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Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30–1:30
or by appointment

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HIST 320/JWST 331

History of Early Christianity: Jesus to Constantine

Tues/Thur 2:00-3:15

CSS 1113

This course examines the development of Christianity from its origins until well into the fourth century. Over the course of the semester we will have the opportunity to discuss the emergence of Christianity, its gradual (and complicated) separation from Judaism, varieties of social experimentation (celibacy, asceticism, prophetic movements, valorization of martyrdom) that took place within Christian settings, and the consequences of the imperial embrace of Christianity. Readings will combine primary documents (in translation) and modern scholarly reconstructions.

Requirements of the course:

1. Attendance, and participation. (5 pts.) If I am forced to give quizzes (let the reader understand) I will adjust the relative grade significance of this portion of the course
2. "Three written assignments. [More information on these is below.](#)
 - a. Synopsis and analysis of the trial and passion narratives. (March 9; 20 pts.)
 - b. Response paper to *The Passion of the Christ* (April 25; 5 pts)
Note: You have the option of writing a more extensive analysis or critique of the film based on your work on the synopsis (10 pts., five of which are extra credit).
 - c. A paper based on Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine*. (25 pts.)
3. Midterm exam (February 23, 20 pts.)
4. Final exam, cumulative (May 17, 25 pts.)

Required reading:

For purchase at the book stores: I have ordered the following books at the University

Book Center and the Maryland Book Exchange.

Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998.

Ehrman, B., ed. *After the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Burrus, V., ed., *A People's History of Christianity: Late Antiquity*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Recommended purchase:

HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). San Francisco: Harpers San Francisco, 1993.

Note: This **edition** is recommended. However, you **must** have access to a text of the New Testament. You may use any good translation that you understand: RSV, NRSV, NIV, Jerusalem, etc. (Unless mayhap thy 17th-century English is good, keep thee from the King James Bible). Avoid happy paraphrases like the *Good News Bible* or *The Word* .

Readings in Electronic Format:

1. Electronic reserves provided by UM Libraries. These are marked with an asterix (*) syllabus in the outline of readings below.

2. Other required reading: A number of readings are readily available on the internet. These are marked on the syllabus below with an open circle (°) in the outline of readings.

Books no longer required:

Rousseau, *The Christian Centuries*

Ehrman, Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity*

Outline of Course and Schedule of Assignments

**Click for
lecture
notes if
available**

[1/26](#)

1. Introduction to Course

1 Thessalonians (handout)

Burrus and Lyman, "Shifting the Focus of History," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 1-26

(Recommended: read as background)

[1/31](#), [2/2](#)

2. The Jewish Context

° Josephus, [Jewish War](#) 2.117–162

*Cohen, *From Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 60–103

[2/7](#), [2/9](#)

3. The Roman Context

° [Correspondence of Pliny and Trajan](#)

° Tacitus, [Annals](#) 15.44

Search or scroll to the two paragraphs on Christians

*LiDonnici in Kraemer, D'Angelo, eds., *Women in Christian Origins* , 80–104

4. Origins and Spread of Christianity

[2/14](#)

Paul and his opponents

1 Thessalonians (review)

Galatians

1 Corinthians

Romans

Epistle of James

Acts of John (selections in Ehrman, *After the New Testament* , 10–12)

Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* , 1–8 (Ehrman, *After the New Testament* , 18–24)

*Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children* , 96–116

[2/16](#), [21](#)

The spread of Christianity: narratives and models

Acts

Revelation, Chapters 1–3

° K. Hopkins, "The Christian Number and its Implications," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), 185–226
(Available through "Project Muse" on [Research Port](#))

*Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* , 3–27

Perkins, "Fictional Narrative and Social Critique," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 70–95

2/23

Midterm Exam

5. Jesus and the Rise of Christianity

[2/28](#)

Sources, traditions, problems

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

*B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 83–91

*P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* , 177–204
(read this as preparation for "Gospels and Communities")

[3/2](#)

Gospels and communities I: Mark and John

Gospel of Mark

Gospel of John

[3/7](#)

Gospels and communities II: Matthew and Luke

Gospel of Matthew

Gospel of Luke

[3/9](#)

The death of the Messiah

Passion Narratives of the four canonical gospels

Synopsis and analysis due

[Download a sample synopsis \(by Lapin\)](#)

6. Institutionalization

[3/14](#)

Bishops and other offices

1 Corinthians 12–14

Ephesians

1 Timothy (see also 2 Timothy, Titus)

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 317–42

[3/16](#)

Emergence of Christian scripture and liturgy

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 309–16

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 343–60

Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*

McGowan, "Food, Ritual, and Power," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 145–64

3/21, 23

Spring Break, No Class

[3/28](#)

Places of Worship

Jensen, "Baptismal Rites and Architecture," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 117–144

*L. M. White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture I* , 102–39

7. History of Christians/History of Christianity

[3/30](#)

"Gnosticism" and other "heresies"

1 Corinthians 8 (on "knowledge")

Gospel of John, Prologue

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 146–92 ("gnosticism")

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 193–226, 405–436 (other "heresies")

[4/4](#)

Jews, Christians, Jewish Christians, and Christian Jews

Review: Gospel of Matthew

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 95–130, 134–43

Fonrobert, "Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 234–254

[4/6](#)

A receding eschaton?

Revelation

Apocalypse of Peter (selections Ehrman, 296–301)

Apocalypse of Paul (selections Ehrman 301–308)

[4/11](#)

Asceticism

1 Corinthians 7

◦ Athanasius, [Life of Saint Antony](#) 1–15, 50–67 (NPNF2)

Clark, "Asceticism, Class, and Gender," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 27–45

4/13, 20

Passover, No Class

TBA

Film: *The Passion of the Christ*

Mandatory response paper

Optional: critique based on your synopsis.

[4/18, 25](#)

Persecution; the making and memory of martyrs

Texts in Ehrman, *After the NT* , 25–50

◦ Eusebius, [Martyrs of Palestine](#) (NPNF2 I)

Young "Martyrdom and Exaltation," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 70–94

Trout, "Saints, Identity, and the City," in *Late Antique Christianity* , 165–87

*R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* , 419–92

Review of *The Passion of the Christ* due

[4/27](#)

Christian piety and late-antique: mutually opposed or variations on a theme?

*R. L. Wilken, [The Christians as the Romans Saw Them](#) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 126–163.

8. Imperial Christianity

[5/2](#)

The conversion of Constantine and its implications

° Eusebius, [In Praise of Constantine](#) Chapters I–V, VIII–IX, XVI; skim the rest (NPNF2)

*R. Lim, “Christian Triumph and Controversy,” in Bowersock, Brown, Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity* , 196–212

Paper on Eusebius due

[5/4, 9](#)

Christians, Christianity, and the new world order

Frankfurter, “Beyond Magic and Superstition,” in *Late Antique Christianity* , 255–84

Bowes, “Personal Devotions and Private Chapels,” in *Late Antique Christianity* , 188–210

Maier, “Heresy, Households, and the Disciplining of Diversity,” in *Late Antique Christianity* , 213–33

5/11

Unfinished Business, Final Review

[Download final exam questions](#)

5/17

Final Examination

10:30–12:30

Description of Writing Assignments **[Back to Requirements](#)**

1. *Synopsis and analysis of the trial and passion narratives.* The goal of this

assignment is to get a sense of the complex texture of the narratives in the New Testament gospels describing the trial and death of Jesus (Mark 14:43–16:41; Matthew 26:47–27:66; Luke 22:47–23:56; John 18:1–19:42; for reasons we will discuss in class I list Mark first). Before we can say anything about the events they describe, we need to understand them as *texts* that have complicated relationships both to one another and to the death of Christ. One way (although it cannot be the only way) of getting at these relationships is by trying to understand some of the differences between the versions. Does one gospel present events or details not in the others? (Example: Is Jesus tried by a formal city or priestly *council* [sanhedrin], or interrogated in a less formal manner?) Can differences be related to judgements? (Example: Are Pilate or the Jews treated differently in the various gospels?) Can they be related to theology? (Example: Does Jesus express particular ideas about God in some versions but not in others?)

At a minimum, your synopsis should present as many major differences as you can. Further analysis (comments on wording, or what the significance of the difference is) are of course welcome. Your synopsis should be preceded by a brief (700–800 word) prose summary of what you have discovered. Some examples follow that may give you a sense of how to organize your synopsis. *Please remember to include verse citations* .

2. *Response paper to The Passion of the Christ*. 2-page response to a viewing of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* . Your response should address the following questions:

1. Are there elements in the movie that do not appear in the Gospels?
2. How would you characterize these elements? (Are they, e.g., poetic license, theological argument, or close reading of underlying meanings in the text?)
3. Would you recommend this as required viewing for a course on early Christianity or the historical Jesus?

3. *Eusebius, In Praise of Constantine*. You may develop a topic and thesis of your choosing based on a close reading of the fourth-century Bishop Eusebius's *Oration in Praise of Constantine* . Among the topics you might want to consider are: (a) The politics of imperial Christianity; (b) the relationship of Eusebius's theology/Christology to Greek philosophy; (c) continuities and/or discontinuities in Christianity between the first and the fourth century.

Suggested bibliography:

Wilcken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*

Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*

Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*

Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*

MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100–400*

Chadwick, H., *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*