Second Year
PRE-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT
PERKINS COURSE OF STUDY SCHOOL

222 – Theological Heritage II: Early Church
Email your pre-class assignment to your instructor and copy
coss@smu.edu.

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

Students will be able to:

1. Summarize the major events and personalities in the growth of the church and its doctrines up to the Council of Chalcedon.
2. Give basic descriptions of major topics associated with the doctrine of the Trinity, and the historical debates in the early Church around the person and nature of Christ.
3. Recount the history of the creeds and ecumenical councils.
4. Explain the relevance of the doctrinal content of the creeds to pastoral ministry.

Textbooks:

Reading Requirement – Between the time you receive these assignments and when class begins, you have three books to read. Only one of the books is tied specifically to a writing project in this pre-class assignment, however, the other two books are indispensable to gain a good grasp of major features of early Christianity. We will discuss them in our class time together (in person and online). Read them with great profit.

Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. Yale University Press, 2003.
Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
Bondi, Roberta. *To Love As God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church*. Fortress Press, 1987.

Assignments:

1. Write a summary review of Robert Louis Wilken's, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, using the following steps:

For each chapter of the book, write, in no more than one page, double spaced the basic thesis statement of the chapter. In other words, summarize the main point the author seeks to explain and promote in each chapter. Give one specific example from the chapter that Wilken uses to illustrate the main point. Then, finish your summary of that chapter by stating its relevance for pastoral ministry. Since there are twelve chapters, this assignment should extend to no more than twelve pages (double-spaced). Put all this work in one document (you do not need to create a new document for each chapter). Writing in a succinct way, yet also capturing the main point is a good discipline for thinking.

2. Identify <u>ten</u> people or principles or movements from the list below by writing one good, substantive paragraph on each one chosen. Include the time they occurred, the issues which made them important in Church History, and their consequences for later Christians. For sources, if you have access to an Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, start with it. You may also use (online) the Encyclopedia of Christianity at www.ccel.org or the Catholic Encyclopedia, also online at newadvent.org. Papers should be double-spaced.

Tatian's *Diatessaron*
Regula fidei (Rule of Faith)
Justin Martyr
Irenaeus
Tertullian
Origen
Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla
Athanasius
Apollinaris
Perpetua and Felicity
Nestorius
Eusebius of Caesarea
Constantine
Arius
Gregory of Nyssa
Macrina the Younger
Augustine of Hippo
Gnosticism
Marcion
Jerome
Donatus

Guidelines & Grades:

In the pre-course assignment and other in-class work, except the final examination, I use plain letter grades (not points). On the final examination, I use points and then convert to a letter grade. Assignments, including the final examination, all count equally. In other words, each work covers roughly 25% of your grade, with some flexibility for the professor to include participation in class discussions.

Two major criteria guide my evaluation of work: (1) Did the student follow the specific instructions of the assignment? Each assignment is designed with a particular learning

purpose in mind. (If you don't include a step mentioned in the assignment, it is very difficult to assign a passing grade, even if the other parts are very good.) (2) Did the student demonstrate basic knowledge of the content and careful thought? (This course does not ask for lots of original thinking. I am trying to help introduce you to a specific part of the theological tradition. My goal is to see that you have a good, basic understanding of that tradition, especially since the major doctrinal anchor points of the Christian faith developed during this time.) Careful thought is shown by attention to good organization and use of proper grammar and conventions. I am not a "grammar god," but the proper use of punctuation marks, for example, makes for clear communication.