CU 2221 – EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

Fall 2015 / Thursdays 7 pm-9 pm / Oct. 15 - Dec 10
UST School of Theology at St. Mary’s Seminary
Instructor: Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson (steensj@stthom.edu)

Course Description.

The goal of the course is to acquire a basic working knowledge of the life and thought of the key Fathers of the Church of the first five hundred years of her life. The Catholic Church teaches that genuine renewal in the Church follows the vibrant encounter with the Fathers, and to that end we will seek to cultivate the study of the Fathers “seriously and lovingly,” as the privileged witnesses to the living tradition of the Church.¹

Required Texts.


The Liturgy of the Hours is a marvelous treasury of patristic texts, and because this will become part of your spiritual discipline, it will be good to encounter these texts in conjunction with the lectures. A comprehensive index of these patristic readings may be found on Blackboard but can also be distributed via email.

Schedule.

Oct. 15 Introduction to the World of the Church Fathers.
  1st Century: Preserving an Apostolic Identity and Consciousness.
  [Readings: Clement of Rome; Ignatius of Antioch; Aquilina, pp. 17-80.]

Oct. 22 2nd Century: Discovering a Distinctively Christian Way of Thinking.
  [Readings: Justin Martyr; Irenaeus of Lyon; Clement of Alexandria; Aquilina, pp. 81-107.]

Nov. 5 3rd Century: Discerning the Catholic Understanding of the Church.
  [Readings: Origen of Alexandria; Tertullian; Cyprian, Aquilina, pp. 108-146.]

Nov. 12 Early 4th Century: The Challenge of Heresy for Catholic Unity
  [Readings: Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria; Aquilina, pp. 147-166.]

Nov. 19 Later 4th Century: Establishing the Boundaries of Catholic Orthodoxy.

Dec. 3  5th Century: Establishing an Authentic Catholic Culture and Spirituality
   [Readings: John Chrysostom; Jerome; Augustine of Hippo; Cyril of Alexandria; Leo the Great, Benedict of Nursia, Gregory the Great; Aquilina, pp. 205-282.]

Dec. 10  The Later Fathers: Living the Faith in a World Falling Apart
   [Readings: Benedict of Nursia; Gregory the Great, Maximus the Confessor; John of Damascus; Aquilina, pp. 283-322.]

Requirements.

- Regular attendance at and participation in the class sessions.
- A paper or presentation on the life and writings of one of the fathers. You may be creative in the way you make this presentation, but keep in mind the goal, to introduce this church father in a compelling and substantive way to a general audience. Try to answer the question, why is this father particularly important for our understanding of the early Christianity? What is his lasting contribution to the tradition? You should illustrate your presentation with the readings included in The Liturgy of the Hours. (A possible model is Pope Benedict XVI’s general audiences referenced below.) Due by Dec. 17.

Some Suggested Patristic Resources.

English readers are well served by numerous translations of the writings of the Church Fathers. A good place to begin is the patristic reading program outlined in Boniface Ramsey’s Beginning to Read the Fathers (Paulist Press, 1985), pp. 229-255. An excellent guide to this vast and intimidating field is Hubertus Drobner, The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007). Johannes Quasten, Patrology, 4 vols. (Christian Classics, 1986), is the classic and comprehensive standard. The excellent General Audience addresses of Pope Benedict XVI on the Fathers have been published and are also available online at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/.

Patristic texts in translation.

There are numerous series available, including the older Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (available online), the Fathers of the Church (Catholic University of America), the Ancient Christian Writers (Paulist), and the Writings of Augustine (New City Press). There are numerous patristic readers to choose from, especially John R. Willis, ed., The Teachings of the Church Fathers (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), which is a very useful anthology of patristic texts, arranged thematically, based on the classic reference work, Enchiridion Patristicum. Milton Walsh, Witness of the Saints: Patristic Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012) (ISBN: 978-1586176624), is a useful introduction to the readings in the Office of Readings.

An overwhelming amount of material is available on the Internet but must be used prudently. An excellent place to begin (and probably the most reliable) is the resources page on the website of the North American Patristics Society (www.patriistics.org).