

SPRING SEMESTER 2008
COURSE SYLLABUS
Department: Church History
CH 620 The Patristic Era
Credit hours: 3
Thursday, 9:20 to 12.00 noon

Dr. Phil Harrold
TESM, Room 210
724-266-3838 (office)
412-749-9309 (home)
pharrold@tesm.edu

The Patristic Era: Lived Christianity in the Ancient World

I. Course Description

The Patristic Era has been considered the classic period of Christian orthodoxy. This course treats the Church's life and growth, and the development of doctrine [*as interrelated aspects of the emerging faith*] from the Apostolic Fathers through the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

--modified from the TESM Catalog

II. Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you should be able to ...

- appreciate some of the main events and theologians of the early church period (extending *what you know*)
- articulate the main contributions of the period (broadening *what you can do*)
- develop greater confidence as a church historian and theologian (developing *who you are*)

III. Course Texts

Required:

- Laurie Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity: A Topic Survey of Its Life, Beliefs, & Practices* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004)
- Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)
- D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)
- Henry Bettenson, ed. and trans., *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956)
- *Christian History (& Biography) Magazine* Back-issues: Issue 57 ("Converting the Empire: How the Early Church Evangelized a Hostile Pagan World"); Issue 64 ("St. Antony & the Desert Fathers: Extreme Faith in the Early Church"); Issue 85 ("Debating Jesus' Divinity: The Council of Nicaea and Its Bitter Aftermath"); and 96 ("The Gnostic Hunger for Secret Knowledge") [these will be available at TESM Bookstore]

Optional supplemental readings and a course bibliography will be provided on the first day of class. Some of these items will be made available via Blackboard or via Library Reserve. Online primary sources may be consulted on occasion, esp. www.ccel.org and www.earlychristianwritings.com.

IV. Course Design & Requirements

This course offers formal lectures as well as less formal discussions in class and in small-group seminars. Each class begins with a 40-minute class discussion of the assigned readings. The professor will provide a general outline (via Blackboard), with selected highlights, illustrations, discussion points/questions to guide the class through the material. We're after the 'big picture' here. After a short break the professor (or guest lecturer) will deliver a 40-minute lecture on a special topic. Usually the special topic is related to the general topic, with the idea of exploring one issue in greater depth. After another short break the class will meet in small seminar groups (approx. 6 per group) for 40 minutes to share insights from their written reading reflections on the required readings and their responses to the special-topic lecture. Students should take notes during these discussions. Legible, handwritten one-paragraph summaries (or a list of bullet points) on the back-side of the reading reflections will demonstrate how each student has responded to the written and oral material. The professor will then lead a 10 minute wrap-up for the whole class to complete the class session. Reading reflections (with additional handwritten comments) are turned in to the professor at the end of the class session.

Reading: The course schedule (below) indicates the preparatory reading for each class. "Secondary sources" provide general background on the topic, usually by contemporary scholars. It is best to begin here. "Primary sources" are writings by the historical subjects in their own words (translated, of course). These take more time—the authors were writing in and for their own contexts, not your own. The primary source provides an instance or illustration of one or more of the historical issues raised in the secondary source(s). "Inwardly digest" the material with margin notes, highlighted quotes, etc. Look for the main ideas, the central concerns, and keep in mind the original audience (as best you can determine this) that the writer is addressing.

Reading should always be completed prior to class. If a student elects not to write a reading reflection (see below) for a particular class session, please indicate accountability by notifying the professor in a note (hardcopy or via e-mail) that the reading was completed nonetheless. If only a portion of the reading was completed, indicate so in the note. Submit this to the professor by class time. Failure to complete the reading may lower the final grade by as much as a half-letter.

Reading reflections: Accountability is chiefly demonstrated in weekly reading reflections due at each class session (except the first). Students may write as many as twelve reading reflections, though only nine are required. A reading reflection consists of a brief written essay that includes summary, analysis, and conclusions (as described below). It helps the student organize his/her thoughts as well as prepare for in-class discussions. Each reading reflection should be three- to four- pages in length, 1.5 or double-spaced, typed in 11- or 12-pt. font, with one-inch margins. Quotations from the assigned texts should be cited with author and page number(s) in parentheses. Citations from other sources (optional) should be footnoted on a separate page (beyond the required three or four) using Turabian's *Manual for Writing* or *The Chicago Manual of Style* (current editions) or the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (current edition). Title pages are *not* required. The average grade for the reading reflections (whether the student writes nine or twelve) determines 75% of the course grade.

Since this is a church history course the main purpose of reading reflections is to express an understanding of the subject matter within its own historical-cultural context. That means you should ... **summarize** the major figures, events, trends, or movements contained in the readings. Be sure to account for all of the secondary sources, tying them together in a coherent, integrative overview. This will constitute the first half (approx.) of the reading reflection. Next, in a somewhat more analytical way, **correlate** the primary source with one or more of the historical issues mentioned in your opening summary. How does the primary source illustrate a particular theme or argument addressed in the general readings. Establish some sort of linkage here—and be specific. You don't have to draw every possible connection, but only those which you think are most important. This portion of the reading reflection should constitute a quarter (approx.) of the total essay. Finally, in the remaining quarter (approx.) of the paper, you may **comment** on what you have learned, chiefly in terms of reflecting on the general significance of the subject matter, suggesting why it matters in the belief or practice of the church over time, or in our own day. Here the idea is not so much to agree or disagree with the subject matter, but to formulate a clear understanding of its overall importance *then* and *now*. How does it inform our self-understanding, individually or corporately, as members of Christ's Church today? Obviously, there may be a subjective aspect in these concluding comments/reflections, especially if you write about the personal significance of the material for your life and ministry.

Students can expect to share highlights of their reading reflections in the seminar groups. As they do so, they should take note of the conversation in handwritten notes on the back-side of the last page of the written reflections, highlighting key issues, clarifications, questions, concerns that arise. Perhaps they have discovered errors or problems in their original reflection and would like to amend these. At the least, the handwritten notes should consist of a bullet-type list of important points which indicate the outcome of the seminar group interaction.

Final projects:

Students have a choice at the end of the course. They may write a short research paper or a book report. The finished product will constitute the remaining 25% of the final grade.

Research Papers: One research paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) may be submitted on, or before, May 14. The paper should:

- show the contribution the historical author or issue made to the early church era (focus especially on primary sources here)
- comment on the strengths, weaknesses, gains, or losses of development(s) associated with the author or issue (secondary literature may be helpful here)
- develop a line of argument or a thesis of your own (for top grades)
- consider how this might help or hinder the Church today; is there some 'ancient-future' wisdom to be found here?

The research paper is an exercise in addressing an issue or a question. The question or issue addressed needs to be stated at the beginning of the paper. Select your own question, but it must be approved by the professor in advance. I would recommend you show me an essay plan before you start writing, although this is not required. I would expect you

to use at least five secondary texts. Citations should follow Turabian's *Manual for Writing* or *The Chicago Manual of Style* (current editions) or the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (current edition).

Book Report: Students will write a book review (8-10 double-spaced pages), due on, or before, May 14. The book to be reviewed is Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007). The review should

- **summarize** the book
- **illustrate**, from various chapters, the overall argument of the book, as it is stated on p. 9: "Africa played a decisive role in the formation of Christian culture. Decisive intellectual achievements of Christianity were explored and understood first in Africa before they were recognized in Europe, and a millennium before they found their way to North America."
- **ask key questions:** to whom is Oden writing? (his imagined audience) why did this book need to be written? how does it challenge the reader? will its African story make a difference in contemporary theology? in contemporary ministry/mission?
- **critique** the book: based on what you have learned in this course how would you judge the success and importance of Oden's argument?

Some 'Good Housekeeping' Reminders:

- Assignments should be submitted on the dates specified. This is important for seminar preparation and for developing time management skills that are necessary in ministry. If illness or some family or personal emergency occurs that makes this impossible, please contact me as soon as possible. Otherwise, late submissions may be penalized with a reduced grade.
- As the *Student Handbook* states, you should expect to spend two hours in preparation for each class hour, or six hours per week.
 - 2-2.5 hours per week of assigned reading (assuming reading rates of about 20 pages an hour and about 40-50 pages of reading)
 - 2-2.5 hours per week of writing the reading reflection
 - the remaining 1-2 hours can be devoted to the research paper or book review, or "stock-piled" for the final examination
- Please note the rules against copying material given on page 94 and 95 of the *Academic Bulletin*. Plagiarism is a serious ethical breach and could be grounds for failure on the course, so please take note. In particular, the *Bulletin* states,

Using materials that are written or spoken by others and copying or transcribing them as one's own without proper punctuation (quotations marks) or credit (footnotes) is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes copying from a book, a speech, a conversation, a lecture, an article on the Internet or any other source where the ideas and expression are not one's own. Cheating also occurs in quoting from one's own previously written material without proper acknowledgement. Resubmission of previously written work for course credit is considered cheating.

Grades:

Grades will be based on the following scheme drawn from the University of Durham, UK.

A (95+)	Work in this category will show full and informed coverage of the topic. It reveals awareness of different views and interpretations and the ability to assess and evaluate them. There will be close familiarity with primary and secondary literature and detailed and accurate references. The structure will be clear and coherent and will show development of ideas. There will be well-developed comment and analysis and an awareness of how the subject fits into the wider picture. The style will show a 'sparkle' and lightness of touch, which reflects a genuine engagement with the material.
A- (90-94)	This is still excellent work, and will show many of the above qualities, but without the 'sparkle' which marks out papers getting the top grade.
B+ (87-89)	Work in this category will still show good coverage of the material and an awareness of different views. There will be a clear structure and evidence of the ability to assess viewpoints critically. Coverage will be adequate and comment competent without being outstanding.
B (83-86)	This kind of paper will offer less incisive analysis of differing viewpoints and less full coverage. Comment and reflection will be adequate but lacking in the penetrating insights of more highly graded work.
B- (80-82)	Like category B, this work will show reasonable competence. It is still good work, but it will lack sparkle and show the ability to summarize the opinions of others rather than display originality and unusual insight. It will be accurate and coherent in its structure.
C+ (77-79)	This category is marked by reasonable coverage, some awareness of differing views and some ability to comment. It will lack real analytical power and a wide awareness of the place of the subject in a wider context. There will be no serious inaccuracies or gross irrelevance but the abiding impression will be of adequacy rather than competence and of ability to summarize content rather than astuteness in analysis.
C (73-76)	Papers in this category will show reasonable accuracy, basic knowledge of the material and an attempt to structure this, but beyond that will have few positive merits. Papers will be relevant without imagination or real ability to analyze and comment on differing viewpoints.
C- (70-72)	This is the lowest category which is deemed a 'pass'. Work assessed at this grade will show just adequate knowledge of the material, some elementary structure but no comment or analysis.
D (60-69)	Work given this category falls short of the criteria outlined above. Both coverage and relevance will be unsatisfactory and there will be a lack of analysis and comment. Style will be pedestrian and the structure lacking in coherence.
F (0-59)	Work of this grade will show a complete failure. Papers may be far too short, display complete irrelevance and gross inaccuracy, as well as complete ignorance of opposing viewpoints. Serious failures in grammar, spelling etc. might well be further evidence of work at this level.

This is intended only as a guide rather than as a set of rules. I trust, however, it will indicate what a particular grade means and suggest what steps might be taken to achieve higher grades.

As a rule of thumb:	C grades: are for summarizing the reading. B grades: are for summarizing and commenting on the reading A grades: are for arguments that use summaries and comments
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V. Course Schedule

Session 1 (Jan. 31)—Introduction: Historiography and Major Themes of the Ancient Period

- Special lecture topic: “The *True Gnosis* of Clement of Alexandria” (based esp. on Wilken, Ch. 3)
- Readings:
 - Primary source: Clement of Alexandria, selections from *Stromateis, Paedagogus, et al.* (Bettenson, pp. 168-184; also pp. 16-18 re. Clement biography)
 - Secondary sources: Guy, Ch. 1; and Wilken, Introduction (optional: Ch. 3)

Session 2 (Feb. 7)—The First-Century World: Jewish Legacies and Greek Culture

- Special lecture topic: “The Emerging Church Movement of the First- and Second Centuries”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: The Epistle to Diognetus (Bettenson, pp. 53-57; also pp. 7-9 re. Diognetus biography)
 - Secondary sources: Wilken, Ch. 2; and Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (1967), Ch. 1 (“From Jerusalem to Rome”) (the Chadwick selection will be made available to students via Blackboard or library reserve)

Session 3 (Feb. 14)—The Apostolic Fathers: Second-Generation Perspectives

- Special lecture topic: “Aaron Milavek’s *Didache* Project: Premodern & Postmodern Communal Apologetics?”
- Readings:
 - Primary sources: *Didache* (Bettenson, pp. 50-53; also pp. 5-7 re. *Didache* background); and Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters* (Bettenson, pp. 40-49; also pp. 3-5 re. Ignatius biography)
 - Secondary sources: Guy, Ch. 2; and *Christian History (& Biography)* Magazine Issue 57 (“Converting the Empire: How the Early Church Evangelized a Hostile Pagan World”), focusing especially on articles by J. David Cassel, E. Glenn Hinson, Gregory Elder, and Rodney Stark

Session 4 (Feb. 21)—Persecution & Martyrdom in the Early Church

- Special lecture topic: “Broken Bread & Lives Poured Out: Martyrdom as *Eucharistes* in Ignatius and Polycarp”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” in *Early Christian Writings* (NY: Dorset Press, 1968) (students will have access to this text via Blackboard or library reserve)
 - Secondary source: Guy Ch. 3

Session 5 (Feb. 28)—“One, Holy, Catholic, & Apostolic”? Defending, Defining, and Organizing the Church

- Special lecture topic: “The Missionary Bishop? Some Ancient-Future Reflections”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: Cyprian, miscellaneous selections in Bettenson, pp. 263-273 (also pp. 22-24 re. Cyprian)
 - Secondary source: Guy Chs. 4 and 7

Session 6 (March 6)—The Constantine Factor: The Church Before & After Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313)

- Special lecture topic: “An Unholy Tradeoff? The Debate over Constantinianism and the “Fall” of the Early Church”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: Augustine’s *City of God*, excerpts in Vernon J. Bourke, *The Essential Augustine* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1964-1974), pp. 197-219. After reading Bourke’s introduction to the selections (pp. 197-199) and Augustine’s “analysis” of *City of God* (pp. 199-200), focus especially on pp. 200-208 (the remainder is optional); these readings will be accessible via Blackboard or library reserve.
 - Secondary sources: Guy Ch. 5; and Wilken Ch. 8

Session 7 (Mar. 13)—Disciples of the Desert: Ascetic Spirituality & Evangelism

- Special lecture topic: “Christian Faith as a Way of Life (*philosophia*): The Spirituality of John Cassian”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: *TBA*
 - Secondary sources: Guy Ch. 6; and *Christian History (& Biography)* Issue 64 (“St. Antony & the Desert Fathers: Extreme Faith in the Early Church”), focusing especially on articles by Galli, Goehring, and Martin, and Lane

March 20—HOLY WEEK (no class)

Session 8 (Mar. 27)—Early Christian Worship: “Blessing the Maker of All Things Through His Son Jesus Christ and Through Holy Spirit”

- Special lecture topic: “The Food of Thanksgiving: From Passover Meal to Love Feast to Eucharist”
- Readings:
 - Primary sources: Justin Martyr, excerpts from *Apologia I, II* (Bettenson, pp. 58-64); and Tertullian, miscellaneous selections on worship and sacraments (focusing more on Eucharist than Baptism, for the time being) in Bettenson, pp. 141-149
 - Secondary sources: Guy Ch. 8; and Wilken Ch. 2 (optional: Ch. 10)

Session 9 (Apr. 3)—“Sealing the Faith”: Baptism as Christian Initiation

- Special lecture topic: “How Normative was Infant Baptism in the Early Church?”
- Readings:
 - Primary sources: Tertullian on Baptism (Bettenson, pp. 144-147) and Baptism accord to *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (portions of this text will be made available via Blackboard or library reserve); we may also refer back to baptismal practice in the *Didache* (review from Session 4)
 - Secondary sources: Guy Ch. 9; and it might be helpful to review (from last week) Wilken Ch. 2, esp. pp. 36-42

April 10—READING WEEK (no class)

**Session 10 (Apr. 17)—“Tradition!”: Rediscovering the Patristics’ Theological Method
(A Discussion of D. H. Williams’ *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church*)**

- Special lecture topic: “Appreciating the Patristics” (Guest lecturer: Prof. Rod Whitacre)
- Readings:
 - Primary source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, excerpts pertaining to the Church (Bettenson, pp. 89-94; also see pp. 12-13 re. Irenaeus)
 - Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*; optional: *Christian History & Biography* Issue 96 (“The Hunger for Secret Knowledge”)

Session 11 (Apr. 24)—Patristic Theology on the Path to Nicaea

- Special lecture topic: “The School of Alexandria’s Star Pupil, Athanasius”
- Readings:
 - Primary source: Athanasius, miscellaneous selections from *The Incarnation and Against the Arians* (Bettenson, pp. 274-290; also see pp. 24-27 re. Athanasius)
 - Secondary sources: Guy, Ch. 10; and Wilken, Ch. 4

Session 12 (May 1)—*Credo*: Making Sense of the First Four Ecumenical Councils

- Special lecture topic: “Appreciating Cyril of Alexandria” (Guest lecturer; Prof. Bill Witt)
- Readings:
 - Primary sources: The texts of the original and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creeds are available in *Christian History* Issue 85 (“Debating Jesus’ Divinity: The Council of Nicaea and Its Bitter Aftermath”), p. 17; in addition, short selections from Cyril of Alexandria will be made available via Blackboard or library reserve
 - Secondary sources: Guy, Ch. 11; and read either/both of the following: (1) Wilken, Ch. 5; or (2) *Christian History* Issue 85 (“Debating Jesus’ Divinity: The Council of Nicaea and Its Bitter Aftermath”), esp. articles by Wilken, McGuckin, Hall, and Ayres

Session 13 (May 8)—Post-Nicaea Theology, East & West: Gregory of Nazianzus & Augustine

- Special lecture topic: “The Doctrine of Justification in Patristic Theology” (Guest lecturer: Prof. Justyn Terry)
- Readings:
 - Primary sources: Gregory’s *Five Theological Orations* (27-31) with commentary (via Blackboard or library reserve); and selections from Augustine on justification-salvation (TBA: *The Nature of Grace / Forgiveness of Sins / Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love* via Blackboard or library reserve)
 - Secondary source: Wilken, Chs. 6 and 7 and Epilogue