

PERKINS COURSE OF STUDY SCHOOL  
2025 PRE-CLASS WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

222 Theological Heritage II: Early Church THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

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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 development of Christian doctrine during this period.

Students will be able to:

1. Summarize the major events and identify personalities in the development of the church's 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 broad outlines of the history of the creeds and ecumenical councils.
4. Explain the relevance of the doctrinal content of the creeds to pastoral ministry.

Textbooks and Reading Requirement – Between the time you receive these assignments and when class begins, you have three books to read. Only the Wilken book listed below is tied specifically to a writing project in this pre-class assignment. The other two we will read during the class time and discuss them online.

1. Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. Yale University Press, 2003.
2. St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, Popular Patristics Series, (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2012).
3. Bondi, Roberta. *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church*. Fortress Press, 1987.

2 Assignments (Due June 20):

1. Write a chapter-by-chapter summary of Robert Louis Wilken's, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, using the following steps: For each chapter of the book, write, in one paragraph the basic thesis statement (the main point). Pinpoint what is the chapter "about." This step requires deciding which point, among all the points the author makes, stands out as the one that stands out over the others and helps you understand the main focus of each chapter. Give one specific example that Wilken uses to illustrate that main point. Since there are twelve chapters, this assignment should extend to no more than six

pages (double-spaced), assuming two paragraphs per page as a reference point for size. 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 eight people or principles or movements from the list below by writing one good, substantive paragraph on each one chosen. Include the time they occurred or lived, the main issue 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](http://www.ccel.org) or the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, also online at [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org). Papers should be no more than six pages, double-spaced. Here is the list:

Tatian's Diatessaron	Nestorius
Regula fidei (Rule of Faith)	Eusebius of Caesarea
Justin Martyr	Constantine
Irenaeus	Arius
Tertullian	Gregory of Nyssa
Origen	Macrina the Younger
Montanus	Augustine of Hippo
Priscilla and Maximilla	Gnosticism
Athanasius	Marcion
Apollinaris	Jerome
Perpetua and Felicitas	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 30% 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? (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.) You show careful thought by 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.

Pre-class Assignments Policy: Pre-class assignments are due by Friday, June 20.

Instructors have discretion to lower a student's grade for the pre-class assignments and their overall course grade for late submission of pre-class assignments. Submission of all pre-class assignments by the first day of class is required to attend the class. Students who do not have pre-class assignments completed by the first day of class will be required to withdraw from the course without a refund.