

## **REL 309: EARLY CHRISTIANITIES**

Fall 2013  
Tuesday and Thursday 2:00-3:20pm  
Hall of Languages 115  
Syracuse University

Instructor: Professor Virginia Burrus (mvburrus@syr.edu)  
Office hours: Tuesdays 3:30-4:30, Thursdays 12:30-1:30 (520 Hall of Languages)

This course traces the emergence of Christianity as a distinct religion within the Roman empire. The focus will be on the diverse and contested character of ancient Christianity, as well as on its distinctive beliefs, practices, and material cultures. We will pay particular attention to the differentiation of Christianity from Judaism, to the forms of self-definition that emerge in the period of imperial persecution, and to the shifts that take place when the movement gains the support of the Roman emperors in the fourth century. Emphasis will be placed on working directly with ancient texts and situating them in their broader historical and cultural contexts.

Course goals include:

- 1) Achieving a historical overview of early Christian history, including major events, trends, thinkers, and texts;
- 2) Learning to study religion from a critical historical perspective;
- 3) Honing interpretive and writing skills.

### **Required Books**

Joseph Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (2010)  
Bart D. Ehrman, *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity* (1999) (ANT)  
Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity: 300-450 C.E.* (2004) (CLA)

These are available for purchase in the SU Bookstore in the Shine Student Center.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Faithful attendance and active participation in class discussions.** You are expected to attend class regularly and read all assignments carefully so that you can ask questions and offer comments and reflections. Three absences will lower your semester grade by three percentage points; four absences by four percentage points; five absences by five percentage points; etc. *Please bring the ancient texts that we are discussing to class.*

2. **A series of one-page reflections (roughly 250 words each)**, due on the dates marked in boldface on the syllabus. These reflection papers must be typed (double-spaced) and handed in at the beginning of class on the day they are due; *no late papers will be accepted.* There are 14 possible reflection papers; you must do 10; and by October 3, you must have turned in *at least 2* reflection papers. Cumulatively, the reflection papers are worth one-third (33%) of the final grade. Prompts for each reflection paper will be posted on Blackboard at least three days in advance of the due date.

3. **Two 30-minute oral examinations will take place during the weeks of Sept. 24 and Nov. 18 respectively;** study guides and sign-up sheets for scheduling exams will be posted on Blackboard in advance. Cumulatively, the exams are worth one-third of the final grade, but the second one will be weighted more heavily than the first (roughly 11% and 22%, respectively). Note that oral exams are not as scary as they might seem! Moreover, they allow students to develop skills that are relevant to interviewing for jobs and making oral presentations, for example.

4. **One 10-page (roughly 2500 word) research paper** is the final requirement, worth one-third (33%) of the final grade. Pick a text or a theme that you find really fascinating! You should meet with me in November to discuss topic and bibliography. The paper must be typed (double spaced) and handed in to me in hard copy by December 9.

## ACADEMIC COURTESY

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructor. This includes being prepared for class, attending class from beginning to end, listening when another speaks, respecting personal and intellectual differences, and generally abstaining from any actions not productively related to this course: ***computers, tablets, and cell phones must be turned off and stowed away.*** Anyone whose behavior deviates from these standards may, at the discretion of the instructor, be asked to leave class for the day.

## SCHEDULE OF READING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Studying ancient Christianity: What's at stake? (Aug. 27)

### I. When Christians were Jews

The quest for the historical Jesus

Aug. 29      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 1 (pp 1-9)  
*The Gospel of Mark*

A diversity of gospels, a diversity of Christs

Sept. 3      **Reading:** *The Gospel of Matthew* 1-2  
*The Gospel of Luke* 1-2  
*The Gospel of John* 1

**Sept. 5**      **Reading:** *The Gospel of Thomas* (ANT 237-244)  
*The Gospel of Peter* (ANT 244-247)  
*The Proto-Gospel of James* (ANT 247-255)  
*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (ANT 255-259)

The parting of the ways of Judaism and Christianity: when did it happen?

Sept. 10      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 2, 4 (pp 13-22, 37-50)

**Sept. 12**      **Reading:** Paul, *Letter to the Galatians* 1-2  
Paul, *Letter to the Romans* 9-11  
*Acts* 12-28

### II. Early Christian Self-Definition

Pursuing gnosis: Christianity as insight

Sept. 17      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 5 (pp 53-61)  
*The Gospel of Truth* (ANT 160-165)

**Sept. 19**      **Reading:** *The Apocryphon (or Secret Book) of John* (ANT 146-54)

Combatting error: Christianity as orthodoxy

Sept. 24      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 6 (pp 62-78)

**Sept. 26**      **Reading:** Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* (ANT 196-211)  
Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* (ANT 218-224)

Persecution and martyrdom: Christianity as suffering witness

- Oct. 1        **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 7 (pp 79-90)  
                 Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* (ANT 28-30)  
                 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ANT 30-35)
- Oct. 3**        **Reading:** *Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons* (ANT 35-41)  
                 *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (ANT 41-42)  
                 *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* (ANT 42-50)  
                 *Acts of Thecla* (ANT 278-284)

Philosophy and apologetics: Christianity as truth

- Oct. 8        **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 3, 8 (pp 24-35, 91-104)
- Oct. 10**      **Reading:** Justin, *First Apology* (ANT 57-65)  
                 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* (ANT 18-24)  
                 Origen, *On First Principles* (ANT 413-429)

Cleansed by the spirit: Christianity as ritual practice

- Oct. 15**      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 9 (pp 105-120)  
                 **also read two of the following:**  
                 *The Didache* (ANT 346-47)  
                 Justin, *First Apology* (ANT 347-349)  
                 Tertullian, *Apology* (ANT 349-351)  
                 Tertullian, *On the Crown* (ANT 352)  
                 Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* (ANT 353-356)

A historical turning point: Constantine's conversion

- Oct. 17**      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 10  
                 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* (CLA 30-36)

III. Imperial Christianity

Creeds and councils, part I: The Trinitarian debates

- Oct. 22      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 11, 13 (pp 131-142, 160-169)
- Oct. 24**      **Reading:** Arius, *Thalia* (CLA 158-159)  
                 Alexander of Alexandria, *Letter to Alexander of Constantinople*  
                 (CLA 159-166)  
                 Arius, *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria* (CLA 166-167)  
                 Creed and Canons of Nicaea and Constantinople (CLA 251-259)

## Creeds and councils, part II: The Christological debates

- Oct. 29      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 12, 14 (pp 144-159, 170-176)
- Oct. 31**      **Reading:** Nestorius, *Letter to Cyril of Alexandria* (CLA 179-182)  
Cyril of Alexandria, *Third Letter to Nestorius* (CLA 182-188)  
Canons of Ephesus (CLA 259-261)  
Definition and Canons of Chalcedon (CLA 261-267)

## Holy lives: desert fathers

- Nov. 5      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 16 (pp 191-210)
- Nov. 7**      **Reading:** *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (CLA 300-307)  
Athanasius, *Life of Antony* (CLA 368-377)  
Theodoret, *The Religious History* (CLA 377-389)

## Holy lives: virgins and harlots

- Nov. 12      **Reading:** Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* (Blackboard)
- Nov. 14**      **Reading:** *Life of Pelagia* (CLA 404-416)

## Holy times and places

- Nov. 19      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 15 (pp 179-189)
- Nov. 21**      **Reading:** Egeria, *Travel Journal* (CLA 333-347)  
Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter on Pilgrimage* (CLA 347-350)  
Vitricius of Rouen, *In Praise of the Saints* (CLA 350-360)

## Conversion and Christianization

- Dec. 3**      **Reading:** Lynch, ch. 17, 18 (pp 212-239)  
Augustine, *Confessions* (CLA 80-92)

## Christian art in late antiquity

- Dec. 5      **Reading:** Images (CLA 474-480)

**Research papers due Dec. 9!!!**

## **ABSENCE DUE TO OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for the observance of any religious holiday. However, we will provide an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement that is missed because of an absence due to a religious observance, *provided the instructor has been notified no later than the end of the second week of classes.*

## **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309; call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Students should submit a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. *Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, it is crucial to contact ODS and plan for accommodations as early as possible.* For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

*In this course, the **minimal** penalty for any student found to cheat on an assignment is an F for that assignment; major violations will result in course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy; repeat offenses can result in even more serious sanctions.*