

THEO 232-03: Early Christianity
Spring Semester 2015
TR 9:30-10:45 AM; Beracha 211

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Office hours: by appointment
(If you wish to speak to me, it is best to see me after class and make an appointment.)
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GOAL

The goal of this course is to introduce the student to the encounter between Christian faith and classical Greco-Roman culture, which took place between the end of the writing of New Testament and the beginning of the Middle Ages, roughly A.D. 100 to 600. These first five centuries of Christian history are designated as either “early church” or “late antiquity.” The theological development of Christianity during this period was marked by internal and external conflict as well as intellectual transformation and cultural assimilation.
Prerequisite: THEO-100: Theological Foundations.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the course involve the reading and study of selections from early Christian literature representative of the period. These selections deal with dominant issues and problems: the separation of Christianity from Judaism; ecclesiastical organization; popular piety and liturgy; external threats (persecution); internal threats (heresy); Christianity’s encounter with Platonism and Stoicism; the interpretation of scripture; the nature of God; the person and work of Jesus Christ; sin, grace and justification; heaven, hell and final judgment. The student will acquire a fundamental understanding of each topic in its theological and historical context.

TEXTS

The following books are available in the campus bookstore:

Saint Gregory of Nyssa. *Ascetical Works*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967. (= SG)

Wiles, Maurice and Mark Santer, eds. *Documents in Early Christian Thought*. New York; Cambridge University Press, 1977. (= #)

Two readings are from the New Testament; please read these in an acceptable modern translation (i.e., not a paraphrase, like *The Message*, and not the King James Version; if you have questions, ask me; www.biblegateway.com is a good resource if you don’t own a Bible). Several readings are available on various websites as indicated below. The remaining readings, including those required to write the 500-Word Essays, will be made available online, either through Blackboard or a SLU Google site TBD (**Online**).

ASSESSMENT

The final grade will be the average of five items: (1) Attendance and Active Participation (10%); (2) Four 500-Word Papers (Combined) (25%), (3) Two Mini-Quizzes (15%); (4) the midterm examination (25%) and (5) the final examination (25%). The following scale is used in this course:

A = 100-96; A- = 95-90; B+ = 89-87; B = 86-84; B- = 83-80; C+ = 79-77; C = 76-74; C- = 73-70; D = 69-60; F = 59-0

1a. Attendance: Each student will be granted one “free” un-excused absence. For each additional un-excused absence 20% is deducted from the attendance grade. Thus, if you miss the class more than 5 times your final grade will be a full letter grade less than what you would have earned. In the event of a sudden illness or an unexpected personal emergency, the student should contact the instructor.

1b. Participation: It is expected that students will arrive to class on time and be well prepared to discuss the readings. Each student will also engage in active participation in the classroom. The fundamental prerequisite for active participation is that you have the assigned readings with you and have done the reading prior to class. Active participation means that you are attentive to the lectures, ask questions, and engage your classmates in discussion and scholarly dispute. Students are expected to conduct themselves respectfully in their interaction with class members.

Oral contributions in the course will be judged according to the criteria below:

- * the degree to which they manifest genuine interest in, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- * the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- * the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

It is important to recognize that the class discussions are not meant to be bull sessions. You will not be rewarded for ill-formed or ill-informed remarks.

It is also important, when deciding what to say and how to say it, to consider that the membership of this course is likely to be more diverse, religiously, politically, and culturally speaking, than you might expect. You cannot take for granted that your classmates share your particular views, assumptions, and opinions. Treat your colleagues with the same respect you hope to enjoy.

2. 500 Word Written Assignments: There will be **three** written assignments of 500 words due on the following dates: February 5, March 24, and April 14. The papers should not draw on any sources other than those assigned for the course. You will be graded on your understanding and analysis of the assigned readings, not whether you agree with them. You should not draw on any outside sources apart from what has been assigned in class when you write these papers; plagiarism will result in a zero on the assignment. Assignments must be turned in to

the professor in hard copy on the date due. If you will not be present on the due date, you must turn the assignment in early, so plan accordingly. Late assignments will not be accepted.

3-5. Examinations: There will be a midterm and a final examination. The midterm covers Parts I-II; the final covers Parts III-IV. There will also be two “mini-quizzes” on the First and Third Parts of the course, designed to test your comprehension of the course readings and provide an opportunity for you to write about them. They are also a chance for you to consolidate your understanding and prepare for the midterm and final, respectively. These take place on February 10 and April 7. Normally there are no make-up examinations. However, in the case of illness or some other personal emergency a student may request a make-up examination from the instructor.

Departmental Criteria for Grading Standards

A range = *Superior, exceptional, outstanding.* The assignment demonstrates critical, informed, and creative theological inquiry that reflects superior understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student demonstrates depth of insight beyond what is normally expected. Carefully nuanced reasoning and writing, free from material, structural and grammatical error are presupposed in this grade.

B range = *Good.* The assignment demonstrates ready command of full range of concepts and shows some critical, informed, and creative inquiry that reflects above average understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student has produced an assignment that is free from material, structural and grammatical errors.

C range = *Acceptable.* The assignment demonstrates satisfactory ability to describe overall picture and essential concepts. This means the student has completed the assignment in a manner involving no significant errors. Material may not be free from structural and grammatical errors. Nuanced reasoning is not demonstrated.

D range = *Below average.* The assignment demonstrates reasoning that is neither carefully nuanced nor coherently presented; writing is insufficient in depth of insight and/or use of texts; presentation is not free from material error in structure, spelling and grammar. This means that the student failed to respond adequately to the assignment and its intentions.

F = *Unsatisfactory.* In one or more of the following ways the student: 1) failed to turn in the assignment; 2) did not respond to the assignment as given; 3) submitted work so thoroughly flawed as to indicate that the student did not make a serious effort, 4) was involved in plagiarism or cheating.

ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information on examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the University. Students should read, understand and abide by this policy, which may be found in

the Arts and Sciences Policy Manual: <http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml>.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student, who due to presence of a disability may need accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course as outlined in the syllabus, should contact Disability Services: <http://www.slu.edu/x24491.xml>

COURSE CALENDAR AND REQUIRED READINGS

Though these readings and dates are not likely to change, I do reserve the right to alter things slightly if I think it necessary. If so, I will be sure to give you plenty of notice in writing and in class.

January 13 Course Introductions

January 15 On Reading Theological Texts “Historically”

Read: Richard Rorty, “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,” pp. 49-56, and M. Adler, “Coming to Terms with an Author”

PART I: Earliest Christianities

January 20 The First Crisis and the Second Generation of Christians

Read: Galatians 2; Acts 15; *First Clement* <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html>

January 22 Martyrdom and Persecution I: Imperial Roman Policy

Read: *Letter of Pliny* and *Rescript of Trajan* and *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (**Online**)

January 27 Martyrdom and Persecution II: Popular Piety

Read: Acts 7:54-60 and the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (**Online**)

January 29 Martyrdom and Persecution III: The Apologetic Writings

Read: Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-secondapology.html>

Begin reading David Brakke, “The Gnostics and their Opponents” (**Online**)

February 3 Gnostics

Read: *The Gospel of Thomas* <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gthlamb.html>

February 5 Scripture and Tradition

Read: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (# 26); Tertullian, *The Crown* (# 27); Origen, *On the First Principles* (# 28); Dionysius of Alexandria, *On the Promises* (# 29); Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Galatians* (# 30)

Finish reading David Brakke, “The Gnostics and their Opponents” (**Online**)

500-Word Essay #1 Due at the Beginning of Class: Summarize David Brakke, “The Gnostics and their Opponents”

February 10 Discussion of Brakke's article on Gnosticism; Mini-Quiz 1 on PART I

PART II: From Churches to Church

February 12 Christianity and Imperial Rome before and after Constantine
Read: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (# 48); Tertullian, *To Scapula* (# 49); Origen, *Against Celsus* (# 50); Eusebius, *Oration in Honor of Constantine* (# 51); Augustine, *Letter 185* (# 52); Augustine, *The City of God* (# 53)

February 17 Church Order
Read: *Didache* <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lake.html>

February 19 Baptism
Read: Cyprian, *Letter 69* (# 32); Augustine, *On Baptism* (# 33); Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* (# 34); Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* (# 35); **Read:** Tertullian, *On Baptism* (# 36); Cyril of Jerusalem, *On the Mysteries* (# 37)

February 24 Eucharist
Read: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (# 38); Cyril of Jerusalem, *On the Mysteries* (# 39); Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* (# 40); John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* (# 41); Augustine, *Sermon 272* (# 42)

February 26 Review

March 3 Midterm Examination

PART III: Classical Christian Theology

March 5 Knowledge of God
Read: Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* (# 1); Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* (# 2); Basil, *Letter 234* (# 3); Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* (# 4); Augustine, *On the Psalms* (# 5)

March 9–13 Spring Break

March 17 The Trinitarian Controversy I
Read: Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides* (# 6); Nicene Creed; Arius's Letter
Read Michel Barnes, "The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon" (**Online**)

March 19 The Trinitarian Controversy II
Read: Gregory of Nyssa, *On "ousia" and "hypostasis"* (# 8); Augustine, *On the Trinity* (# 9); Athanasius, *Against the Arians* (# 7)

March 24 The Holy Spirit
Read: Origen, *Commentary on John* (# 17); Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* (# 18); Athanasius, *Third letter to Serapion* (# 19); Augustine, *On the Trinity* (# 20)
500-Word Essay #2 Due at the Beginning of Class: Summarize Michel Barnes, “The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon.”

March 26 The Christological Controversy I
Read: Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* (# 10); Eusebius, *Demonstration* (# 11); Athanasius, *Against the Arians* (# 12); Theodore of Mopsuestia, *On the Incarnation* (# 13); Proclus, *Sermon I* (# 14)

March 31 The Christological Controversy II
Read: Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Succensus* (# 15); Leo, *Sermon 28* (# 16); Chalcedonian Definition

April 7 Discussion of Barnes’s article; Mini-Quiz I on PART III

April 2–6 Easter Break

PART IV: Classical Christian Moral Psychology

April 9 Sin and Grace I
Read: Origen, *On First Principles* (# 21); Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* (# 22); Augustine, *On the Trinity* (# 23); John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* (# 24); Augustine, *Sermon 156* (# 25)

April 14 Sin and Grace II
Read: Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life* (SG, 123-158) and James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge” (**Online**)

April 16 Sin and Grace III
Read: Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* (**Online**); Augustine, *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, Book II (**Online**)
500-Word Essay #3 Due at the Beginning of Class: Summarize James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge” (Online)

April 21 Asceticism I
Read: Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (SG, 193-272); Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina* (SG, 161-191)

April 23 Asceticism II
Read: Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* (SG, 1-75); *On What it Means to Call Oneself a Christian* (SG, 77-89); *On Perfection* (SG, 91-122)

April 28 The End or Eschatology

Read: Rufinus, *On the Creed* (# 54); John Chrysostom, *Homilies on I Corinthians* (# 55); Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon on I Corinthians* (# 56); Augustine, *Letter 199* (# 57); Augustine, *The City of God* (# 58)

April 30 Compare Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa; Review

May 7 **Final Examination**

Thursday 8:00-9:50

University policy prohibits me from changing the time of the final examination either for the entire class or for individuals.