

COURSE OF STUDY SCHOOL OF OHIO AT MTSO

Winter, 2026

February 13-14; March 13-14
COS 222 – Theological Heritage: Early Church

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Course Description:

This course focuses on the history and theology of the Church through the first five centuries. Using primary sources and other readings, students will reflect on significant individuals, events, and the articulation of the Christian faith during this period.

Course Goals:

Students will be able to:

1. Understand and articulate the doctrine of the Trinity, and the historical debates in the early Church around the person and nature of Christ.
2. Understand and articulate a doctrine of salvation in light of the controversies of the early church.
3. Understand the history and significance of the creeds and ecumenical councils.
4. Appropriate historical theology for pastoral ministry.

Course Overview:

Welcome to the history and theology of the church in its early centuries! This course will survey the first 600 years of the church with interest in both its theological development and in the practice of Christian life. We will encounter a variety of fascinating individuals and engage in discussing several pivotal theological issues. Each segment of class will focus on particular themes or individuals so that you can become more closely acquainted with the world and faith of these Christians of our heritage. There will be far more material than you can absorb effectively in one course, but take heart; some of these writings will be worth putting on your shelf for reflection at a future point. Understanding your own faith and applying the insights of the past Christians can transform your life and ministry as it has throughout the history of the church.

Course Texts (required):

Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 (HarperCollins, revised, 2010)

Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Fortress Press, 1991).

Reference Book (required):

Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Recommended:

Elizabeth Livingstone, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Other materials distributed in class.

Course Expectations and Assignments:

Although our class sessions will be on-line and synchronous, we will look to engage with and learn from each other as an active learning community. Overall, we will use recorded lectures, lectures and conversations during class time, small group break-out discussions, videos, music and other strategies to accomplish the learning goals for the class. You will be responsible for keeping up with our scheduled class experiences, and for replying in a timely fashion to on-line discussions and conversations. We will use the Populi features of the COS site to enable our classwork. Your participation each weekend, and in our various scheduled learning assignments will make this class valuable for you and for your ministry.

Assignments:

I am asking each of you to complete the following written assignments that will help you to work with issues of this course in different settings. They will be completed outside of class and they are noted in the class schedule. Each written assignment completed outside of class should be submitted by the appropriate due date. In addition, I have included a description of the work associated with the class asynchronous work and class participation (see #4 below)

1. Pre-class writing assignment. Offer your response to the book by Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and to Love*, in a two page paper. See the questions at the end of the syllabus. Please upload your paper to the appropriate assignment link in the Populi site. **Due Feb. 12 (20% of final grade)**

2. Biographical Response: Select one of the persons we have considered in this course and develop a sermon or adult study experience based upon this person. Becoming acquainted with someone from the history of the church is one of the best tools available for presenting the rich heritage of our Christian past. Make certain to incorporate appropriate background material to this person's life and faith experience. It also helps if you can incorporate primary materials, e.g. letters, writings, sermons, prayers, etc. from your character (see the Bettenson text). Your sermon and or class outline should be 5-6 pages. A list of possible figures is included at the end of the syllabus. Please upload to the Populi tab for this assignment. **Due Mar. 24 (30% of final grade)**

3. End of Weekend Theological Reflection: At the end of each weekend I will ask you to provide some written response to our reading and class discussion. This assignment will be open book, open notes—but will require you to complete your own work. I will ask you to reflect on key theological themes and identify the importance of individuals and issues we have discussed. You will upload your responses to the Populi site, at the end of each weekend. **Due Feb. 15 (weekend 1) and Mar. 15 (weekend 2) (each assignment 15%; for a total of 30% of course grade).**

4. On-line discussion posts. During our weekends, I will ask you to provide short posts to questions and issues we are discussing in class. These posts will form PART of your class

participation grade. I will also posted a few taped lectures or videos with discussion threads for you to post your responses. Please respond in a timely fashion **(20% of course grade)**

A word on writing relevant to all assignments: Learning to write clear and effective prose is a skill worthy of any ministry. I will not be too picky, but if I encounter too many grammar or spelling mistakes, I may return the paper to you. Remember, the COS has a writing coach to assist in these matters.

Please Note: I expect all of your work to be completed as identified in the syllabus, but if there is a problem and your work will be late, talk to me BEFORE rather than after the fact. In most instances a reasonable penalty will be assessed to late work.

ACADEMIC HONOR POLICY

The Course of Study School of Ohio requires that all material submitted by a student in fulfilling academic requirements must be the original work of the student.

Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations include, but are not limited to, cheating and plagiarism.

Cheating includes seeking, acquiring, receiving or passing on information about the content of an examination prior to its authorized release or during its administration. Cheating also includes seeking, using, giving or obtaining unauthorized assistance in any academic assignment or examination.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting the published or unpublished words or ideas of another [including online resources] as if it were one's own work. A writer's work should be regarded as his or her own property. Any person who knowingly (whether intentionally or unintentionally) uses a writer's distinctive work without proper acknowledgement is guilty of plagiarism.

A student found guilty of a violation of the academic honor code, after a review of the case, may be subject to one or more of the following sanctions:

- (1) warning;
- (2) failing grade for the assignment and/or course;
- (3) probation;
- (4) suspension;
- (5) dismissal from the Course of Study School of Ohio.

In severe or repeat cases (regardless of the sanctions) a letter will be sent to the student's District Superintendent and Board of Ordained Ministry representative.

Projected Class Schedule:

Note: We will also use the “Lessons” feature of Populi to detail each class session

Prior to class:

1. Complete pre-class written assignment (see below), and reading for the weekend;
2. Watch videos in “Lessons” for Sat. morning. and afternoon sessions, Feb. 14; and post responses.

Faith and Life in the Early Church

Weekend #1, February 13-14

On-line sessions: Feb. 13, 3:30- 5:30 pm
Feb. 14, 8:30-10:30 am; 1:00-3:00 pm

Themes:

Course Introductions

The Church in the Rome’s Empire: Experiences of the Early Christian Community

History as Biography and Martyrdom in the Early Church (see Bettenson)

The Early Church at Worship: Sacraments and Liturgy

Defending the Faith and Developing a Theological Vocabulary

The Gnostic Threat: Christianity Confronts Culture

Spiritual Contributions of the Desert Fathers and Mothers,

Discussion: Bondi, *To Pray and to Love* (read the entire book)

Reading: Gonzalez, 7-126; Bondi, *To Pray and to Love*; see too Bettenson, *Documents*, Part 1, sections I, II, VII, VIII

Prior to class:

1. Watch taped lectures (see “Lessons” for the weekend)
2. Complete posting to on-line discussions.

The Church, Empire and the Beginnings of Christendom

Weekend #2, March 13-14

On line sessions: Mar. 13, 3:30- 5:30 pm
Mar. 14, 8:30-10:30 am; 1:00-3:00 pm

Themes:

Church, State, and the Empire

The Council of Nicea: the Early Church Wrestles with Christology

The Theology and Spirituality of the Eastern Church

Augustine of Hippo: Grace, Faith, Salvation and Sacraments

Foundations of the Medieval World—Monks and Missionaries

Christian Empire in the East and the West

Reading: Gonzalez, 129-314; see too Bettenson, *Documents*, Part 1, sections IV, V, VI, Part II, sections I and III

Biography Response due by March 24; there are no provisions for incomplete work in COS

Assignment #1 Instructions

Pre-class response paper to: Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and to Love*

Please prepare the following responses in a two-page paper and upload to the assignment tab: Bondi book, *To Pray and to Love*

1. You are sitting in a local coffee shop and someone notices you reading Bondi's book. They introduces themselves to you ask you what the book is about. In a short paragraph (3 -4 sentences), how would you answer them?
2. What sources does Bondi use to provide insights into the prayer life of the early church? What is the significance of these materials?
3. Numerous references are made to the teachings of the various desert Abbas and Ammas. Select one of these that you found particularly significant or helpful (note the page number) and indicate why.
4. How will your prayer life be different as a result of reading and reflecting on this book?

Assignment #2 Instructions:

Biographical Response

Select one of the persons we have considered in this course and develop a sermon or adult study experience based upon this person. Becoming acquainted with someone from the history of the church is one of the best tools available for presenting the rich heritage of our Christian past. Make certain to incorporate appropriate background material to this person's life and faith experience. It also helps if you can incorporate primary materials, e.g. letters, writings, sermons, prayers, etc. from your character (see the Bettenson text for some examples and materials). Your sermon and or class outline should be 5-6 pages.

The Early Church

Perpetua of Carthage
Justin Martyr
Athanasius
Bishop Irenaeus
Macrina
Tertullian
Cyprian of Carthage

Emperor Constantine
Benedict of Nursia or Scholastica
Arius
John Chrysostom
Anthony of the Desert
Augustine of Hippo
Origen

COSSO ATTENDANCE POLICY

National policy from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) states that a student is expected to attend every class session. Unexcused absences may be cause for loss of credit or dismissal from the school. A student missing 20% or more of the classroom work shall not receive credit for the class. In the event of extenuating circumstances which require the student to miss up to 20% of the synchronous course time (whether in-person or on Zoom), the student should contact both the instructor and the Director prior to the start of the class to get approval and discuss make-up work. (Extenuating circumstances include emergency situations, illness, and dire circumstances, for example. Students are to provide back-up coverage at the local church while attending COS classes.)

Students attending online are required to show their faces the entire class time in order to be considered present, unless internet bandwidth issues or emergency circumstances (e.g., a power outage) necessitate turning off one's camera or calling in to class by phone. You are expected to attend class as you would in a face-to-face classroom (e.g, not driving). During asynchronous class time, faculty may monitor time used in posting and responding to colleagues to track your participation.

Cancellation and Withdrawal: Student must notify the COSSO office if they will be unable to attend class for which they are registered. Although there is no penalty when withdrawing more than two weeks in advance of the beginning of a term, registration fees are nontransferable and nonrefundable. A \$50.00 late withdrawal fee is charged for all withdrawals within two weeks of the start of a class. All tuition and housing payments are applied to a future term.

Students withdrawing after the start of a term will be assigned a grade of AW (Administrative Withdrawal) and will be responsible for the full \$300.00 tuition amount.

Any annual conference scholarship applied to the student billing record becomes the student's responsibility and is due by the end of the term. Housing payment is non-refundable.

No Shows: Except in cases of immediate and dire emergencies, if a student misses any class without notifying the COSSO office, tuition and housing fees are due immediately, a \$50.00 no show fee is charged, and the student will receive an "F" in the class.