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Introduction to the Worlds of Ancient Christianity

Instructor

Michael E. Foat
mfoat@directory.reed.edu

Institution

Reed College, a private liberal arts college

Course Level and Type

First Year / conference (seminar)

Hours of Instruction

39 hours, 3 hours / week over a 13 week semester

Enrollment and Year Last Taught

Enrollment has fluctuated between 40 and 60 students over the past three years

Requirements

1. Keep up with the reading, attend conference, and confer vigorously
2. 5 take-home quizzes (these should take no more than 2 hrs to complete and must be typewritten);
3. Midterm examination;
4. Final examination. The final exam will have two components: 1) a time-line of the period under consideration (ca. 25 to ca. 550 C.E.) to be presented at the last class-meeting, 2) a comprehensive take-home examination (closed book, closed notes).

Required Books

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible;

Gregory of Nyssa, E. Ferguson & A. Malherbe, trs., *The Life of Moses*;

Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, v. II;

Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*;

H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*;

K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses*;

Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*;

The Sourcebook (a collection of primary readings).

Recommended Books

For the purposes of this course, the PBS video, *From Jesus to Christ*, cannot be recommended too highly. The best scholars in the field, including Helmut Koester, Wayne Meeks, and Allan Callahan, have worked together to provide a generally accessible introduction to their work on Christian origins. It is available for viewing in the Instructional Media Center in the Hauser Library.

For those interested in further reading a variety of primary texts are available free on the internet, among the available one of the best is provided by the Saint Pachomius library at:

<http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/St.Pachomius/globalindex.html>

Course Outline

Monday 31 August,

Required:

Chadwick, 9-31.

Highly Recommended:

Koester 71-94.

Wednesday 2 September,

Paul: the Jewish God for Gentiles.

Required:

The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans;

Koester, 97-145.

Recommended:

Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" in his *Paul Among the Jews and Gentiles*, 78-96 (reserve);

Stanley K. Stowers, *Romans: a Rereading* (reserve).

Friday 4 September,

Jesus 1: The Synoptic Problem and the Problem of Jesus.

Required:

The Gospel According to Mark;

Koester, 45-49; 147-177.

Recommended:

Helmut Koester, "Written Gospels or Oral Tradition," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 293-97 (reserve).

Monday 7 September,

LABOR DAY: NO CLASSES!!!

Wednesday 9 September,

Jesus 2: The Community of John.

Required:

The Gospel According to John;

Koester, 178-98;

Raymond Brown, "Other Sheep Not of This Fold," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 5-22 (reserve).

Friday 11 September,

Jesus 3: Jesus and Jewish Christianity.

Required:

The Epistle of James;

Koester, 198-207.

Monday 14 September,

Jesus 4: The Thomas Gospel.

Required:

The Gospel of Thomas, Sourcebook: 3-19;

Koester, 208- 218;

A.F.J. Klijn, "Christianity in Edessa and the Gospel of Thomas," *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 70-7 (reserve).

Recommended: Visit the Gospel of Thomas Homepage at <http://www.epix.net/~miser17/Thomas.html>.

Wednesday 16 September,

Jesus 5: Christian Prophecy and Apocalyptic Literature.

Required:

The Apocalypse;

Koester, 241-261;

John G. Gager, "The End of Time and the Rise of Community," in *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity*, 20-57 (reserve).

Recommended:

P. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: 1975);

Friday 18 September,

The Early Churches 1: The Pauline Heritage.

Required:

1st Timothy;

Koester, 261-279;

Recommended:

M. Dibelius & H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*

(Philadelphia: 1972).

Monday 21 September,

The Early Churches 2: Charismatic Wanderers.

Required:

The Didache, Sourcebook: 20-28;

Koester, 158-160.

Wednesday 23 September,

The Early Churches 3: Charismatic Authority and Episcopal Institution.

Required:

Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*, Sourcebook 29-32;

H. Chadwick 41-53;

Max Weber, "Charismatic Authority and its Routinization," in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (reserve): 358-372.

Recommended:

Koester, 279-287;

Friday 25 September,

The Early Churches 4: Martyrdom and Early Persecutions.

Required:

Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, Sourcebook: 33-36;

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Sourcebook: 37-45;

Pliny, *Ep. X.96*, Sourcebook: 46-47;

Chadwick 54-66.

Recommended:

G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge:1995).

Monday 28 September,

Stark 1.

Required:

Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, xi-146.

Wednesday 30 September,

Stark 2.

Required:

Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 147-216.

Friday 2 October,

Stark 3: Stark and His Critics.

Required:

The following required articles may be found in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.2, summer 1998. You may reach this Journal via the Internet at

http://chaos.press.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_early_christian_studies

T. Klutz, "The Rhetoric of Science in The Rise of Christianity: A Response to Rodney Stark's Sociological Account of Christianization;"

K. Hopkins, "Christian Number and its Implications;"

E. Castelli, "Gender, Theory, and The Rise of Christianity: A Response to Rodney Stark;"

R. Stark, "E Contrario."

Monday 5 October,

The Early Churches 5: Defending the Church.

Required:

Athenagoras the Athenian, *A Plea on Behalf of the Christians*, Sourcebook: 48-94;

Chadwick, 66-73.

Recommended:

R.M. Grant, *The Greek Apologists* (Philadelphia: 1988).

Wednesday: 7 October,

The Early Churches 6: The Gnosis.

Required:

The Apocryphon of John, Sourcebook: 95-113;

Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* 5-21 (reserve);

Chadwick 32-41.

Recommended:

Koester, 328-334;

Visit The Gnostic Society Library at <http://home.sol.no/~noetic/nagham/nhlcodex.html>.

Friday 9 October,

Emerging Orthodoxy 1: Irenaeus and the Genealogy of Error.

Required:

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* bk. I: ch. 10; 23-31, Sourcebook: 114-38;

Chadwick 80-83.

Monday 12 October,

Emerging Orthodoxy 2: Tertullian.

Required:

Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Sourcebook: 139-69;

Chadwick 84-93;

James L. Ash, "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976):227-52 (reserve).

Wednesday 15 October,

Emerging Orthodoxy 3: The Manichaean Counterpoint.

Required:

Concerning the Origin of His Body, Sourcebook:170-201;

Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* 326- 342 (reserve).

Recommended:

Jason Beduhn, "The Battle for the Body in Manichaeism

Asceticism" in V. Wimbush and R. Valantassis, eds., *Asceticism*, 513-519 (reserve).

Friday 16 October,

Mid-Term Examination.

The examination may cover Koester, Stark, Chadwick, and Weber, in addition to the primary readings we have read.

OCTOBER 17-25

FALL RECESS

Monday 26 October,

Emerging Orthodoxy 3: Origen.

Required:

Eusebius, *Church (a.k.a. Ecclesiastical) History* , selections from book 6; Sourcebook: 202-269;

Origen, selections from *On First Principles*, Sourcebook: 202-269;

Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 160-177 (reserve).

Wednesday 28 October,

Church of the Empire 1: Constantine.

Required:

Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, Sourcebook: 270-312;

Eusebius, *Church History* book 10, Sourcebook: 313-37;

Chadwick 116-128.

Friday 30 October,

Church of the Empire 2: The Council of Nicaea.

Required:

Socrates, *Church History*, 1.5-1.9.26, Sourcebook: 338-62;

Sozomen, *Church History*, 1.15-21, Sourcebook: 363-72;

Theodoret, *Church History*, 1.4-7, Sourcebook: 373-82;

Chadwick 129-136.

Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* 57-91.

Recommended:

Athanasius, *apologia contra Arianos* 59-71, Sourcebook: 383-84.

Monday 2 November,

Ascetic Practice 1: The Image of Antony.

Required:

Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, Sourcebook: 385-430;

Chadwick 174-183;

James E. Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (1993): 281-96 (reserve).

Wednesday 5 November,

Ascetic Practice 2: Antony Himself .

Required:

Antony the Great, "Letters Six and Seven," (reserve);

Samuel Rubenson, "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition" in V. Wimbush and R. Valantassis, eds., *Asceticism*, 149-57 (reserve).

Friday 7 November,

Ascetic Practice 3: The Beginning of the Common Life

Required:

The Life of Pachomius (reserve);

Susanna Elm, "Pachomius and Shenoute: the Other Classic Model," in *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, 283-310 (reserve).

Monday 9 November,

Ascetic Practice 4: Coptic Monastic resistance to Hellenization.

Required:

Shenoute of Atripe, *I Am Amazed*, Sourcebook: 431-463.

Wednesday 11 November,

Ascetic Practice 5: The Idea of the Holy Man.

Required:

Theodoret, *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Sourcebook: 464-81;

Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Sense of a Stylite" *VC* 42(1988): 376- 94 (reserve);

David Frankfurter, "Stylites and Phallobates: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria;" *VC* 44(1990):168-198 (reserve).

Recommended:

F. Young, "Theodoret of Cyrrhus" in *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 265-289.

Friday 13 November,

Ascetic Practice 6: Basil the Great and the asceticism of the wealthy.

Required:

Basil the Great, "Selected Letters," Sourcebook: 481-21;

F. Young, 92-122.

Monday 16 November,

Ascetic Practice 7: Gregory of Nyssa and unending askesis.

Required:

Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 55-138;

Chadwick 184-191.

Wednesday 18 November,

Ascetic Practice 8: Augustine and the recovery of the mediocre in the West.

Required:

Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 9, Sourcebook: 522-43;

Chadwick 214-236.

Recommended:

P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: 1967).

Friday 20 November,

Female Dominion 1.

Required:

Holum 6-78;

Gregory of Nyssa, *A Homily of Consolation Concerning Pulcheria* Sourcebook: 544-50.

Monday 23 November,

Christological Controversies 1: The Road to Chalcedon.

Required:

Socrates, *Church History*, VII.29-35, Sourcebook: 551-58;

Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 295-309 (reserve);

F. Young, 213-265.

Wednesday 25 November,

Female Dominion 2.

Required:

Holum 79-174.

26-29 November

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Monday 30 November,

Christological Controversies 2: Chalcedon.

Required:

The Tome of Leo, Sourcebook: 559-67;

Chadwick 209-234.

Wednesday 2 December,

Female Dominion 3.

Required:

Holum 175-228.

Friday 4 December,

The Papacy and Leo I

Required:

Leo I, "Sermon III on his elevation to the pontificate," Sourcebook: 568-70;

"Selected Correspondence," Sourcebook: 571-98;

Chadwick 237-257.

Monday 7 December,

The Unknown God.

Required:

Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology* (reserve);

John Jones, "Sculpting God." (reserve).

Recommended:

John Jones, "Trinitarian Rhetoric in Dionysian Thought." (reserve).

Wednesday 9 December,

Presentation of time-lines;

Take-home final exam distributed.

Pedagogical Reflections

The goal of the course, now in its third year, is to introduce first and second year students to the history of ancient Christianity and to various methods the historian might use to both understand and articulate that history. The time-line and final examination (5 hrs.) have of course been very useful as indicators of student comprehension. More importantly, they almost invariably provoke a synthesis of the material. The PBS video, *From Jesus to Christ* provided a very helpful introduction to the early material for those students who chose to view it. I anticipate requiring it the next time I offer the course. Weaker students do have some difficulty comprehending all of the primary material (which runs about 1300 pp.), however the conference method allows the participants to address misunderstandings when they arise. Despite their near universal initial difficulty with the text, my students have become very attached to Helmut Koester's *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, v. II.

Select a location 

http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/introduction_to_the_worlds_of_ancient_christianity-foat.html

Latest update: August 02, 2002
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