

RELG 326
The Ancient Christian Church (54–604 CE)

Winter 2015
Monday/Tuesday/Thursday 10:35–11:25am
Location: Birks 203

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Office Hours: TBA
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Aims

Early Christianity represents a diverse collection of beliefs and practices embraced by a number of communities. In the context of early Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, followers of Jesus composed texts that developed their ideas about God and his relationship to Jesus. These texts defined Christian identity within or against prevailing modes of religious adherence, and sometimes argued for Christian supremacy.

This course provides an introduction to the development of early Christianity as it became an increasingly centralized set of institutions, with special attention paid to how we, as scholars, read these texts. Where appropriate, students will also examine related literature from the world in which the early church flourished. A diligent student will become well-versed in the major events and historical persons from Nero's reign to the papacy of Gregory I, while appreciating the diversity of beliefs and practices that flourished in the first few centuries of Christianity.

Learning Outcomes

- Read a variety of texts written by and about early Christians, their beliefs, and their practices
- Grasp the interpretive issues facing scholars of the early church and be able to discuss them critically
- Develop textual skills for close reading of both ancient and modern texts
- Be able to discuss the major events and disagreements in the formation of early Christian communities between 54 and 604 CE.
- Become conversant in the possible religious, social, and historical settings in which early Christianity developed
- Learn about what came to be called non-orthodox forms of Christianity, including being able to list their major tenets and disagreements.

Texts

Since the course relies on analyses of primary texts at its core, students are required to have access to certain ancient texts in translation. For convenience, these have been published in two volumes, available for purchase at The Word Bookstore (469 Milton).

Bart Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity*. Oxford, 1999.

(~\$60) (Abbreviated to *ANT*)

Bart Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity (300–450 CE): A Reader*.

Oxford, 2004. (~\$60) (Abbreviated to *CLA*)

If you choose not to purchase the books, at least one copy of each will be placed on reserve at the library. In addition, you may be able to find the individual assigned primary texts online at earlychristianwritings.com, although the translations that are available there are often outdated and/or difficult to read. You must bring ancient texts under discussion to class in hard copy. Additional readings will be made available on MyCourses or on reserve at the library.

Class discussions will focus on specific problems and methods in the historical study of early Christianity, rather than on a continuous historical, narrative thread. For students' reference, the following general introduction will be placed on reserve, but is not required for purchase.

Joseph H. Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (Oxford University Press) 2009.

Methods of Evaluation

Enthusiastic Participation	10%
Map Project	15%
Focused Thinking Pieces	15% (1% x 15)
Wikipedia Project	25%
Wikipedia Project report	10%
Final Exam	25%

Enthusiastic Participation

Attending class regularly, preparing readings in advance, and participating in class discussions, whether on MyCourses or in “real life.” Attendance is mandatory. Three unexplained absences will result in a 0 mark for participation. A pattern of using tablets/laptops/phones for non-academic purposes will result in a 0 mark for participation (yes, I can tell).

Map Project

So that you are more familiar with the geography of the regions we will be discussing, you will be given a set of blank maps and a list of place names. Using the atlas (in the bibliography) and other resources, you will complete the map, assigning the names correctly. The completed map project is **due February 2nd at the beginning of class**.

Focused Thinking Pieces

Over the semester, you will hand in fifteen 250-word reflection pieces responding to a particular question. The questions can be found in the schedule. These reflection pieces are low-stress—grammar, syntax, spelling, etc., will not be marked, nor are you required to have a formal argument. Instead, you will be rewarded for the process of thinking rather than for the effectiveness of the writing. This should be “exploratory” writing—more like thinking out loud than a formal essay. The purpose of these pieces is for you to engage with the primary readings more directly, to deepen your thinking, and to get you into the habit of writing regularly. The lowest mark will be dropped.

Wikipedia Project

The Wikipedia project involves each student writing and taking stewardship of one “stub,” or one existing entry lacking a significant amount of information, on Wikipedia. (A stub is an article that is currently too short for an encyclopedic coverage of a topic.) Each student will sign up for an entry, sending the link and the student’s Wikipedia account name by email to the instructor. You must **sign up for an entry by February 16th**.

Your contribution(s) to the entry **should be at least 500 words long**, whether this means expanding a partially completed stub or composing an entry entirely. It must abide by the Wikipedia guidelines for neutrality and citation, with appropriate links to other entries. **The entry must be original—your own research, your own words—and abide by McGill’s policy on academic integrity.** It should reflect your research on a specific topic in ancient Christian history. You must cite at least 3 peer-reviewed, academic secondary sources in your entry, and with at least one ancient primary source. **Your sources may NOT include web pages, lecture notes, encyclopedias (including Wikipedia), or textbooks.**

Grading will be based on historical significance of the information you added and the clarity of your explanation. The completed entry is due **March 9th**, when you will post a working link to your entry in the designated forum on MyCourses.

The student is responsible for learning how to edit, add links, and include citations to a Wikipedia article. Tutorials can be found here:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Tutorial>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Article_size
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources#Footnotes
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources#Embedded_links
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_sources#Images
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual_of_Style
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Etiquette>

The student is responsible for monitoring any activity on the stub for one month after the assignment is due; on the last day of class, **April 7th**, the student will submit a **short report** (~1

page) detailing (a) any changes that were made by other users and (b) what action the student took to either support or correct the changes.

I am happy to offer suggestions of articles requiring expansion, but you are encouraged to find one suiting your interests on your own by exploring Wikipedia.

Final Exam

The final exam is cumulative. Further details will be released towards the end of term. The exam will be scheduled by the exam office.

According to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1, General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca

Schedule of Classes

Monday Jan 5

Introduction: The Greco-Roman World and Antiquity

Tuesday Jan 6

Models for Approaching Late Antiquity and Early Christianity

READ: Jörg Rüpke, “Patterns of Religious change in the Roman Empire” 13-33, CF

Question 1: What do you (think you) know so far about “the Ancient Christian Church”?

Thursday Jan 8

The early Jesus movement becomes a church

READ: Acts 13–14; Galatians

Monday Jan 12

Judaism and Christianity

READ: ANT 6.19–21

READ: “A Fork in the Road or a Multi-Lane Highway? New Perspectives on ‘The Parting of the Ways’ Between Judaism and Christianity.” CF

Question 2: Discuss the common phrase “the parting of the ways.” In what ways does this phrase help our understanding of Judaism and emerging Christianity? In what ways does it obscure it?

Tuesday Jan 13

Judaism and Christianity

READ: ANT 5

READ: Terence Donaldson, "Supersessionism in Early Christianity."

Question 3: To what extent does the idea of supersessionism rely on the idea of a "parting of the ways?"

Thursday Jan 15

Judaism and Christianity: Judaism after Christianity

READ: CLA 5.13; 7.30, 31

Monday Jan 19

Martyrdom, Persecution and Hostility

READ: ANT 3.4–6; Correspondence between Pliny and Trajan (on MyCourses)

Tuesday Jan 20

Martyrdom, Persecution and Hostility

READ: ANT 3.7–8

Question 4: How do the senses (sight, hearing, scent, touch, taste) figure into early Christians' depictions of their persecution?

Thursday Jan 22

Martyrdom, Persecution and Hostility

READ: CLA 2, 4

Monday Jan 26

Extension and Growth of Christianity

READ: ANT 2

READ: Zeba Crook, "Introduction" in *Reconceptualizing Conversion*.

Question 5: What are some problems with using the term "conversion" for early Christian growth?

Tuesday Jan 27

Extension and Growth of Christianity

READ: CLA 5

Thursday Jan 29

Extension and Growth of Christianity

READ: Ian H. Henderson, "Mission and Ritual: Revisiting Harnack's 'Mission and Expansion of Christianity'" 34-56, *Changing Face*

Question 6: How does the "missionary" model help/hinder our understanding of how ancient people thought about religion?

Monday Feb 2 (MAP PROJECT DUE)

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Meals

READ: ANT 11.61–63

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 2

Tuesday Feb 3

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Fasting

READ: ANT 11.61–63

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 7

Question 7: Aside from the symbolism of the eucharist, why do you think food is so important to the communities of early Christians?

Thursday Feb 5

Special Focus on the Codex: Mandatory field trip to Rare Books (McLennan Library)

Question 8: How is seeing early Christian artifacts different from or similar to reading about them? (to be emailed by 5pm)

Monday Feb 9

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Baptism and Initiation

READ: ANT 11.64–66

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 5

Tuesday Feb 10

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Reading and Preaching

READ: ANT 12

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 3

Question 9: What does it do to a text when it is read in the context of liturgy?

Thursday Feb 12

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Music

READ: (ANT 11.63) John 1:1–16; Philippians 26–11; 1 Cor 14:7–15; *Acts of Paul* 9

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 4

Monday Feb 16 (DEADLINE TO SIGN UP FOR WIKI PROJECT)

Diversity in Early Christian Practices: Prayer

READ: Tertullian On Prayer; Cyprian On the Lord's Prayer (links on MyCourses)

READ: McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, ch. 6

Question 10: Reflect on how McGowan discusses early Christian worship. Name one strength and one weakness of the book.

Tuesday Feb 17

Diversity in Early Christian Beliefs: Heterodoxy/Orthodoxy

READ: ANT 6.22–30; 7

- Gnosticism
- Marcionism

Thursday Feb 19

Diversity in Early Christian Beliefs: Heterodoxy/Orthodoxy

READ: CLA 7

- Montanism
- Arianism

Monday Feb 23

Diversity in Early Christian Beliefs: Heterodoxy/Orthodoxy

READ: ANT 4; CLA 8

- Apologists

Tuesday Feb 24

Creeds and Councils

READ: ANT 14

Thursday Feb 26

Creeds and Councils

READ: CLA 8

Monday Mar 9 (WIKI ENTRY DUE)

Emerging Leadership Structures

READ: ANT 10; CLA 6

Tuesday Mar 10

Emerging Leadership Structures

READ: Optatus of Milevis, *On the Schism of Donatists* 2.3–4, 21; 3.3; Letter of Constantine to Aelafius (in the appendix at the link to Optatus on MyCourses); Augustine of Hippo, *On Baptism* 1.1–5.

Question 11: How do we know who holds authority?

Thursday Mar 12

Diversity in Texts: Canonization and the Bible

READ: ANT 8

READ: Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, ch. 7.

Question 12: Why does canon matter for the formation of early Christianity?

Monday Mar 16

Diversity in Texts: Canonization and the Bible

READ: ANT 9; CLA 12

Tuesday Mar 17

Diversity in Texts: Canonization and the Bible

READ: Excerpts from the writings of Jerome, on MyCourses

Thursday Mar 19

Religion and Empire: The Constantinian Revolution

READ: CLA 3

Monday Mar 23

Religion and Empire: Augustine's City of God

READ: Selections from Augustine's *City of God Against the Pagans* (on MyCourses)

Question 13: How does Augustine understand the relationship between religion and empire?

Tuesday Mar 24

Religion, Empire, and Church

READ: CLA 14

Thursday Mar 26

Holiness and Asceticism: Removal from the World

READ: CLA 9

Question 14: How does isolation relate to the End Times?

Monday Mar 30

Holiness and Asceticism: Virginitly and Gender

READ: Sayings of the Desert Mothers (on MyCourses)

Question 15: Does the movement towards asceticism relate to how attitudes towards women changed over the development of early Christianity?

Tuesday Mar 31

Holiness and Asceticism: Authority and Veneration

READ: CLA 10, 11

Thursday April 2

Christianity in Late Antiquity

READ: Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule* 1.10–11 (link on MyCourses)

Monday April 6

Easter Monday: No class

Tuesday April 7 (WIKI UPDATE REPORT DUE)

Christianity in Late Antiquity

READ: Martin of Braga, *De Correctione Rusticorum* (on MyCourses)

Thursday April 9

Christianity in Late Antiquity

READ: TBA

Question 16: In what way(s) are borders—theological, geographical, political—porous?

Monday April 13

Final Discussion: Trends in the Ancient Church