HI-550-1. THE EARLY CHURCH

The course will trace the growth and development of Christianity from its earliest beginnings in the first century to the great councils of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, stopping en route to examine selected texts from the New Testament, early Christian and Roman documents, the writings of the Fathers, and the earliest creeds—ranging from the Gospels and St. Paul, to Ignatius, Justin, Origen, Basil, Augustine, and Nicea. The course will focus on emergent and diverse Christian thought concerning the nature of God and Christ, the Bible, Church and sacraments, sin, grace, salvation, the relation of church and state, and the Christian way of life, toward the end of keener insight into issues of religion and faith today.

Thoughts on History, Church, and Us

- "There are many sheep without, many wolves within." --St. Augustine of Hippo
- "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." -- Tertullian
- "Do not be like those people who think they are inaugurating a new era, as if before they came along there had been nothing but emptiness or chaos. Before we came there were our parents, and they were the latest link of a long and sacred chain. The generations which went before us left such wonderful proofs of their noble victories in the cause of truth and goodness that we fear we may never equal them in merit and glory. It would be a meritorious thing for us all frankly to admit that we should still be very wretched indeed, and hardly out of the phase of barbarism, if the civilization of past centuries had not seen to our baptism." -- Pope John XXIII
- "I accented the historicity of the Church, showing that it does evolve and change through the centuries. If it freezes, it ceases to be alive. It needs to speak to the problems of the day."
  - Avery Dulles
- "Christian life is the life of Christ in man and man in Christ." - Romano Guardini

I. Books for Purchase


II. Additional Texts on Permanent Reserve

- Hazlett, Ian, ed. Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to A.D. 600 (Abingdon) [=EC]
- Wiles, Maurice and Santer, Mark, eds. Documents in Early Christian Thought (Cambridge University Press) [=W&S]
Requirements

1. **Weekly readings, class participation, regular attendance.** Classroom exchange is as important as the reading. (Each absence = reduction of one letter attendance grade; consistent tardiness also reduces the grade. See instructor for absence makeup). [1/6 of grade]

2. **One class report,** chosen from the topics asterisked in the syllabus, presented orally in class (ten-minute presentation, plus discussion) and submitted in written form (5 type-written pages maximum) one week later
   a. Begin by telling us why this topic interested you.
   b. The body of the report should consist of an orderly overview of the topic, elaborating on five to ten facts that caught your attention, explaining why.
   c. Conclude with an observation on how this topic illumines our understanding of the subject matter of this course (e.g., morally, historically, spiritually, literarily, personally).
   d. Feel free to use visuals, a handout, etc.
   e. The written version should include brief bibliography (including web sources, if used).

Grade will be based primarily on the written version (clarity, organization, thoughtfulness, breadth of reading, and range of issues and applications considered). [2/6 of grade]

3. **Final Research Project (15 pages maximum; plus bibliography), due Dec. 21, 28? Other?** Notify instructor of your choice of topic by November 9, with a sheet indicating a tentative title, a descriptive paragraph on the rationale, focus, and scope of the paper, and a brief preliminary bibliography. The project must include an epilogue consisting of (a) a paragraph on the significance of the paper for you, e.g. has it changed your thinking?; (b) a paragraph on its significance for the study of the early church. [3/6 of grade].

*All academic papers are to conform to conventional technical, grammatical and stylistic standards referred to in the Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper. The Hartford Seminary Grading Guidelines will be the standard of evaluation for work in the course*

**Course Objectives**

1. To provide opportunity for critical reflection on the diverse factors (historical, social, economic, artistic, theological, economic, liturgical, religious, ecclesiastical, and psycho-spiritual) at work in the emergence of the early church, toward an enriched understanding of the church and issues of religion and faith today.

2. To develop a more sure-footed sense of the contributions of Roman, Hellenistic (Greek), and Jewish religion, philosophy, politics, and culture to the development and formation of Christian thought and practice.

3. To have in your head a brief chronology of early church history, its main events, persons, and literature.

4. To become familiar with the story and thought of key figures that have led to new insight into the nature and meaning of Christian faith and practice, from Paul and other New Testament writers, to Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.

5. To appreciate the role of theology as a way of wrestling with the recurrent issues, questions, and potentialities of life, and to identify the key theological formulations that develop in the early church, with special emphasis on the doctrines (=teaching) about God, the Trinity, Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin and grace, tradition and scripture, church and sacraments, Christian living, church and society, and the final goal of life.

6. To identify and reflect on the evolution of the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, with special emphasis on the virtues as well as “vices” of Christian Gnosticism.

7. To identify those ideas, themes, and realities in the Early Church you regard as indispensable for humankind and yourself.
SYLLABUS
(Asterisked items indicate topics for "class report" selection)

Sept. 7  **Prospectus**  In preparation, read STEINDL-RAST, Foreword & Intro. “God Isn’t Something Else.” Bring Q/R/B (a Question, Reflection, or Both).

Part I. **THE EARLIEST CHURCH AND ITS NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE**

Sept. 14  **The Synoptic Gospels: Jesus of History and Christ of Faith**
Read: (1) Special handout, "Who Wrote the Bible." Spend no more than 5 min. reading each of the 8 sections of the article. Summarize each section in one clear, informative sentence. (2) Special assignment on Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels. (3) STEINDL-RAST 19-30, “I Believe,” “I Believe in God”; Bring Q/R/B (Question, Reflection, or Both).

* Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapters 1, “An Ancient New People” (pp. 15-21) and 3, "The Founder of Christianity,” (pp. 29-39)
  * Fitzmyer, [CC] "What do we know about the Jesus of History?” 11-17, and "What is to be said of the titles of Jesus?”, 102-107; "Are there different interpretations of Jesus (or different Christologies) in the New Testament?", 81-85; and "Did Jesus Clearly Claim to be God?” pp. 97-100.
  * Peter in the Early Church  * Crucifixion in antiquity
  * Gospel of Mark and his Theology  * Gospel of Matthew and his Theology

Read: (1) Special handout assignment; (2) STEINDL-RAST 31-40, “The Father,” “The Father Almighty”. Bring Q/R/B.

* Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapter 4, “Jerusalem and Beyond,” (pp. 40-47)

Sept. 28  **St. Paul: The Earliest Christian Writer and First Great Theologian**
Read: (1) Special handout assignments on Paul; (2) STEINDL-RAST, 41-52, “Creator of Heaven & Earth,” “And in Jesus Christ.” Bring Q/R/B.

* Supplementary Reading: HINSON chapters 2, ”The World of Early Christianity,” (pp. 22-28) and 5, “The Pauline Mission” (pp. 48-58)

Oct. 5  **The Gospel According to John, the Johannine Epistles, and Revelation: Hints of Nicea**
Read: (1) Special handout assignment on “Johannine Literature. (2) STEINDL-RAST 53-64. “God’s Only Son” and “Our Lord.” Bring Q/R/B.

PART II. A GEOGRAPHICAL, CULTURAL, AND CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Oct. 12  The Geographical Overview: The Roman Empire & Mediterranean Basin


* The City of Ephesus
* The catacombs
* Mystery religions
* Travels of Egeria (cf. bibliography under “Egeria”)

Oct. 19  The Chronological Overview: From Augustus to Constantine and Beyond: 63 BCE to CE 476

Read: (1) Special handout. Pencil-check every date/event/person that strikes you as especially significant. For class, prepare your list of the 10 items you judge to be the most significant for the development of the EC. (2) Read STARK, “The Class Basis of Christianity,” 29-47. (3) STEINDL-RAST 78-95, “Suffered Under Pontius Pilate;” “Crucified.” Bring Q/R/B

* Augustus Caesar
* Emperor worship and Roman Religion
* Jerome
* Eusebius. the primordial church historian
* The Emperors, from Augustus to Domitian, 31 BC to AD 96: A thumbnail sketch

PART III. THE POST-APOSTOLIC AGE AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE CREEDS

Oct. 26  The Didache: Life and Order in A Jewish-Christian Community

Read (1) "The Didache" in Ehrman in the following sequence: Didache cc. 1-5, Ehrman 385-87; cc. 7-10, 346-47; cc. 11-15, , 323-25; (2); Stark, “The Mission to the Jews: Why It Probably Succeeded,” 49-72; (3) Read: Ehrman, “Jewish Christian Texts, 134-45. (4) STEINDL-RAST, 96-103; “Died and Was Buried;” “He Descended Into Hell” Bring Q/D/B. Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapter 8, “Life Together,” (pp. 77-87)

* Jewish Christianity
* Fasting in world religions and in the Early Church
* Shepherd of Hermas
* EC "The Jewish Dimension," 40-51
* Ehrman: “Anti-Jewish Polemic, The Opposition to Jews in Early Christianity,” 95-130

Nov. 2  Attack on Christianity: The Martyrs

Read: “Martyrdom of Polycarp, Ehrman, 30-35. Answer four questions: (1) Who was Polycarp? (2) What are his dates? (3) Why is this document of special importance? (4) Does it teach us anything today?

Nov. 9  **The Defense of Christianity: The Apologists**
Read. Justin, *First Apology*, Ehrman 57-65. List at least 10 items of defense of early Christian belief and practice that Justin crafts to counter the 5 Roman accusations that Christians are (1) atheistic, (2) immoral, (3) unpatriotic, (4) of lower social status, (5) uneducated and ignorant.

Read: Stark, 95-128, “The Role of Women in Christian Growth”
Read: *Minucius Felix*, Ehrman, 54-57 and *Athenagoras*, 65-70

**Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapter 10, “Confessing Faith,” (pp. 97-106), chap. 13, “Aliens in Their Own Homeland,” (pp. 134-43), and 15, “Christian Spirituality” (pp. 158-169)**

* Tertullian, The Life and Writings of the First Latin Father
* Origen: The Life and Writings of an Eminent and Controversial Biblical Scholar
* The Role and Position of Women in the EC

Nov. 16 **The Riddle of Heresy and Orthodoxy: Lost Strains of Christianity: The Gnostics, Montanists, and Manichaean**
Read: Special handout on Gnosticism
Read: Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, in Ehrman, 196-211
Read the following Gnostic texts in Ehrman:

- Intro. to Gnosticism, 144-45
- The Secret Book of John, 146-154
- The Gospel of Truth, 160-165
- Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora (on scripture), 166-70
- The Treatise on the Resurrection, 182-84

Read: the following Non-Canonical Gospels in Ehrman:

- The Gospel of Thomas, 237-44
- The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, 255-59.

Also, STEINDL-RAST, 127-137, “Then He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead” and “I believe in the Holy Spirit” Bring Q/R/B.

**Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapter 9, “Struggle for Identity and Unity” (pp. 88-96)**

* New Testament Apocryphal Writings
* Irenaeus, The First Great “Catholic” Theologian.
* The Protevangelium of James (Ehrman, 247-55)
* Marcion

* Manichaean

Nov. 30 **The Emergence of Creeds: Constantine, Nicea, and Chalcedon**
Read: Special handout on the Nicene Creed.
Read: Special handout by Elizabeth Johnson on five stages of development in Christology from the EC to the present
Dec. 7  Developing Church Structures and Scriptures in the EC
Supplementary Reading: HINSON chapters 16, Life Together (pp. 170-181) and 17 “First Principles” (pp. 182-196)

* Origin of the priesthood  * Celibacy in Christian history and practice
* Bishops, Deacons, and Elders in the Early Church
* Sunday as the Lord’s Day
* W&S, “Tradition and Scripture” (readings), 127-158.

Dec. 14  Growth of Liturgy and a Christian Way of Life
Read: Ehrman, 343-60, “The Development of Liturgy: Ritual Practices in Early Christianity”  
Read: Ehrman, 387-404, “Leading the Upright Life: Role of Ethics in Early Xty”  
Supplementary Reading: HINSON, chapters 22, “Changing Churches” (pp. 241-253) , and 23, “The Call of the Desert” (pp. 254-69), and 29 “Being Christian in a Collapsing World” (pp. 326-341)

*Eucharist in the EC  *Emergence of the cult of the saints
*Baptism in the EC  * Origins of the Monastic Movement in EC
*Augustine: Life, Writings, and Key Themes
*Christian ethics of sexuality  * Gregory of Nyssa
* W&S, 172-201, “Sacraments” (readings from Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom)

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY
NEW TESTAMENT: Research Resources in the Reference Room

Atlases
- Rand McNally Bible Atlas  BS630 K855
- Macmillan Bible Atlas  BS630 Ah15

General Commentaries
- Anchor Bible Commentary  192.2 A1 1964
- The New Interpreter’s Bible (12 vols.) BS491.2 N484 1994
- Women’s Bible Commentary  BS 491.2 W66 1992

Dictionaries
- Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vols.) BS 440 A54 1992
- Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation (2 vols.) BS500 D5 1999
- Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (IVP) BS2555.2 D53 1992
- Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology BS 440 B46713 1981
- Exegetical Dictionary of the NT (3 vols.) (Grk) BS2312 E913 1990
- Harper’s Bible Dictionary  1985
- Hawthorne, G.F. and R. P. Martin, Paul and His Letters (IVP) BS 2650.2 D53 1993
- Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible BS440. I36 1986
- Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (5 vols.) BS444 IN85
- New Interpreter’s Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis (3 vols.) BS440 N438 1997
- New Interpreter’s Dictionary of NT Theology (3 vols.) BS2397 N48
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (10 vols.) BS440 B5713
- Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (10 vols.) BS 2312 T4713

Concordances
- Analytical Concordance of the RSV of the New Testament BS2305 M67
- Eerdmans’ Analytic Concordance (RSV) BS425 1989
- Nelson’s Complete Concordance (RSV) BS425 E4 1984
- The New RSV Concordance (John Kohlenberger III, ed.) BS425 K545 1991
- Whittaker, Analytical Concordance to the RSV Bible (1991) B S425 W48
- Young’s Analytical Concordance BS425 Y7 1970

Specialized Concordances
- Greek English Concordance to the NT (Smith) BS2302 SM 61 1955
- Harper’s Topical Concordance BS432 H37 1976
- Moulton and Geden, A Concordance to the Greek NT BS2302 M862 1963
- Concordancia Completa de la Santa Biblia BS 428 S65 1979

EARLY CHURCH: Research Resources in the Reference Room

Atlases

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias
- New Catholic Encyclopedia BX841 .N42

Special Resources
- Schneemelcher, NT Apocrypha, (2 vols.) BS2832 .S3 1991
- -Quasten, Johannes, Patrology BW205 .Q28 vols. 1-3
- Robinson, James, The Nag Hammadi Library BT1391 .A3 1986

Online Resources
Consult with Harford Seminary Librarians on how to access the Hartford Seminary religion database using keywords for bibliography or topics.
Website: www.earlychristianwritings.com and of course, Google.