The history of Christianity is, among other things, a history of ideas. These ideas shape the Christian church and contribute to our convictions as believers. This course aims to provide an overview of Church history and theology from the time of the Apostles to the birth of Martin Luther in a breathtaking thirty-seven and a half hours of class time – supplemented, of course, by many additional hours of reading time. While obviously a whistle-stop tour, I do hope that each one of you will get a feel for the contours of the Christian faith as they were hammered out in the patristic and medieval eras.

This course aims to acquaint us with our past, and help us interpret the present. But since Christianity has been shaped as much by its failures as by its triumphs, these lectures will trace both the low and high points in the history of Christian doctrine and experience. Significant emphasis will be placed on key moments and key thinkers in church history. But we will also try to reflect on the lives of normal Christian people and ordinary Christian pastors. It was the collective experience of God’s people, often in the ordinary settings of worship, church government, or pastoral counseling that helped clarify the central truths of God’s word in the midst of persecution, heresy, and confusion.

B. In class
It is my conviction that reformation in the church today must involve a willingness not only to hear what the Holy Spirit is teaching us today, but to listen to what he has taught our brothers and sisters in the past. In this course students will have the opportunity to read and discuss primary source material most weeks as we examine the doctrine of God, the Scriptures and their formation, and the fall of humanity into sin. We will listen to what our forebears had to say about the good news of redemption planned, accomplished, and applied. We will try to deepen our understanding of the church, Christian worship, the sacraments, and the formation and relevance of creeds and confessions, each from an historical and theological perspective.
While first seeking to understand the history of Christian doctrine on its own grounds and for its own sake, most lectures contain apologetic undertones and will answer questions which are still relevant today: how did early Christians engage with pagan culture? How did the medieval theologians confront the teachings of Islam? How are we to answer critics of the Bible today?

Our heritage is a rich and varied one. I hope this course will equip teacher and student alike to be better articulate, defend and live out the gospel in our pluralistic society.

C. At home
Students will have extensive take-home reading, as well as readings in class. You will be well-advised to read ahead in the two class texts by Chadwick (or Hall) and Southern. It may also be wise to read in advance the two classic texts that we will read in full: Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, and Anselm’s medieval classic, *Why the God man?* (best known by its Latin title, *Cur Deus Homo*).

The number of pages read for this course, although significant, will be lower than some other three-hour classes at RTS. The main texts are an easy, even delightful read. Each of the authors has been chosen not only for their astonishing knowledge of their period, but for their ability to write in an engaging manner. Here, reading may edge toward entertainment.

Many of the primary texts, on the other hand, are more difficult to penetrate. It is for this reason that the reading load has been adjusted downward. Some of the smaller readings will be distributed in class, usually one week prior to the class in which they will be discussed. Here, reading will be work, but hopefully an investment that will pay long-term dividends.

*Please purchase and read the first primary source reading for the first day of class. No written assignment is due on the first day of class.*

III. Reading list

A. Primary sources (*circa 500-600pp*) including, but not limited to:
2. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapters 1-13, and 142; then read each chapter heading in the book and then select five more chapters of your choice to read. For a free version of the text, see [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.html).
5. Copies of decrees, etc. in I. Boyle, ed., *The Ecclesiastical history of Eusebius Pamphilus*, Bk X, Chs 5-7 (pp. 426-433). Google books link: [http://books.google.com/books?id=V2IAAAAAAMAAJ&dq=introduction%20to%20the%20ecclesiastical%20history%20of%20eusebius&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q=introduction%20to%20the%20ecclesiastical%20history%20of%20eusebius&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=V2IAAAAAAMAAJ&dq=introduction%20to%20the%20ecclesiastical%20history%20of%20eusebius&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q=introduction%20to%20the%20ecclesiastical%20history%20of%20eusebius&f=false)
7. Augustine, *A treatise concerning the Correction of the Donatists*, chs 1-6 (same as sections 1-24; same as NPNF Series I, vol. 4, pp. 633-642). For an online version, see [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.v.vi.i.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.v.vi.i.html)
8. Augustine, *On marriage and concupiscence* (selections, (3pp.)
10. *Gospel of Thomas* (selections; in class reading)
15. Innocent III, *Between God and man* (pp. 1-15)
17. Wycliffe, *On the church* (selections)

Note on primary texts: Many of the works of the church fathers were translated into English in rival nineteenth-century collections, American and British. The collections prior to the time of the first council of Nicea (325) are entitled *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Those at and after the time of the council and continuing to the time of the second council of Nicea (787) are collected in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, in two different, but complementing series. The first series contains only works by Augustine and Chrysostom. The second series contains works from a wide variety of less prolific authors. Many or most of the primary sources listed below are freely available in these editions and can be found simply by searching for the title of the work. For additional texts, see [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/)

Modern, often smoother, translations with up-to-date scholarly apparatus can be found in the following series: *The fathers of the Church; Ancient Christian writers*; and, for Augustine’s vast corpus, *The works of Saint Augustine.*

**B. Secondary sources (circa 650pp.)**
   OR Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and practice in the early church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 250pp., larger paperback (designed to complement the *New Eusebius*)

**C. Recommended reading**

**D. Purchase list**
Students must purchase or borrow the following books:
IV. Assessment
A. Reading reports and responses (30% of grade)
Students will be required to submit weekly reading reports varying from 2-5 pages on the assigned reading for the week. These reports will be due at the beginning of class and will later serve the student as aids to study and review. Typically the student will answer a question posed by the instructor.

Please purchase and read the first two primary source readings for the first day of class.

B. Examinations (70% of grade)
Each student’s understanding of the material will be assessed, in part, by examination. There will be two take-home exams. (1) The first, covering the history of the early church first part of the course, will be worth 35% of the course grade. This two to three hour exam is designed to help students get a sense of their own comprehension of the course material and will aid students in preparing for the final examination. (2) The final, two to three hour exam, covers the medieval church and is worth 35% of the course grade.

Typical examination questions include the following elements:
- **Essays** (perhaps choosing two or three of four or five major themes to discuss). The students discusses the history and theology of the relevant theme and, where appropriate, the differing perspectives presented in assigned texts and class lectures.
- **Chronological arrangements** Students may be asked to recall the names of fifteen to twenty theologians or heretics and list them in order of their birth.
- **Identifications** Students may be asked to
  - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians
  - the titles of one or two books by each theologian (but no less than 15 total)
  - provide two-sentence descriptions of each title
- **Map placements** Students may be asked to
  - recall the names of ten to twelve theologians and place them in the country where they served
  - recall ten to twelve church councils and synods in the country where they were held.

All persons, councils and places mentioned in the student’s answers must be those within the chronological frame of the course. The same persons can be mentioned in chronological arrangements, identifications and map placements.

V. Grading
A. RTS Grading Scale
The seminary uses the following grading system:

- **A** (97-100) 4.00 quality points
- **A-** (94-96) 3.66
- **B+** (91-93) 3.33
- **B** (88-90) 3.00

The grade "I" indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination. A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an "I" grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to "F."

VI. Class advice
1. I recognize that many of you work long days and have awkward commutes. Please leave sufficient time to battle adverse traffic so that you can arrive on time.
2. Please come to each class prepared, with readings and reading reports completed. From the first class, I will call on students to discuss assigned material. It is a courtesy to teacher and fellow students alike if your class contributions are informed by prior study. There are no reading reports due for the first class.
3. Take notes of these discussions. These exchanges are a vehicle for learning and you will be expected to retain (and be tested on) the material that we discuss.
4. Please ask questions in class. When necessary, I will establish the boundaries and let you know when I need to press on in delivering information and when we should stop to enjoy a discussion. But a certain amount of class time is set aside each week for discussion and I would be disappointed if we did not pack it with useful comments and queries.
5. Give some thought to your questions. There is no question too simple to ask (although there are many that are too difficult to answer). But please do not stop the class to regale it with stories, ride hobby-horses, play teacher to your fellow students, or ask to have a word spelled.
6. Please turn off your cell phones. Checking your mobile phone in a class discussion or lecture is as thoughtless as checking it while holding a conversation with another person.
7. Please do not use web access for web-surfing, chatting, and emailing.
8. You may quietly snack and drink and stretch in class, or pace about the back of the room if it helps you stay alert.