

**Hermeneutics in Early Christianity:**  
**(Patristic Exegesis)**

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary HIST 626  
Course Syllabus: January 2026  
PREREQUISITE: HIST 501 (*History 1*)

**Course Taught By:**

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Office Hours: By Appointment

**This course is conducted online, completely asynchronously, with no class meetings.  
The Professor will communicate with students by EMAIL**

**Course Description:**

This course will survey the biblical and interpretive methodology of the early Church through the study of patristic exegesis/hermeneutics and early Christian reception of Scripture. Students will learn the methodology and hermeneutics of patristic exegesis through the reading of secondary sources, then observe the same through the reading of primary sources, then practice the same by creating a biblical interpretation project – a sermon/homily or Bible study - using the methodology of the early Church.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** As a result of the course, students will be able to...

- 1) Gain experience reading excerpts from early Christian commentaries, sermons, and methodological documents.
- 2) Recognize, understand, and even anticipate early Christian exegetical hermeneutics, identifying interpretive assumptions and biases underlying traditional Christian exegesis.
- 3) Analyze the writings and doctrine of the early Church for its biblical foundations, as well as the interpretive decisions made by influential theologians who informed the process of the development of doctrine.
- 4) Compare and contrast historical hermeneutics with contemporary methodologies.
- 5) Practice working with the historic methodologies and traditional hermeneutics, to understand the concerns and priorities of the early Christian authors and teachers.

**Required Textbooks** (prices are from Amazon as of October 2025):

1) **A Study Bible** - Preferably one which includes the entire Old Testament, that is, the Bible of the early/medieval Church, i.e., including the deuterocanonical books. **[Note: The NRSVUE, REB, CEB, GNT, KJV/New KJV, and NIV/New NIV versions are NOT adequate translations for the study of Scripture or early Christianity.]** If you already own an acceptable study Bible, you are not required to buy a new one. If not, the recommended study Bible is the **Ignatius Study Bible (NRSV-2CE)** (ISBN: 978-1586176136 – about \$60)

2) Papandrea, James L. *Reading Scripture Like the Early Church: Seven Insights...* (Sophia Institute Press, 2022 ISBN: 978-1644134818 – about \$17)

3) Papandrea, James L. *The Wedding of the Lamb: A Historical Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Pickwick Publications, ISBN: 978-1608998067, about \$28)

4) Papandrea, James L. *Reading the Church Fathers: A History of the Early Church and the Development of Doctrine* - REVISED VERSION **This is for review, and you should already have this from History 1. If you took History 1 before 2022 and had the older version of the book, you will need to get the new one.** (Sophia Institute Press, 2022) ISBN: 978-1644136560.

5) Papandrea, James L. *Trinity 101: Father, Son, Holy Spirit* (ISBN: 978-0764820823. **This is for review, and you should already have this from History 1.**

6) *The Ancient Christian Commentary Series* (Library Reference – students who do not have direct access to the library can get scans of the relevant pages for their project passage.)

7) St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Golden Chain (Catena Aurea)*. Accessed online at: <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I> (Scroll down the index to *Catena Aurea*, and click to expand for the four gospels.)

### Course Schedule and Assignments:

#### Pre-Reading (First week of January):

Review *Reading the Church Fathers*, Chapter 7, on the Canon and the New Testament  
Read Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* (excerpts, online)  
Read Papandrea, *Reading Scripture Like the Early Church* (the entire book)

#### During the Intensive Session (Second Week of January):

Review *Trinity 101*, chapter 1, "The Trinity in Scripture"  
Read Oecumenius and/or Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentaries on Revelation* (excerpts)  
Read Papandrea, *The Wedding of the Lamb* (the entire book)  
**Email the Professor and Choose your Scripture passage** (first come first served)  
Students are advised to avoid the minor prophets, patristic commentary is sparse

#### During the Intensive Session (Third Week of January):

Read Ancient Christian Commentaries (selections on your chosen passage)  
Consult the Golden Chain (on your chosen passage)  
Watch Video Lectures/Examples

After the Intensive Session (Fourth week of January):

Work on Final Project – **Upload by Jan 27<sup>th</sup>**

### **Final Project:**

Students will create a video presentation (of 10 to 20 minutes), in which they will preach a sermon, OR teach a segment of a Bible Study, on a biblical text of their own choosing, using the methodology of the early Christian exegetes. **THIS IS THE CLASS WHERE YOU GET TO PREACH JESUS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, IF YOU WANT TO!** Students will write and turn in a full script (not just bullet points or notes), and will upload the video to Canvas. All students will comment on the videos of each of the other students, offering feedback, and points of view from the perspective of early Christian hermeneutics. ***The final project will not be considered complete until each student has commented on each of the other students' videos. All comments must be completed by the February 1.*** (In the event of high enrollment in the course, the professor reserves the right to break the class up into smaller groups for commenting on videos.) In your comments, try to give some constructive feedback. It's ok to listen critically, and apply the method to what you're hearing your colleagues doing – don't limit yourself to saying only things that indicate your agreement or praise. On the other hand, refrain from bringing contemporary political views or reader-centered interpretations into the conversation. The point of the comments is to evaluate, according to your understanding, whether the video has faithfully captured the hermeneutics of the early (and medieval) Church.

NOTE: The assignment is to complete a project **that you could not have done before taking the course**. To receive a passing grade, you must incorporate some of the commentary from the Church fathers on the passage at hand, as found in the Ancient Christian Commentary or other primary sources. Your interpretation of the passage should be somewhat timeless, meaning that it focuses on personal spirituality, rather than current events. There should be no references to current political situations or issues. You will make your interpretation relevant by applying the text of Scripture to the Christian life in ways that are not dated or specific to any current events. Citation of sources is verbal, so you will introduce your quotations by saying something like, "As Ambrose, the fourth century bishop of Milan, wrote in his treatise *On the Mysteries...*"

In your presentation, do not teach the methodology itself, but rather simply model the method. Don't lecture on how you are doing your interpretation, don't mention this course, the professor, or the textbook or other secondary sources – all of this takes time away from the actual interpretation of the text. Just tell your audience what the text means for them and how they should apply it. This does not have to be the last word on this passage – it's just you

bringing the ancient methodology into the conversation. But don't feel like you have to present every point of view. It's ok to present a traditional point of view, and leave it at that.

You do not need footnotes, citations are within the text of the manuscript – however, you should write a description for your video at the end of your manuscript, which includes the primary sources referenced, by author and document. Ideally, you would provide a link where the viewer can read the primary sources online. Note that the reuse of your own work from outside the course, if used without citation, constitutes a form of plagiarism/cheating. Students are not allowed to share their manuscripts (finished or unfinished) with other students. Study groups are encouraged, but students may not collaborate on written assignments. See the AI policy below.

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact the Director of Academic Support and Student Thriving ([melanie.baffes@garrett.edu](mailto:melanie.baffes@garrett.edu) or 847-866-3869) to get started with the established accommodation process. If you are a **continuing student who has already established accommodations** with Student Access, you should receive a copy of your access letter at the start of the semester when it is emailed to the faculty member of each course you are enrolled in. Disability information, including academic accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential under FERPA regulations, so no one other than the access coordinator and your professors will see your accommodation letter.



### AI and Internet Policy

The use of AI tools is not allowed in this course. Some limited internet use is allowed:

Not Allowed	Allowed with appropriate acknowledgment	Allowed and no acknowledgement needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet search engines, with or without AI assistance</li> <li>• Generative AI help with <u>papers</u> (generating topics, ideas, outlines, arguments)</li> <li>• Generative AI help with <u>writing</u> (paraphrasing, summarizing, generating language for assignments)</li> <li>• Generative AI help with <u>reading</u> (summarizing or outlining reading assignments)</li> <li>• Language translation</li> <li>• Language assistance for non-native English speakers</li> <li>• Editing, polishing, or revising paper drafts</li> <li>• Proofreading</li> <li>• Presentation design</li> <li>• Citation generation</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Note-taking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet sources (websites) <u>recommended by the professor</u></li> <li>• Internet sources known to the student to be both trustworthy and directly relevant to the subject matter (that is, not too general) <i>may</i> be used <u>with the specific permission of the professor</u> – request permission by sending a link to the professor in an email, <i>FROM YOUR GARRETT EMAIL ACCOUNT</i> – the professor will not click on links that come from outside email accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online conferencing and collaboration applications (such as Teams or Zoom) are acceptable for optional study groups or conversation, but not for collaboration on assignments – each student must produce a unique project or written assignment, as appropriate</li> </ul>
<p>You must consult the professor(s) for uses not mentioned above.</p>		