

Syllabus

Course: RP445-D&DN Great Christian Thinkers: The Early Church Fathers
Credit: 1 Semester Hour
Semester: Spring 2027 (Session 1, Jan 11–Mar 05)
Time: 9:30–10:50 am, Wednesdays
Instructor: Dr. Michel Dodds. (816) 322-5152 ext. 1348, mike.dodds@calvary.edu, (913) 638-3291 (cell)

**About This Class: This course is offered in two formats: in-person and online. Students registered for in-person attend the classes in person, online students attend the classes via the online classroom. For both in-person and online students, assignments and interaction outside of the class period are done in the learning management system.*

**About Disabilities: Students with disabilities have the responsibility of informing the Accommodations Support Coordinate (aso@calvary.edu) of any disabling condition that may require support.*

**About Assistance for All Course Assignments: The Clark Academic Center (learning@calvary.edu) is dedicated to providing free academic assistance for all Calvary University students. Student tutors aid with all facets of the writing process, tutor in various subject areas, prepare students for exams, and facilitate tests. Please take advantage of this service.*

**About Changes to this Syllabus: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time during the course, but any changes made will only be done after clearly communicating the need for the change and the specific change to be made via in-class announcement and Canvas announcement.*

I. DESCRIPTION:

A reading seminar focusing on the writings of an important Christian thinker that has influenced or continues to influence the church. The writings will be evaluated from the perspective of biblical theology. Students will read and report on selected writings of the thinker. This course may be taken four times for credit as different Christian thinkers are covered. (Prerequisite: Junior class standing or permission of the professor)

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

A. General competencies to be achieved: You will be able to . . .

1. Articulate the cultural influences on the thinking of the Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #2) (A- A & B)
2. Summarize the biblical and theological perspectives of the Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #1, 2, & 3) (A- A & C)

Our Mission: "...to prepare Christians to live and serve in the church and in the world according to the Biblical worldview."

3. Classify the types of literature used by the Early Church Fathers for expressing their theology. (PLO- #1, 2, & 4) (A- A & B)
4. Critically evaluate selected writings of the Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #1, 2, 3, & 4) (A- C)

B. Specific competencies to be achieved: You will be able to . . .

1. Articulate the cultural influences which shaped the theology and writings of the Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #1, 3, #4) (A- A & B)
2. Critically evaluate selected writings of the Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #1, 2, 3, & 4) (A- C)
3. Demonstrate the ability to accurately communicate the theology and thinking of selected Early Church Fathers. (PLO- #1, 2, 3, & 4) (A- C)

III. REQUIREMENTS

***Note:** Specific instructions for each assignment are posted in Canvas.

A. Read the course textbook and ask significant questions.

1. Read the textbook according to the Class Schedule (i.e. 1 ECF and his writings each week).
2. After reading the assigned reading, write a significant question (i.e. one that uses critical thinking about the material) concerning either the Early Church Father or the writing(s).
3. Note: When you are the student assigned to make a presentation on the week's ECF, answer each of the questions the other students and the instructor have asked about that Early Church Father or his writings during your presentation.

B. Develop a Backgrounds Chart of the times of the Early Church Fathers.

1. Research the dates (birth and death years) and historical events (i.e. cultural and church such as church councils and significant works and major world events) which occurred during the lives of the Early Church Fathers (i.e. A.D. 50—450, Clement to John Chrysostom).
2. Present the findings from this research in the form of a chart in a PowerPoint slide(s) which shows the historical events which influenced the Early Church Fathers, to include the following.
 - a. Significant world events.
 - b. Significant Church events.
 - c. ECFs – when they lived.

C. Study a selected Early Church Father and write a critical paper.

1. Study the life and selected writings of a specific Early Church Father.
2. Write a 2500-word essay about the author and his writings that includes the following:
 - a. analysis of his life identifying the significant influences upon his thinking.
 - b. discussion and evaluation of his specific theological perspectives as presented in his selected writings.

- c. an assessment of the impact of his writings upon the Church.

D. Make a presentation of your conclusions concerning the selected Early Church Father.

1. This presentation is not to be the mere reading of your paper, but it is to be a verbal highlighting of your findings (e.g., envision making this as a presentation to a church group or in a seminar setting).
2. A PowerPoint presentation must accompany the presentation, and it must include pertinent pictures as well as text.
3. This presentation should be at least 30 minutes in length.
4. Note: During the presentation, the presenter must answer the questions the other students and the instructor submitted concerning the Early Church Father or his writings.

E. Write significant questions about each day's additional lecture material.

1. Following the instructor's presentation of additional theological material concerning the Early Church Fathers, submit a significant question which the material raised.

IV. METHODS

A. Presentation:

1. **In-class methods:** listening to lectures, participating in class discussions, and making presentations.

***About Class Attendance:** Research consistently demonstrates that class attendance and active participation correlate to higher performance on course assessments.

***About Classroom Use of Media:**

-**Computing devices** are permitted during the lecture and class discussion sessions for the sole purpose of taking notes. Use of these devices to access the Internet, make telephone calls or video calls, text messaging, updating social network services, etc. is not allowed, let alone very distracting to other students.

-**Cellphones / smartphones** may only be used in an emergency, and in those situations the student may take the call but must leave the room and not return until the next break out of courtesy to fellow classmates.

***About Note Taking:** Students are expected to take notes during each class. Significant peer reviewed studies continue to demonstrate that notes taken by hand are understood better and remembered longer than those taken with a computer. Computer use which is a distraction to others (i.e., noise, blocking the screen, displaying non-class related material, etc.) is not allowed.

2. **Out-of-class methods:** research, writing, and critical thinking.

***About written assignments:** Unless directed otherwise, all written assignments must follow the Turabian style according to *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th edition and the Calvary Style Guide, 2019 update.

B. Grading:

***About Late Assignments:** All course assignments must be submitted into Canvas by the due date listed in the Class Schedule and Canvas. Late assignments will be accepted but will be reduced 5% each week they are late.

***About Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is defined as copying any content without identifying the source. This also includes taking another person's or AI entity's ideas or constructs and presenting them as your own. The use of AI generated content in student work is prohibited (even if cited) as it does not represent original work created by the student and is an unreliable aggregate of ideas from other sources. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Any assignment that includes plagiarism will receive a **zero (0) grade**. (**Note:** AI detection software will be used to verify plagiarism.)

***About course grade:** See the grading scale in the University Catalog for the specific grading scale that will be used for final course grade.

1. Possible points for each specific assignment:

***Note:** An assignment-specific rubric will be provided for each assignment.

a. Reading Questions (8 @ 5 ea).		40 points
b. Lecture Questions. (8 @ 5).		40 "
c. Backgrounds Chart (1 @ 40 ea).		40 "
d. Critical Review Paper (1 @ 220 ea).		250 "
e. Presentation & PPT (1 @ 40 ea).		40 "
f. Questions & Answers (8 @ 5 ea).		40 "
Total		= 450

V. MATERIALS

A. Required:

1. English Bible (NAS, NASB-U, NKJV, NET, ESV, or other by approval).

-The Bible is a required textbook in every course at Calvary University. To facilitate academic level study, students are required to use for assignments and research an English translation or version of the Bible based on formal equivalence (*meaning that the translation is generally word-for-word from the original languages*), including any of the following: New American Standard (NASB, English Standard Version (ESV), New King James (NKJV), or King James (KJV). Other translations and versions based on dynamic equivalence (*paraphrases, and thought-for-thought translations like NLT and NIV*) may be used as supplemental

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sources. Please ask the professor if you have questions about a particular translation or version.

2. Richardson, Cyril C, Editor. *Early Christian Fathers*, Reprint edition. New York: Touchstone Books. ISBN: 978-0684-8295-17. Retail: \$18.00. 416 pages.

VI. ABBREVIATED CLASS SCHEDULE

[**Note:** An expanded schedule will be presented during the first class session.]

Week	Class Discussion	Assignments Due
1	Introduction to the ECF	--
2	Clement	Papers & Presentations
3	Ignatius	"
4	Polycarp	Backgrounds Chart
5	The Didache & a Sermon	"
6	Justin Martyr	"
7	Athenagoras	"
8	Irenaeus	"