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REL. 353: Christian Foundations

Aim of the Course

In this course, we will explore the original development of some of the classic ideas of Christian faith, with special emphasis on the idea of God. "Original" in this context means earliest, or foundational. Therefore it is mainly with the so-called "Patristic" or "Early Church Fathers" era of Christian history--stretching from the time immediately after the completion of the New Testament documents until the fall of the Roman Empire and its aftermath--that we will be concerned. We will be reading and reflecting together on the writings of some of the formative figures of this era, including Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, Athanasius, and Augustine of Hippo, with attention to early Church councils and creedal documents as well.

Other Christian beliefs that are closely associated with the idea of God, such as the doctrines of the creation and the person and work of Christ, will also be considered. Our greatest concern will be to understand the development of the characteristic Christian understanding of God as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Prerequisite

Sophomore standing is prerequisite for this course.

Course Requirements

1. *Class Participation (20% of final grade)*. Regular attendance at class meetings and regular participation in class discussions are expected. Additionally, each student will take a turn at initiating class discussion by identifying, and raising a question about, a passage in the assigned reading that they find particularly interesting. *More than one absence from class will progressively lower this portion of your grade.*
2. *Midterm Exam (25%)*, which will take place on the second Wednesday of the term. The exam will contain both short answer and short essay questions.
3. *A 4-5 Page Essay (25%)*, due on the third Wednesday of the term. Late essays will not be accepted without prior consent of the professor.
4. *A Final Essay of 5-7 pages (30%)*, due by 1:00 P.M. on the fourth Wednesday of the term.

Class Meeting Times

Class meetings will be held on Monday through Friday, from 12:15 to 3:00 PM.

Required Texts

1. Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*.
2. William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*.
3. Richard A. Norris, Jr., *The Christological Controversy*.
4. Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*.
5. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (trans. Rex Warner).

Students with Special Needs

Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml. Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the [disabilities services coordinator](#) as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes. At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

Academic Honesty

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgment of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Course Calendar

Note: The reading assignments listed in this course calendar are to be completed PRIOR to that day's meeting of the class.

WEEK 1

Monday: Getting oriented

Tuesday: A. The Biblical Background to Early Christian Writings (Library Reserve).

(1) Hebrew Bible: Genesis 3; Psalm 82; Proverbs 8; Isaiah 44; Amos 3.

(2) Christian Scriptures: Mark 13; John 1, 14, 15, 16; Philippians 2:1-11.

B. An Introduction to Early Christian Writings.

Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, pp. 15-26.

Wednesday: A. Letters of Ignatius.

Richardson, pp. 74-80; 87-93; 102-116.

B. An Early Christian Manual: The *Didache*.

Richardson, pp. 161-166; 171-179.

C. The Letter of (?) to Diognetus.

Richardson, pp. 205-224.

Thursday: The First Apology of Justin Martyr.

Richardson, pp. 225-289.

Friday: Irenaeus of Lyons Attempts to Refute Heresies.

Richardson, pp. 343-397.

WEEK 2

Monday: The Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicaea.
Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, pp. 17-23; 29-62.

Tuesday: Athanasius Attempts to Refute the Arians.
Rusch, pp. 63-129.

Wednesday: MIDTERM EXAM.

Thursday: The Question of Christology: Melito, Tertullian, and Origen.
Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, pp. 9-10; 12-17; 33-47; 61-81.

Friday: Apollinaris, Theodore, and the Council of Chalcedon.
Norris, pp. 21-31; 103-159.

WEEK 3

Monday: The Beginnings of Christian Monasticism.
Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert* (whole book).

Tuesday: Beginning an In-depth Study of a Classic Christian Text.
The Confessions of St. Augustine, Books I.1-IV.10.

Wednesday: ESSAY DUE, AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS.
In-class viewing of the film, *Church and Empire*.

Thursday: Augustine, Books IV.11-VII.5.

Friday: Augustine, Books VII.6-IX.13.

WEEK 4

Monday: Augustine, Books X.1-XI.13; and XIII.11, 32-34.

Tuesday: No class--work on final essay.

Wednesday: FINAL ESSAY DUE BY 1:00 PM.

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