**COS 222, Theological Heritage II: Early Church**

Part I: February 7-8, 2025, by Zoom

Part II: March 7-8, 2025, by Zoom

Instructor: William McDonald

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*“It cannot be that the people should grow in grace unless they give themselves to reading. A reading people will always be a knowing people.” – John Wesley*

**Course Goals:**

• To give students a deeper understanding of such central Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, salvation by grace, and the church.

• To introduce the major ideas, movements, and leaders in the church’s history in the period 100-600 C.E.

• To prepare students to preach, teach, and lead more effectively by examining issues and questions that have confronted Christian leaders throughout the ages.

**Required Reading:**

Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, vol. 1,* Second Revised Edition (Harper & Row, 2010)

William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology,* Revised Edition, vol. 1 (Westminster/John Knox, 2015)

*Note Regarding Assignments:* Failure to submit the pre-course assignment, the mid-course assignment, or the final examination will result, not simply in a zero for that assignment, but for the class as a whole.

**Course Schedule and Assignments:**

*Students should reserve Fridays 5:30-8:30 pm and Saturdays 8:00 am-3:30 pm for both sessions of the class*

**Pre-Course Assignment:**

1. Read González, Part I (Introduction through Chapter 12); Placher, Chapters 1-2.

2. In a paper between five and seven typed, double-spaced pages, write a presentation you would make to a Sunday School class or study group in your congregation. The presentation will introduce the class to the work of four of the following theologians:

Ignatius of Antioch

Irenaeus

Justin Martyr

Clement of Alexandria

Origen

Tertullian

Spend no more than one paragraph telling the theologian’s life story; the rest of the paper should discuss the theology of the four figures you choose, drawing on the selections from each theologian in the Placher book. Explain why each theologian’s thought is important for the church today. Due by Thursday, February 6. Please submit it as a Microsoft Word document attachment and send it to the instructor’s e-mail address listed above.

**First Weekend: Zoom teleconference, February 7-8, 2025:**

Our time together will feature dialog about what has been learned of the early church so far, and some lecture that further explicates some key issues from the first three centuries and anticipates the second portion of the class to come. Please come to class with some questions in mind about what you have learned so far so that we can have a productive conversation! Specifically, during out time together, we will explore:

* Christians in the Roman Empire
* development and structure of the liturgy
* the catechumenate and possibilities for its implementation today
* the development of episcopal polity and church discipline

**Mid-Course Assignment:**

1. Read Gonzalez, Part II (Chapters 13 through 25); Placher, Chapters 3 through 5.

2. In a paper between four and six typed, double-spaced pages, write a presentation you would make to a Sunday School class or study group in your congregation. The presentation will examine *both* of the following two subjects:

The doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the full humanity and full divinity of Christ (Christology).

Spend no more than one paragraph each telling the story of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, respectively. Focus the rest of your discussion on what the major theologians on each side of these controversies said, drawing on the selections from these theologians in the Placher book. Address how these two theological topics might be interrelated (i.e., how Christology cannot be understood apart from the Trinity and vice-versa). Explain why these are among the most central Christian beliefs. Due by Thursday, March 6. Please submit as a Microsoft Word document attachment and send it to the instructor’s e-mail address listed above.

**Second Weekend, Zoom teleconference, March 7-8, 2025:**

We will especially devote our time to discussion of the impact made by Augustine, and how his legacy still inspires (and challenges!) the church. Again, plan to come with specific questions for your classmates. We will proceed in a lecture-discussion-break format Friday evening and during the day Saturday.

**Honor Code:**

The honor code of the ALPS-Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study can be found on the website (alpsumc.org). Please be certain to print, fill out, sign, and attach the cover sheet to each assignment. When turning in an assignment via e-mail attachment, you can fulfill this requirement by including the following statement in the body of the e-mail: “I have read the plagiarism definition on the ALPS-Memphis/Tennessee/Holston Course of Study Honor Code, and I affirm that the attached assignment represents my own work, except where credit is given.” I will not accept your paper if you have not included the cover sheet or included the statement above in your e-mail.

Plagiarism is theft of another person’s work and lying by claiming to have written something that you didn’t write. If I discover that a student has plagiarized, they will have two choices:

• I will offer the student an opportunity to rewrite the paper and will deduct 20 points from the grade of the rewritten paper for plagiarism on the original.

• If the student does not wish to rewrite the paper, I will assign it a grade of 0.

• For a good explanation of plagiarism and ways to avoid it, see the following web page: https://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism

**Final Examination:**

The final will be e-mailed to students after the final Zoom session. It will be open book. While you may use the textbook and other sources in preparing to answer the questions, do not quote from them directly. I want to know what you know about the subject, not someone else. The final will have 20 questions. 2-5 sentences will be optimal for most questions.

**Grading:**

Pre-course assignment: 30%

Mid-course assignment: 30%

Final Examination 30%

Participation: 10%

Tardiness in turning in assignments or the final exam will result in a reduced grade.

A 10-point scale is used, where 90-100= A, 80-89=B, etc.