



St. Symeon the Stylite  
from a 10th cent manuscript

# REL 321: The History of Christianity: Ancient Christianities

TR, 16:00-17:50

Professor: Dr. Stephen Shoemaker  
Telephone: 346-4998\_  
sshoeam (at) uoregon (dot) edu

Office: 813 PLC  
Office Hours: TR 11-12  
(or by appointment)

---

## Index

[Course Description and Objectives](#) | [Textbooks](#) | [Assignments](#) |  
[Expectations and Regulations](#) | [Grading Scale](#) | Handouts [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#)

[Internet Resources of General Use](#): If you have a general question about a particular person, concept, etc., you might try these resources first to find an answer.

[Schedule of Assignments and Suggested Internet Resources](#)

<a href="#">WEEK 1: 9/30-10/2</a>	<a href="#">WEEK 6: 11/4-11/6</a>
<a href="#">WEEK 2: 10/7-10/9</a>	<a href="#">WEEK 7: 11/11-11/13</a>
<a href="#">WEEK 3: 10/14-10/16</a>	<a href="#">WEEK 8: 11/18-11/20</a>
<a href="#">WEEK 4: 10/21-10/23</a>	<a href="#">WEEK 9: 11/25-11/27</a>
<a href="#">WEEK 5: 10/28-10/30</a>	<a href="#">WEEK 10: 12/2-12/4</a>

---

## Course Description and Objectives

This course is designed to introduce various aspects of Christianity during the first seven centuries of its existence. Although this course focuses to a certain extent on the development of what would later become “orthodox” Christianity within the bounds of the Roman Empire, this is not to the exclusion of rival forms of early Christianity. Considerable attention will also be given to the spread of Christianity along the fringes and outside the borders of the Roman Empire. We will concentrate especially on the historical diversity of the early Christian tradition, in an effort to understand better its contemporary complexity. In the course of the term, students will read and write reflective essays on several primary sources, each selected to represent the historical and confessional diversity of Christian traditions, as well as to present certain basic problems from the history of Christianity. We will conclude in the middle of the seventh century, a period often considered “the end of antiquity,” and while this periodization is not unproblematic, the Arab conquests of the eastern Mediterranean that would follow indeed mark a significant historical change.

---

## Textbooks

- Dale T. Irvin & Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. 1, *Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Orbis; ISBN: 1-57075-396-2) = HWCM
- Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Penguin; ISBN: 0140231994) = Chadwick

Optional (for specific paper assignment - see below)

- Elizabeth A. Clark, *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (Catholic University of America Press; 081320867X)

Several other items are to be found on the internet, as indicated below.

Readings from the New Testament may also be done from an NRSV, RSV, REB, NAB, or Jerusalem version - do not use Living Bible, Bible in Today's English, NIV, KJV, etc. If you have questions about another version, please ask the instructor.

**Some good resources to learn more about a particular topic (with bibliography for further reading) include:**

- *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*: Knight Library Reference, [BR95 .O8 1997](#)
- *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*: Knight Library Reference, [BS440 .A54 1992](#) (good for first 2 centuries)

---

## Internet Resources of General Use

[The Catholic Encyclopedia](#) Although this is an older edition (1907-12), there are many excellent articles on many of the key people, events, concepts, etc. covered in this class, particularly in the early and medieval periods. The articles naturally reflect a particularly Roman Catholic point of view, making it a rich source for information on this tradition. The articles are often lengthy, but are usually worth the read.

[Glossary of Theological Terms](#) This glossary, taken from Alister McGrath's *Christian Theology* (2nd edition) published by Blackwell Publishers, provides succinct definitions for a number of theological technical terms..

[The Ecole Initiative](#) This site's [Glossary](#) has brief descriptions of several hundred topics (mostly people). The site also has a number of texts, images, and articles relevant to this period.

[Internet Ancient History Sourcebook](#) Many of the items used in this class, along with a number of other historical documents, maps, etc., are to be found here and at the related [The Internet Medieval Sourcebook](#).

[Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia](#) This is a good online source for general information on a variety of topics: brief explanations of many people, places, etc.

---

## Assignments

Attendance at all class sessions is expected. Since class sessions will involve a fair amount of student discussion, students should read all the assignments carefully before coming to class. Assignments will generally involve about 100 pages of reading per week. Everyone should be prepared to contribute both ideas and questions to the class discussions. Assignments and grading are as follows:

A. Two exams 11/4 and 13:00, Thur. 11 Dec (60%)

B. Class attendance and participation (10%)

C. One 5-6 page (double-spaced: approx. 1500 words) essay (30%), chosen from the following options. Students may also write two papers, with the option of having their lowest exam or paper grade dropped:

1. Due 10/23. Read the [The Gospel of Thomas](#) and the [Gospel according to Luke](#) and answer the following questions: "What is similar about these two gospels, and what is different? Are they more different than similar? What things are similar and different in their depiction of Jesus? How do they represent similar and/or different understandings of the Christian faith? What, in your view, is the significance of the relationship between these two early gospels for understanding the early history of Christian traditions?"

2. Due 11/11. Read Origen's [On First Principles, Book IV](#) and answer the following questions: "How does Origen believe the Scriptures are to be interpreted? What reasons does he give for adopting this approach? Do you think that this is an appropriate way to interpret the Scriptures? What are its strengths and its shortcomings? What do you think about the fact that this was the dominant method of reading the Scriptures in both the early and medieval periods?"

3. Due 11/18. Read Athanasius' [Life of Antony](#) and answer the following questions: "In what ways is Antony's life a fulfillment of the Christian ideal reflected in the life and teachings of Jesus and his apostles? In what ways might it seem to fall short of this? To what extent do the demons confronted by Antony represent an internal struggle within himself? To what extent do the demons seem 'real'? What sorts of strategies does Antony adopt to overcome these demons? What sort of miraculous powers are attributed to Antony? What is their source? Why does *he* have them?"

4. Due 12/2. Read Clark, *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, 42-105 together with [1 Corinthians 7](#), and answer the following questions: "What is Augustine's view of Christian marriage, and how is it related to celibacy (continence/virginity)? What the good things does he find in each? What is Augustine's view of human sexuality? What is the purpose of marriage? What do you think of his understandings of marriage, virginity, and sexuality, and how do they compare to Paul's view? How does he reconcile his views with the the Hebrew Bible's (the Old Testament) view of marriage?"

Format of Essays: In answering the questions, first of all, briefly summarize the contents of the text(s) regarding the questions asked: what do the texts say? Then, take a clear position in response to the texts and defend it: imagine that your reader believes the opposite and that you are trying to persuade him or her. Your assignment for this paper is to write from a perspective outside of the Christian tradition in question. Do not make the mistake of giving a spiritual autobiography or a narrative of how this text relates to your own personal spiritual life and faith. Do not make the mistake of just dismissing the ideas of a text because you have different religious beliefs: if you disagree, give convincing reasons why. In all instances, strive for an impersonal and objective tone: you need to represent the contents of the text(s) fairly and accurately and give thoughtful reasons for your response. Your goal for this assignment is to approach and consider these religious traditions as objects of study from the outside, NOT from the perspective of an insider, legitimate as this perspective is in other contexts. Even if one is a believer in a particular tradition, the purpose of taking this class is to learn how to see and study the same phenomena from a perspective outside of the tradition. In general, it is good to avoid using "I," "me," "my," "we," "our," "you", "your" (except in quotations of course); you should give your opinions, but write them using the third person. Also, while you should cite examples from the texts, be sure to explain and contextualize any quotations made, and be sure that your own voice is not lost in a sea of quotations. All quotations must be

identified as such, and references to the text should be given parenthetically either as a page number or section number, as appropriate. Take care to write correctly and well: you will be graded for grammar and style as well as content. Finally, please number your pages. For extra help and advice on writing your paper, [Academic Learning Services](#) in the basement of PLC is an invaluable resource.

---

## **Expectations and Regulations**

1. **Preparation**: You are expected to come to class having completed the reading assignments for that session. You should be prepared to discuss and ask questions about the assignments. Note also that some material from the readings that is not covered in class may be included on the examinations.
2. **Participation and Class Attendance**: You should come to class prepared to ask questions and to discuss the readings for that session. Regular class attendance is required, and attendance will be taken. If you expect to miss class due to illness, observance of religious holy days, or other extenuating circumstances, please notify the instructor in advance after class or at [sshoemak@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:sshoemak@darkwing.uoregon.edu).
3. **Late Papers**: Unless an extension has been arranged in advance, late papers will be marked down one full letter grade for each day after the due date. Late papers will not be accepted more than three days after the due date.
4. **Make-up or Early Exams**: will be allowed only in truly exceptional circumstances, in the case of unforeseeable events beyond the student's control.
5. **Plagiarism or Cheating**: Students caught plagiarizing or cheating on any assignment will be reported to the Student Conduct Coordinator in the Office of the Dean of Students. Students who are aware of cheating or plagiarism are encouraged to inform the instructor. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism (or other forms of academic dishonesty), please consult the University of Oregon's [Policy on Academic Dishonesty](#).
6. **Completion of Assignments**: Completion of all required assignments (2 Exams, 1 Paper) is necessary to pass and receive credit for the course. Incompletes will be granted only at the discretion of the instructor and only in case of circumstances beyond the student's control.
7. **Special Needs**: Students with special needs requiring academic accommodations should 1) register with and provide documentation to [Services to Students with Disabilities](#) (SSD); 2) bring a letter to the instructor from the SSD indicating that you need academic accommodations, and we will arrange to meet them. This should be done during the first week of class.

---

## **Grading Scale**

98-100	A+
94-97	A
91-93	A-
88-90	B+
84-87	B
81-83	B-
78-80	C+
74-77	C

71-73	C-
68-70	D+
64-67	D
61-63	D-
0-60	F

---

## Course Outline

### Week 1

9/30 Introduction

Read:

- HWCM, 1-21 (optional)

#### Handout 1

10/2 From Jesus to the Church

Read:

- HWCM, 22-44; 47-56
- Chadwick, 41-45
- The Gospel according to Mark, 13-16.8 ([web](#))
- The Gospel according to Matthew, 5-7 ([web](#))
- The Gospel according to John, 1 ([web](#))
- The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians 1-5 ([web](#))
- *Didache* (selections; [web](#))
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians* ([web](#)) & *Letter to the Trallians* ([web](#))

#### Web Links

- [Jesus Seminar Forum - Home Page](#)
- [Resource Pages for Biblical Studies](#) A huge site with links to information on the web about the New Testament and its historical background. Also links to many on-line translations of the Biblical texts.
- [1 Clement](#) Clement of Rome's letter to the Corinthian Church.

### Week 2

10/7 Christianity and the Roman Empire

Read:

- HWCM, 66-85
- Chadwick, 23-31; 66-79
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans* ([web](#))
- Letters of Pliny and Trajan ([web](#))
- Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* ([web](#))

#### Web Links

- [Nero's Persecution of the Christians](#) as described by the Roman historian Tacitus.
- [The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch](#).
- [Perpetua's Prison Diary](#) Diary kept by a young woman who was martyred in N. Africa, circa 200.
- Justin Martyr, [First Apology](#).

## 10/9 Orthodoxy and Heresy

Read:

- HWCM, 57-65; 86-97; 115-26
- Chadwick, 80-83
- *Gospel of Thomas* ([web](#))
- *The Reality of the Rulers (Hypostasis of the Archons)* ([web](#))

(Note: You will likely find this last item extremely difficult. Don't get bogged down in trying to understand every detail of it - just read through it and appreciate how different it is)

### [Handout 2](#)

#### Web Links

- [The Synoptic Problem](#) Extensive treatment of the literary relationships between the first three gospels, with discussions of alternative theories and links to other sites.
- [The Gospel of Thomas Home Page](#)
- [Two brief essays on the Gospel of Thomas](#)
- [The Gnosis Archive](#) A collection of web links to sites dealing with gnosticism, broadly defined, from antiquity until the present.
- [The Gnosis Archive](#) Same name, different site. This one is maintained by the Gnostic Society, a group of contemporary gnostics: there's a church in [Portland](#). An enormous collection of gnostic texts, this site also has lots of lectures and articles, as well as information on the Ecclesia Gnostica, a contemporary gnostic church. More on contemporary gnostic denominations can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- [The Center for Marcionite Research](#) A collection of texts relevant to Marcionite Christianity.
- [The Development of the New Testament Canon](#) A excellent site with lots of charts and other information chronicling the development of the NT canon. See especially the [Cross Reference Table](#), which gives a quick overview of which books, both canonical and apocryphal, different early Christian writers considered a part of the NT canon. Also good brief summaries of a number of [apocryphal texts](#).
- [The Noncanonical Homepage](#) A good collection many early Christian writings that were excluded from the NT canon.

## Week 3

### 10/14 Tertullian, Montanism, and Early Christology

Read:

- HWCM 129-47
- Chadwick, 84-100
- Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.16-5.20 ([web](#))
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrneans* ([web](#))

### [Handout 3](#)

#### Web Links

- [The Tertullian Home Page](#)

10/16 No Class - Instructor attending Conference on Armenian Apocalyptic Literature

## Week 4

### 10/21 Origen of Alexandria

Read:

- HWCM 99-114; 147-52
- Chadwick, 100-115
- Origen, *On First Principles*, bk 1.4-7 ([web](#))

### Web Links

- *Catholic Encyclopedia* article on [Origen and Origenism](#).
- Entry on [Origen](#) in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

10/23 Imperial Persecution, the Conversion of Constantine, and the Problem of the “Lapsed”  
Read:

- Chadwick, 116-24
- HWCM 155-72
- A Certificate of Having Sacrificed to the Gods ([web](#))

### First Paper Due.

### Web Links

- Diocletian's [Edicts of Persecution](#) of the Christians.
- [The Conversion of Constantine](#) according to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.
- [The Edicts of Galerius and Milan](#).

## Week 5

10/28 Arius, the Council Nicea, and the Doctrine of the Trinity  
Read:

- HWCM 173-79
- Chadwick, 125-36
- Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, selections ([web](#))
- Arius, *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria* ([web](#))
- The Nicene Creed ([web](#))
- [Some important Biblical passages in the Trinitarian Controversy](#)

### Handout 4

### Web Links

- See esp. [A Chronology of the Arian Crisis](#) at [The Ecole Initiative](#) website, with many hyperlinked documents
- Athanasius' [On the Incarnation](#) (complete text).
- Several websites questioning the doctrine of the Trinity. They site can give you a good idea of the many biblical difficulties encountered by the pro-Nicenes as they tried to argue the doctrine of the Trinity against the Arians.
  - [Trinity Doctrine/Dogma Exposed](#)
  - [THE TRINITY EXPOSED](#)
  - [The Trinity Exposed-The Truth about the Trinity](#)
- [The Doctrine of the Trinity](#) You will find a clear explanation of this doctrine here, at the [Orthodox Church in America's](#) web site.

10/30 The Councils of Constantinople and Ephesus

Read:

- HWCM 179-91

- Chadwick, 136-51; 193-200
- Niceno-Constantinopolitan-Creed ([web](#))
- Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 52* ([web](#))
- Correspondence of Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria & Cyril's 12 Anathemas ([web](#))

### Web Links

- [Map](#) of the Roman Empire ca. 395.

## **Week 6**

11/4 **Midterm**

11/6 Monasticism, Saints, and Relics

Read:

- HWCM 209-14
- Chadwick, 174-83
- *Rule of St. Augustine* ([web](#))
- Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* ([web](#))

### Web Links

- [The Rule of St. Benedict](#) Benedict of Nursia's influential regulations for the monastic life.

## **Week 7**

11/11 Women in Early Christianity: Apostles(?), Ascetics, and Patrons

Read:

- HWCM 220-36
- "The Roles for Women" in Early Christianity ([web](#))
- *Acts of Paul and Thecla* ([web](#))

**[Second Paper Due.](#)**

11/13 Augustine of Hippo

Read:

- Chadwick, 213-37
- *The Confessions* [Book 8](#)

### Web Links

- A web page devoted to [Augustine of Hippo](#), complete with texts, images, and links to other sites, including the following items:
  - ["Christ and the Soul"](#) Chapter 4 of James J. O'Donnell's *Augustine*, an introduction to Augustine's writings against the Pelagians.
  - [Augustine's Africa](#) A collection of detailed maps of Roman Africa in Augustine's time.
- Augustine's account of his conversion from his [Confessions](#).

## **Week 8**

11/18 The Council of Chalcedon

Read:



- HWCM 191-94
- Chadwick, 200-205
- *The Tome of Leo* ([web](#))
- The Chalcedonian Definition ([web](#))

### Third Paper Due.

#### Web Links

- [Map](#) of Constantinople and surroundings, including Chalcedon.
- [The Incarnation](#) This is a good, clear explanation of the development of orthodox Christology at the ecumenical councils. At the [Orthodox Church in America's](#) web site.

11/20 No Class - Instructor attending SBL Conference

### Week 9

11/25 No Class - Instructor attending SBL Conference

11/27 No Class - Thanksgiving

### Week 10

12/2 After Chalcedon: Christianity in the Early Byzantine Empire  
Read:

- HWCM 214-15; 240-54
- Chadwick, 205-10
- *The Life of Peter the Iberian* ([web](#))
- Emperor Justinian, *Dialogue with Paul of Nisibis* ([web](#))

#### Web Links

- [The Syrian Orthodox Church](#) (non-Chalcedonian): its [history](#) and [music](#).
- The [Nicene Creed in Syriac](#) (Aramaic).
- The history of the Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox Church: [here](#) and [here](#).

### Fourth Paper Due.

#### Web Links

- A history of the [Mar Thoma \(Indian\) Church](#).
- The [Assyrian Church of the East](#) (non-Ephesian/Persian).
- History of the [Ethiopian Orthodox Church](#) and some [religious texts](#).
- History and overview of the [Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church](#).
- Christianity in Georgia: [history](#) and [music](#).

12/4 The “Fall of Rome” and the Rise of the Papacy  
Read:

- Chadwick, 237-58
- HWCM 236-39; 323-27
- Augustine, selections from *The City of God* ([web](#));
- [Pope Leo the Great](#);
- Pope Gregory the Great: [Letters showing Papal Activity](#); [The Papal Estates](#); [Pope Gregory the Great and the Lombards](#)

## Web Links

- Maps of the Roman Empire and the Mediterranean world in [476](#), [526](#), and [600](#). The progressive impact of the Barbarian invasions is clearly seen.
- The [decadence of Rome](#) just before its fall, according to Ammianus Marcellinus.
- [Alaric's sack of Rome](#) in 410, according to Procopius.

FINAL EXAM: 13:00 (1:00 PM), Thur. 11 Dec