

**TH 3XP3 – Classical Faith: An Introduction to  
Patristic Theology and Spirituality (AD 100–381)**

**McMaster Divinity College**  
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**May 29 – June 2**  
**Mon: 11:30–4:00**  
**Tues–Thur: 9:00–4:00**  
**Fri: 9:00–12:00**

“[T]he fathers never split theology off from spirituality, as though theology was academic, mental exercise best practiced in one’s study, while Christian spirituality was more appropriately focused on the heart and centered in a church sanctuary. Any split between mind and heart, theology and spirituality, study and sanctuary would have met with scant toleration from the fathers. [They] continually remind us that theology is at best broken speech about the transcendent, mysterious God who draws near to us in the incarnation of the Son and the presence of the Spirit.” Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Interest in early Church studies has risen considerably over the last several decades. Perhaps most surprising is the emergence of interest among evangelical Protestants, among whom there is particular curiosity in the beliefs and spiritual practices of the post-apostolic believers. This course is an introduction to the study of patristic theology and spirituality, with the specific aim of learning to integrate lessons from these formative years of Christian history. Through the assigned readings and lectures students will receive a general overview of the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> century Church’s social, theological, and spiritual perspectives and practices. Of primary importance for the course is noting the unique bond between theology and spirituality at this stage in Christianity. Students will be expected to come away from this class not only appreciative of historical roots, but better equipped to theologically reflect on their own beliefs and practices.

**Specializations:**

Christian Thought and History, Pastoral Studies, Christian Worldview, Church and Culture

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

**Knowing**

- To gain a firm understanding of the essential beliefs and spiritual practices of the Church in the second through fourth centuries
- To learn the value in studying the early Church, while doing so with an objective mind

**Being**

- To develop a theological and spiritual lens for evaluating the contemporary world.
- To allow classic Christian writings to shape our own spirituality

**Doing**

- To develop skills of critical thinking and analysis of theological texts
- To consider one’s own context and allow the Fathers to challenge us

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

1. Wilken, Robert L. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003.
2. One of:
  - a. (PS) McGowan, Andrew B. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
  - b. (CT) Chadwick, Henry. *The Penguin History of the Church: The Early Church*. Revised Edition. London: Penguin, 1993.
  - c. (CW, CC) Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
3. Primary Readings: Selected readings will be assigned and will all be available online.
4. Recommended: Williams, D. H. *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

## ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Participation** **10%**
2. **Annotated Reading Log** (6-8 pages) **20%**

At the heart of patristic research is the writings of the Church fathers. These are the “primary” sources for this class. Students will keep a reading log for both primary and secondary readings. Primary source selections require one paragraph of summary analysis and reflection; the textbooks require two pages each (include: a summary of key ideas, potential insights for ministry, and personal evaluation of the book’s thesis and relevance). It is strongly recommend that readings be completed prior to May 29.

➤ Due Date: June 5
3. **Integration Paper** (8-10 pages) **30%**

Students will demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate and integrate lessons from the early Church. Each specialization will have a different approach to the paper:

  - a. Those in the Christian Thought and History will examine a particular doctrine or individual.
  - b. Christian Worldview will focus on the religious and philosophical milieu of the early church and its comparative relevance for today.
  - c. Those in the Church and Culture will draw insights from a facet of the early church’s relationship to its surrounding culture and context.
  - d. Pastoral Studies students will focus on a spiritual practice of the early Church and comment on its potentiality for today.

➤ Due Date: June 23
4. **Research Paper** (10-12 pages) **40%**

Each student will write a research essay investigating one aspect of patristic theology, spirituality, or the interface between the two. The paper will demonstrate a solid grasp of the issue under exploration, as well as the contemporary scholarship. Students must receive approval for their topics and show its relevancy to their specialization area.

➤ Due Date: June 30

## LECTURE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

### **MONDAY, MAY 29: 11:30 am – 4:00 pm (with a short break for complimentary lunch)**

1. Course Introduction
  - a. Overview of course, syllabus, learning objectives
  - b. The value and applicability of patristic studies
2. The expansion of the Church up to 381, a brief overview
  - a. Introduction to world of late-antiquity
  - b. Summary of Christianity's key developments up to 4<sup>th</sup> century
3. Patristic Theology Introduced
  - a. The marriage of theology and spirituality

### **TUESDAY, MAY 30: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

1. Theology after the Apostles
  - a. Apostolicity as “canon” in the early second century
  - b. Authority, cosmology and theology
  - c. Logos theology and mediatorial Christology
2. Morality, Marytdom
  - a. Persecution as identity
  - b. Virtue and spiritual practices in the apostolic fathers

### **WEDNESDAY, MAY 31: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm (with a short break for chapel service)**

1. The emergence of “orthodox” theology
  - a. Irenaeus against heresy
  - b. Incarnational theology
  - c. Origen and mystical theology
2. Trinitarian spirituality
  - a. The Holy Spirit finds identity
  - b. Prayer and Spiritual formation

### **THURSDAY, JUNE 1: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm**

1. Imperial Christianity and the desert exodus: implications on the faith
  - a. Constantine and conciliar theology
  - b. The rise of monasticism
2. Desert Faith
  - a. Ascetical Christianity
  - b. Desert mothers: a muted voice heard again

### **FRIDAY, JUNE 2: 9:00 am – 12:00 pm**

1. The Emergence of Nicene Theology
  - a. Arianism, Athanasius and the divine “nature”
  - b. The Cappadocian Fathers and Greek theology
  - c. Augustine and Latin theology
2. Theosis as the heart of patristic theology and spirituality
  - a. Communion in the Church as communion with God
  - b. Spiritual formation as divine ascent

## **Textbook Purchase**

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3 : phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## **Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

## **Gender Inclusive Language**

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

## **Style**

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

## **Disclaimer**

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anatolios, Khaled. *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Bettenson, Henry, and Chris Maunder. *Documents of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bradshaw, Paul F. *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*. Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Brakke, David. *The Gnostics : Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity /*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
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- Christensen, Michael J. and Jeffery A. Wittung. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Collins, Paul M. *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion*. London; New York: T & T Clark, 2012.
- Grant, Robert M. *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*. London: SCM Press, 1988.
- Hall, Christopher A. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2009.
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- Hurtado, Larry W. *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
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- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- McGinn, Bernard et al. *Christian Spirituality: From the Apostolic Fathers to the Twelfth Century*. New York: Crossroad, 1985.
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- . *The Moral World of the First Christians*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1986.
- Osborn, Eric Francis. *The Emergence of Christian Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
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