Course Description

Christianity in the 1st through 5th centuries; its formation as seen through the literature of early Christians and their detractors.

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to the formation of Christianity in the 1st through the 5th centuries CE. Through examining a variety of literature written by early Christians and their detractors, students will gain an understanding of the ways that Christianity developed in the regions of the Roman Empire. We will focus on the ways that early Christians forged their own religious/ethnic identities among Judeans, Greeks, and Romans; similarly, we will consider the extent and implications of the early Christian adaptation of Judean, Greek, and Roman culture. The course meets twice weekly for lecture and discussion, and has no prerequisites.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the primary sources available for an historical reconstruction of Christianity from the 1st through the 5th centuries CE;
- Compare and critically engage various theories and methods (sociological, anthropological, literary) that historians use to approach the ancient sources;
- Identify current issues and debates among scholars concerning the reasons for the growth and spread of Christianity.

Textbooks


Students will also read excerpts (available on Blackboard as PDF files) from the following:


**Assignments, Requirements, and Grading**

Students will be evaluated in a variety of ways. The following four components contribute equally toward the final grade:

- **Quizzes** (25% of the final grade): At the beginning of each class meeting, students will be given ten minutes to write short answers (one or two paragraphs) to questions about the reading. The quizzes will be open-book and aim to evaluate the students’ comprehension of the reading as well as their ability to think critically about its content. Quizzes may only be made up in cases of an excused absence (see Attendance Policy as described below).

- **Midterm Exam** (25% of the final grade): A take-home written exam covering the assigned readings as well as material delivered in class (lectures, films, discussions, and so forth).

- **Research Project/Presentation** (25% of the final grade) During the second half of the course, students—in consultation with the professor—will identify a topic of interest. Students will research the topic and prepare a 6-7 page paper and a brief oral presentation for the class. With permission of the professor, students may work together in small teams. Reports will be evaluated in terms of clarity, attention to detail, critical analysis, and ability to assess the project in terms of the academic study of religion. Details will be distributed and discussed in class.

- **Final Exam** (25% of the final grade): A comprehensive in-class written exam covering the assigned readings as well as material delivered in class (lectures, films, plenary/team discussions, and so forth).

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance will be taken at each class session. In the case of an unexcused absence, students will receive no credit for that day’s quiz. Students who accumulate three or more unexcused absences risk having their final grade lowered by ten points, in addition to having received no credit for the missed quizzes. Students who anticipate needing to miss a class for any reason must contact the professor ahead of time and receive permission to make-up the quiz. Unless the absence and the make-up quiz are discussed with the professor ahead of time, or unless the student has a compelling reason for not doing so, the student will not be allowed to make-up the quiz.
Grading Scale

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:


Schedule

January 14  Course Introduction
January 16  Galatians, Gospel of Mark; skim Acts of the Apostles (on Blackboard)

Part One: From the Outside Looking In

January 21  *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 19-58 (on Blackboard)
January 23  *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 58-81 (on Blackboard)
January 28  *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 81-104 (on Blackboard)
January 30  *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 1-47

February 4  *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 48-93
February 6  *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 94-125
February 11 *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 126-163
February 13 *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 164-205
February 18  *Inventing Superstition*, 1-35
February 20  *Inventing Superstition*, 36-78
February 25  *Inventing Superstition*, 79-124
February 27  *Inventing Superstition*, 125-159

March 4  *Inventing Superstition*, 160-206
March 6   *Inventing Superstition*, 207-243
March 11  Spring recess
March 13  Spring recess

Part Two: From the Inside Looking In (and Out)

March 18  Ehrman *Reader*, selections from chapters 1-3
March 20  Ehrman *Reader*, selections from chapters 4-5
March 25  Ehrman *Reader*, selections from chapters 6-7
March 27  Ehrman *Reader*, selections from chapters 8-9

April 1  *Constantine’s Bible*, 1-31
April 3   *Constantine’s Bible*, 32-68
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