

Reading List for Halifax Thinks – The Middle Ages

Here are the books you will need to read for the Medieval World.

In the New Testament, *The Gospel of Mark*

St. Augustine, *Confessions*

Anonymous, *The Song of Roland*

St. Benedict, *The Rule*

Abelard, *The History of My Calamities*

Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise*

All texts are all available from the [King's Bookstore](#) or may be ordered online.

Lecture #1 Introductory Lecture – Summary of Antiquity

There is no reading other than the posted lecture. A wonderful account of the origins of Christian monasticism is Helen Waddell's classic, *The Desert Fathers* (1936).

Lecture #2A – The First Account of Jesus

The reading is the *Gospel of Mark* which is our earliest account of the life of Jesus. You can find this in any version of the New Testament.

Lecture #2B – The Definition of Jesus.

In the first three hundred years after his death the Church was dominated by an intense controversy to define what Jesus was – was he a man? was he God? was he an angel? These struggles are reflected in various short documents like the letters of the protagonists and in the Creeds and Symbols which captured – in brief and memorable form – the leading edge of a discussion that extended over centuries. The most important of these (the Nicene Creeds) are printed with the lecture. Readers who are interested in a more complete compilation should consult the old standard – “That invaluable Christian reference book” – by Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 1970.

Lecture #3 – St. Augustine – *Confessions*: Escaping God

The reading for this lecture is Books 1–VI of the *Confessions*. There are a vast number of translations of this work which was crucial to the formation of European Christendom. The first English version was produced by William Watts in 1631. It accurate – given its strongly Jacobean flavor – and has something of the wonderful Jacobean rhythms of the King James Version of the *Bible*. Surprisingly, it is still available, with the Latin texts on facing pages, in two volumes from the Loeb Classical Library from Harvard University Press. I tend to avoid the Victorian translations, ubiquitous in libraries, like that of E.B. Pusey. I find that there is just too much wool to see the sheep. The contemporary standard is the translation of Henry Chadwick, (a later day successor of Pusey, as Regius Professor at Christ Church, Oxford). His recent translation (Oxford World’s Classics, OUP, 1991) is both clear and accurate. It is one of the two I will be using along with the earlier translation of R.S. Pine–Coffin, first published by Penguin Classics in 1961, and reprinted over 50 times. You can get either. There is also a recording available which lasts for 12 hours and 48 minutes. However, since Augustine was the first person to remark that he read *silently*, and since his *Confessions* created the literature of inwardness, I would not bother with a recording of the text – unless you expect to be caught in long traffic jams.

Lecture #4 – St. Augustine – *Confessions*: Embracing God. The reading is *Confessions* VII–X.

Lecture #6 – The Song of Roland.

This anonymous poem is *the* epic of early Christendom occupying a place in its world like the *Aeneid* in Rome or the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Greece. The old standard is Dorothy L. Sayers’ translation (1937). It is still available as a Penguin Classic. Sayers was to go on to translate most of the *Divine Comedy*. After her death, ‘Paradise’ was finished by her friend, Barbara Reynolds. Sayers is, of course the author of a number of

classic British whodunits – including those solved by her hero Lord Peter Wimsey. As the oldest major work in French Literature, its importance is comparable to the place of Bede or Beowulf or even the Canterbury Tales in the English-speaking world. If you read French, a convenient and beautiful version of the Old French can be found [here](#):

Lecture #5 – Monasticism and the Romanesque – The reading for this lecture is the brief (113pp) *The Rule of St. Benedict*. This small work became the foundation for Benedictine monasteries all over Europe. There are many translations, any of which will be fine.

Lecture #6 – Neo-Platonism and Islam – The readings for this lecture, which are included in the text, are selections from the following works. Plotinus, *Enneads*; Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of Egypt*; Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*; Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*; Al-Farabi, *On the Perfect City & The Attainment of Happiness*; Al-Ghazali, *The Deliverer from Error*; Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*; Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.

Lecture #7 – Scholasticism and Gothic Art & Architecture – The reading for this lecture is Peter Abelard's, brief (48pp) *The History of my Calamities* available online from the Fordham Medieval Sourcebook [here](#): In spite of its Latin title, the *Historia Calamitatum*, is an anonymous English translation from Kessinger Publishing, (2004). Selections from Thomas Aquinas are included in the lecture.

Lecture #8 – Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Hell. Our reading for these last three lectures is the whole of Dante's incomparable *Divine Comedy*. Our lecturer, Robert Crouse, is one of its leading interpreters. He uses the translation of Dorothy Sayers (1949) which is still available from Penguin Classics. Sayers' notes – and her diagrams – are amongst the best but her English is not quite modern. As Robert always gives references by Canto and Line you can use any translation you prefer. There are many earlier and later translations – some by famous poets in

their own right, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – or the one volume version of John Ciardi. Mark Musa's translation is less dated than that of Sayers and he uses many of her notes and illustrations, which makes this a good choice. But I think the most useful edition of all is the recent 3 volumes by Anthony Esolen, now available in paperback, (Random House, Modern Library). This contains the famous Gustav Dore illustrations from the 19th c – but its greatest virtue, apart from an accurate and lucid translation, is that it is printed with the Italian text on facing pages. As no one should go to his or her grave without having memorized at least a couple of favorite lines in Dante's beautiful Italian this can be your chance.

Lecture #9 – Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory

Lecture #10 – Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradise

Concluding Lecture – The Collapse of the Middle Ages. There is no reading other than the posted lecture although the modern works of both Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919), and Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, (1978) – mentioned in the lecture each capture the terror and the exaltation of the time.