



**Nipawin Bible College**  
**GE312: History of the Early Church**  
**Mr. David J. Smith**  
**Fall 2018**  
**3 Credit Hours**  
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### ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

The Achilles' heel of evangelicalism is its ahistorical mentality. In a desire to recover and "contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" of the New Testament Church, we typically ignore, or downplay, the contributions of most of our spiritual ancestors. The story of the Church, however, is not only its continued testimony to the first century events of Jesus' ministry, but also includes the activities, theological developments, struggles and victories of successive generations of believers. In examining these, we establish a better context for understanding Christianity in our own times. This course is a survey of the history of the Church (Christianity) from the apostolic age through to the dawn of the Reformation.

### ***COURSE TEXTBOOKS***

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. Revised and updated. New York: HarperOne, [1984] 2010. [pp. 1-490]

### ***THE BIG QUESTION***

How will the contemporary believer establish a more informed context for understanding the Christian faith in his or her own time?

### ***LEARNING OUTCOMES***

With successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Improve their knowledge of the development and spread of the Christian community;
2. Comprehend with clearer insight the nature of Christian identity from believers who lived out their faith in the dialectic of cultural appropriation and confrontation;
3. Develop greater skill in the craft of historical research and writing through responsible evaluation and interpretation of primary source documents, and through critical engagement with the work of other historians and theologians;
4. Appraise with greater critical insight the Christian faith as it moved (and continues to move) across cultures and through time.

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

**1. Primary Document Analysis (25%).** From a selection of six (6) historical documents provided for you choose one (1) as the subject material for this assignment. These primary documents come from an earlier period in Church history. As you read, be careful to think about what kind of document this is, and how its genre might impact the document's message. Then, having carefully read the document, write a **4-page response** in which you:

- a) Identify and explain why you think the document was written (in other words, what was its purpose),
- b) Identify and discuss what you think are the author's basic assumptions which are made in the document,
- c) Identify, and provide examples of, what you think might be any authorial biases,
- d) Discuss what you think can be learned about the society/culture which produced the document, and
- e) Evaluate what you think this document says about the church *in that era*.

The choices from which you are to select one (1) are as follows:

- Excerpt from *In Praise of Constantine* (4<sup>th</sup> century) by Eusebius
- Portion from *Rule of St. Benedict* (6<sup>th</sup> century) by Benedict of Nursia
- Passage from *The Ecclesiastical History of England* (8<sup>th</sup> century) by Bede
- Recounting the *Miracles of St. Foy* (11<sup>th</sup> century) by Bernard of Angers
- Retelling of *The Damascus Chronicle* (12<sup>th</sup> century) by Ibn Al-Qalanisi
- Selection from *Letters* (14<sup>th</sup> century) by Catherine of Siena

Do not consult outside sources; the purpose of the assignment is for students to deal with the document alone. Because this is a short essay, concise and precise writing that strictly follows the criteria given above is of the essence. A proper title page is required.

***DUE DATE: MON. OCT. 22***

**2. Research Paper (45%).** This assignment is a standard historical paper in which you will select a topic that falls within the parameters of this course. You are encouraged to pick a topic early giving consideration to such factors as personal interest, prior knowledge and the availability of source documents.

This is a scholarly assignment in which you will be required to research data, interpret it and fit it into a coherent and extended discussion. Therefore, your paper is not simply a report of an event or the retelling of someone else's work; rather, it is a critical work in which you will present a clear thesis (an interpretive assertion) and then use your sources to support your claim. It is important that your thesis deals with some interpretive dispute; *avoid simply restating a position that is overwhelmingly agreed upon.*

This 15-page paper will be supported by a minimum of 15 sources, 3 of which will be primary documents. Exercise discretion in using the Internet. Without question Wikipedia is unacceptable as a legitimate resource. Your link to "Galaxie" may be helpful.

***DUE DATE: MON. NOV. 12***

**3. Textbook Reading (30%).** Each student is expected to read the course text, *The Story of Christianity* (vol. 1) by Gonzalez, in its entirety (pp. 1-490). A reading schedule is provided in the course calendar below. Having done so, in 4 full pages provide a summary and evaluation of the book. Be aware that this critique is not about the author's style, whether you liked or didn't like the book, or decided it was a "good read". Rather, you are being asked to assess the book's value as a resource in understanding the expansion of Christianity from its beginnings thru to the sixteenth century. Students are expected to exercise a good measure of Christian **and** academic charity and respect when disagreeing with scholars. An excellent critique will include the following components:

- Begin by providing the basic bibliographic data (in proper format) as well as the total number of pages (not percentage) you have read.
- Your first paragraph should identify the author and give their credentials for writing the book. This need not be overly extensive.
- Then state (in one good sentence) the subject of the book as well as the intended audience.
- Next, provide a *brief* (but adequate) summary of the material covered in your reading.
- Finally, carefully evaluate the clarity and organization of the book. In doing so, consider such questions as: Does the author write in such a way as to explain concepts, principles or facts clearly? Is the material well organized, balanced and comprehensive? Does the author provide insightful analysis? How have your presuppositions been affirmed or challenged? How has the material shaped your worldview? What is one significant aspect of this period in Church history that this author has helped you to see and understand which you did not previously grasp? And, would you recommend this book as a serious resource on the subject of early Church history? Why, or why not?
- A title page.

***DUE DATE: MON. DEC. 3***

All written assignments are to be word-processed on a computer in accordance with the prescribed requirements in the NBC *Student Handbook*. Assignments will be graded on the basis of content, clarity, grammar, spelling and the student's ability to follow instructions. Optima or Times New Roman (preferred) font is required. Pagination is a must. All assignments will be due **no later than 5:00 PM** on the day that they are assigned.

### ***ATTENDANCE POLICY***

Refer to the *NBC Student Handbook 2018-2019*.

### ***LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY***

Refer to the *NBC Student Handbook 2018-2019*.

In addition to these, be aware also that classroom etiquette involves responsible use of technology. Therefore, electronics (laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.) are not to be used to play games, web browse, email or text messages during class time. Since technology can be used to enhance learning, discretion is left to the individual faculty whether they allow devices in the classroom. If such devices become a distraction the student may be marked absent from class and/or no longer permitted to bring their device to class.

One further important word. If you are hindered in any way because of a learning disability please speak with the course instructor as soon as possible. It is their desire to develop strategies that accommodate your need and make your learning experience as rewarding as possible.

**Course Reading: approx. 500 pages of textbook reading.**

**Course Writing: 23 pages of writing.**

## **SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Anatolios, Khaled. *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

Drobner, Hubertus, R. *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007.

Gonzalez, Justo L. *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, Vol. 1. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, Vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.

Heine, Ronald E. *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978.

Louth, Andrew. *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013.

Oberman, Heiko. *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

Peters, Greg. *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

Southern, R. W. *Western Society in the Middle Ages*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.

In addition to these titles students are directed toward the numerous volumes of *Christian History* available in the reference section of our library, as well as the excellent "Suggested Readings" sections of their text.