

Introduction to the History of Christianity

Institution: Hope College, Holland, Michigan; 3,000 student liberal arts college, affiliated with the Reformed Church in America

Level: Introductory (although most students were upperclass)

Hours: 3 hours/week for fifteen weeks

Enrollment: Three sections, fall 1999; two sections, spring 2000; approximately 30 students/section

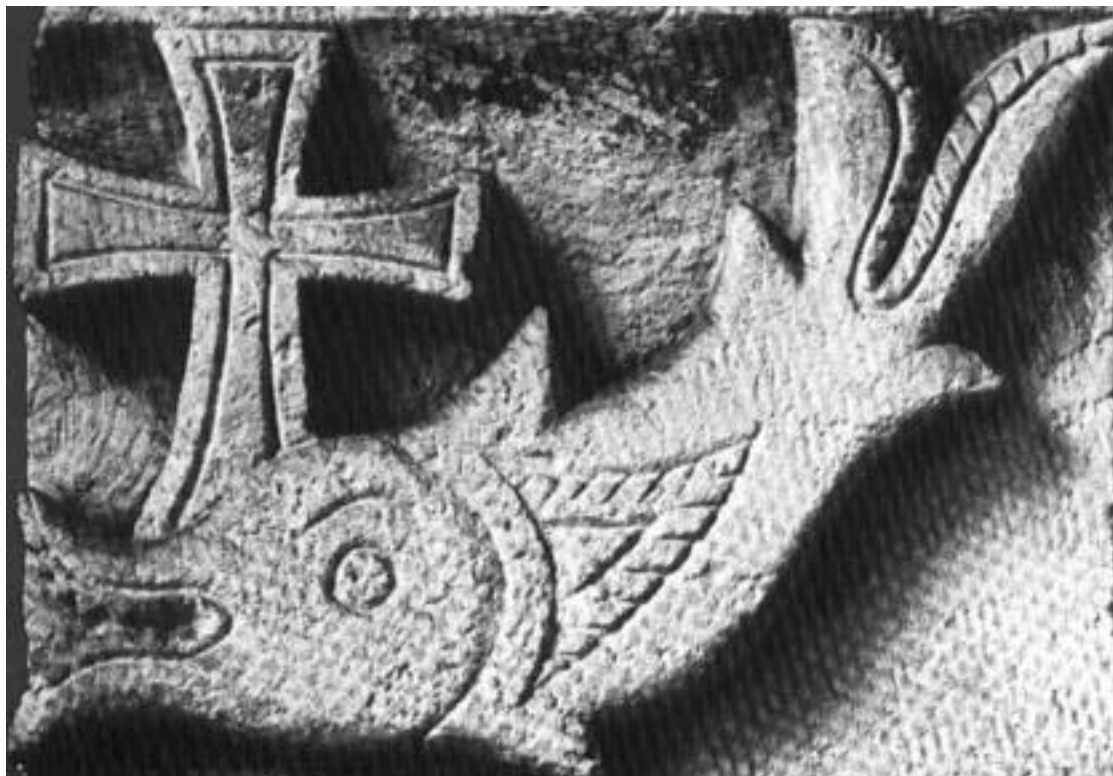
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Hope calls itself a "college in the Christian tradition." As such, all students are required to take one of the religion department's introductory courses; one of the options is Introduction to the History of Christianity.

I had two major goals. First, many of my students had a fairly limited experience and restrictive definition of Christianity; I wanted them to discover that Christianity is a rich and complex tradition. So I introduced them to Pentecostalism, Christian Science, and Orthodoxy, in addition to more familiar names. (This approach required the use of photocopied [readings](#) to supplement the text.) Second, in line with the mission of the school, I wanted to connect the students' contemporary life in the church with its history. A short reflection paper asked them to imagine themselves a medieval peasant and decide whether or not to join the Crusades, or imagine themselves a Roman citizen and respond to the new Christian movement. I encouraged students to focus their research paper on a personal passion, such as a contemporary controversy or their career interests.

The writing assignments worked fairly well and seemed to engage students' interests. Class discussion was less successful, because of the lecture format and the fact that the class was a requirement for most students.



In the history of world religions, Christianity is relatively young—a bit less than two thousand years old. It has had a massive impact on the world's culture, however, over those two thousand years. Its ideas and its language run through the world's literature, and great acts of both kindness and cruelty have been done in its name. To understand the world, we need to understand how Christianity came to be. In this class we'll begin investigating the development of this world religion.

Over the course of this semester, we will

- meet some of the important people and investigate some of the important events in the history of Christianity;
- trace how Christianity developed and changed over its two thousand years; and
- explore the richness and complexity of world Christianity.

By the end of the term, you will better understand contemporary Christianity in its historical context. And along the way, I hope you will get an opportunity to reflect on your own relationship to the Christian tradition.

Two notes as we begin. First, this is an introductory course. With over two thousand years of history and only fifteen weeks to study it, we can't cover everything. Inevitably some things will be left out or discussed only briefly. We'll be moving pretty quickly; if you start getting lost, please let me know and we'll try to adjust the pace. Second, this is not a theology course. Although we will be looking at important parts of Christian doctrine, we will not discuss the truth or falsity of Christianity's claims. You all bring to the classroom your own beliefs—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, or other—and those beliefs will shape your reactions to our discussions. I will be happy to discuss your personal reactions during office hours. In our class time, however, we will not try to prove or disprove Christian beliefs or any Christian practices. Our goal is to understand the development and importance of those beliefs and practices.

Expectations

- Because you will learn as much from classroom discussion as from the reading, **class attendance** and **participation** are important and will be figured into your grade. (Participation can help your grade but not hurt it.)
- Every day, bring to class a **response card**. It could be a question, a brilliant insight, or a challenge to the author (or lecturer)—something stimulated by that day's readings. By recording your insights you will help direct your own reading. This will help stimulate our discussions. (Please bring the first card on Monday, January 17. No card is required on days when there is no reading assigned.)
- There will be two **papers** for the course. The first is a reflection paper, due February 4; it should be approximately 3-4 pages. The second is a research paper, due April 14; it should be approximately 8-10 pages. (A brief description of your paper topic is due on February 18.) I will tell you more about these assignments early in the semester. [Note: Reflection paper asked students to imagine themselves as a historical actor. One question asked whether the student, as a Roman citizen, would have joined the early Christian movement. Another question asked the student to imagine herself a medieval peasant, and to decide whether or not to join the Crusades. For the research paper I encouraged students to
- There will be a **midterm** on March 3, and a **final** during finals week. The exams will be a combination of in-class objective and take-home essay. We will have review sessions before each exam.

Grades

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Reflection paper: 15%
- Research paper: 30%
- Midterm: 20%
- Final: 25%

Textbook

Justo L. González, The Story of Christianity, volumes I and II. (Available in the bookstore)

[Additional photocopied readings](#) (Purchase from the religion department)

The Standard Rules and Regulations

1. **Deadlines:** Due dates for papers are clearly stated here in syllabus and will be adhered to. Grades will decline a half-grade for each day a paper is late. Medical (with doctor's note) and family emergencies may excuse a late paper. Please plan ahead, and let me know if you think there will be a problem—we might be able to make some arrangements. To prevent computer problems, back up your work!
2. **Preparation:** Please come to class having done the reading and having thought about what you read. Bring along the readings for the day.
3. **Office hours:** Please take advantage of them. I am happy to discuss intellectual and personal questions about the material, as well as ideas and concerns about assignments.
4. **Identification:** Please put your name and your course section on everything you turn in.
5. **Academic integrity:** Plagiarism (using words from other authors without proper credit) is cheating, as well as a sign of sloppy thinking. We will discuss how to avoid plagiarism when discussing the paper assignments.
6. **Respect:** Religion touches many people very deeply; that makes it fascinating to teach and to study. But it can also stimulate complex emotions, as people make categorical statements about their views of reality. Not everyone in this class is a Christian, or is the same kind of Christian. Please show respect for the convictions of your classmates by making thoughtful and gentle arguments.

A few notes on grading:

I don't use grades as punishment for "bad students" or as a reward for "good students." They are simply ways of testing your achievement of the goals for the course. For each assignment I will have a set of expectations, and your grade will depend on your fulfilling those expectations. The class participation grade will take into account your response cards as well as how your participation furthers the class discussion. On exams, I will look for:

- Familiarity with important (not trivial) facts
- The ability to compare different events and times
- The ability to make and defend an argument

On papers, I will look for:

- A thesis, clearly stated and clearly defended
- References to important personalities, events, movements, and ideas in the history of Christianity
- Understanding how your work fits into the larger scheme of Christian history
- Proper citation of sources

I will not be looking for "correct" views, but for well-argued (but respectful) statements. Also, for both papers and exams, spelling and grammar do count; they show you take your work seriously. Papers and exams that meet these expectations and show particular insight will get As. Work that meets expectations will

get Bs. Work that misses some of these expectations will get Cs. Work that misses most of these expectations will get Ds. If you would like to re-take an exam or rework an essay, I am open to that. Please discuss it with me.

If you have questions about expectations for exams and papers, please ask.

Course schedule and reading assignments

Numbers (I:5, etc.) indicate the volume and chapter(s) of the Gonzales book. Thus, the assignment for January 17 is volume I, chapters 1-4.

Monday

Wednesday

Friday

1/10 No class

1/12 Introductions

1/14 Themes of the course

1/17 The birth of Christianity
I:1-4

1/19 Paul
1 Corinthians

1/21 The early church
I:5-8, 11, Reader I

1/24 The church and the empire
I:12-13, 16-17

1/26 Medieval era
I:25-26, 28-29

1/28 Crusades
I:30, Reader II

1/31 Orthodoxy
I:27, Reader III

2/2 Monasticism
I:15, Reader IV

2/4 Medieval spirituality
Reader V **FIRST PAPER DUE**

2/7 High middle ages: Art and architecture
I:31

2/9 High middle ages: Power and corruption
Reader VI

2/11 Reformation I: Context
I:33, II:1

2/14 No class—winter break

2/16 Reformation II: Themes
II:2-4

2/18 Reformation II: Themes
II:7-10 **PAPER TOPIC DUE**

2/21 Reformation III: Antecedents
II:8, 17

2/23 Reformation IV: Movements
II:5-6

2/25 Reformation V: Movements
II:12

2/28 Reformation VI: Consequences

3/1 Review

3/3 **MIDTERM**

3/6 The new world
I:35, 36

3/8 Rationalism
II:14, 21

3/10 Evangelicalism I
II:22-24, Reader VII

3/13 Evangelicalism II

3/15 Nineteenth century I
II:25-26

3/17 Nineteenth century II
Reader VIII

3/27 New religious movements

Reader IX

3/29 Women

Reader X

3/31 Liberalism and the social gospel

Reader XI

4/3 Twentieth century

II:31, 34-35

4/5 Fundamentalism

Reader XII

4/7 Neo-orthodoxy

Reader XIII

4/10 Catholicism vs. modernity

II:32-33

4/12 Pentecostalism

Reader XIV

4/14 Ecumenism

II:27,36 **SECOND PAPER DUE**

4/17 Global Christianity

4/19 Liberation

Reader XV

4/21 No class—Good Friday

4/24 Conclusion

4/26 Review

4/28 No class—spring festival

Reader Table of Contents

I: Early Christian Life and Ritual

"The Didache"

"First Apology" by Justin

"Constantine Recognizes Sunday"

"Imperial letter of Constantine on Worship at Easter"

"Imperial Letter of Constantine: Heads of Churches Exempted from Civic Duties."

II: The Crusades

"On the First Millennium"

"Decree on Forgiveness of Sins for Those who Die in Battle with the Heathen"

"Truce of God - Bishopric of Terouanne, 1063."

"Sermon at the Council of Clermont"

"The Capture of Jerusalem"

"The Sack of Constantinople"

"The Conquest of Constantinople"

III: Orthodoxy

"The Celestial Hierarchy" by Pseudo-Dionysius

"The Triads" by Gregory Palamas

"On Holy Images" by John of Damascus

"The Fount of Wisdom" by John of Damascus

"The Iconoclastic Council of 754"

"Decree of the Second Council of Nicea"

IV: Early Monasticism

"The Life of Antony" by Athanasius

"Sayings of the Desert Fathers"

V: Medieval spirituality

"God's Aid"

"The Rule of Columba"

"Exorcism of the Eye"

"Journey Prayers"

"Peace Prayer"

"Breastplate Prayer of St. Patrick"

Prayers by Anselm of Canterbury

Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux

Writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen

Writings of St. Francis of Assisi

Letter of St. Clare of Assisi

VI: High Middle Ages

"The Arrival of the Plague"

VII: Evangelicalism

"The Aldersgate Experience" by John Wesley

"A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God" by Jonathan Edwards

VIII: Missions

From The Evangelization of the World in This Generation by John R. Mott

IX: New Religious Movements

Documents regarding the Latter Day Saints

"Christian Healing" by Mary Baker Eddy

X: Women

Documents about women in ministry

XI: Liberalism and the Social Gospel

"The Ideals of Social Reformers" and "The Social Principles of Jesus" by Walter Rauschenbusch

XII: Fundamentalism

From Christianity and Liberalism by J. Gresham Machen

"Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" by Harry Emerson Fosdick

XIII: Neo-orthodoxy

From Nature and Destiny of Man by Reinhold Niebuhr

The Declaration of Barmen

XIV: Pentecostalism

"Pentecost in Los Angeles" by Stanley H. Frodsham

"The Fire Falls at Azusa" by Frank Bartleman

XV: Liberation

"The Background of Liberation Theology" by Deane William Fenn

A Black Theology of Liberation by James H. Cone

"Introduction to Feminist Theology" by Carter Heyward