

THEO 3310, R01
T/F 10:00–11:15 am, Duane 353

Fordham University, Fall 2018
Department of Theology

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

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Office hours: Tues., 12:00–3:00 pm, and by appointment.

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Preferred pronouns: He/him

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigates how Christian literary culture first emerged and then developed throughout the Mediterranean during the initial centuries of the Common Era. Early Christian literature, as has been the case with all human culture, transformed and varied over time, in intimate relation with social, economic, and political changes, both within the Christ cult and in the wider Roman Mediterranean world. Our textual studies, accordingly, shall be thoroughly grounded in and guided by the following historical questions: how did a ragtag band of squarely Jewish social critics from backwater Galilee mutate into a popular Mediterranean cult, with devotees from multiple ethnicities, in every major city across the Roman empire? How did the Christ cult come to organize itself socially? In the fourth century, how did this cult, which was viewed with occasionally murderous suspicion during earlier centuries, become the official religion of the Roman state? How, on the flip side, might careful consideration of early Christian writing help us formulate tentative answers to these questions? How did early Christian literary culture itself transform during this process? This course, in other words, does not intend to gloss early Christian theological musings with a glistening veneer of piety. It is rather a class designed to prod substantial, difficult, and faith-shaking historical insight through careful scrutiny of primary material — much of which just so happens to be theological in nature.

Furthermore, while we shall indeed be selectively studying the writing of prominent early Christian theologians — including the likes of Justin Martyr and Augustine — we shall also be

paying considerable heed to more plebeian expressions of early Christian literary culture. As a crucial component of each of the questions raised above, we shall constantly be asking how the merchant, coppersmith, mason, or tanner who belonged to this peculiar cult during the first few centuries of its existence might have lived, worshiped, and come to express themselves as Christians. We can, however, hope to formulate partial answers to this question only by supplementing the theological writings of highly educated, leisured men like Justin Martyr and Augustine with the often anonymous, fragmentary, or seemingly bizarre literary traces left by their rank and file co-religionists. Alongside more bookish theological tractates, therefore, we shall be examining early Christian hymns, spells, potions, incantations, letters, oracles, visions, memoirs, shamanic guidebooks, wisdom collections, and legends.

As a final point, while we shall have abundant occasion to examine the theological beliefs expressed throughout these various writings, we shall always want to put these sentiments in intimate dialogue with practice. To this end, we shall begin our course with a consideration of the rich and variegated cultic life of early Christians. When possible, we shall additionally be examining early Christian literary culture in the wider context of contemporary material culture (building remains, papyri, codices, public inscriptions, funereal decorations, and so on). Lastly, throughout the course, as intimated above, we shall be interrogating how various seemingly abstract theological speculations might have been formulated in some relationship, murky though it may be, with social, political, and economic realities at play both within the Christ cult and in the Roman Mediterranean at large.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course you will have:

- ▣ Developed critical and close reading habits.
- ▣ Honed rhetorical skills of delivery, argumentation, rebuttal, and persuasion.
- ▣ Gained facility with basic methods and frameworks in the academic study of religion.
- ▣ Sharpened analytical techniques needed for the study of ancient Mediterranean culture.
- ▣ Cultivated historically responsible insight into early Christian literature.

- ▣ Mapped some of the crucial contours of early Christian theological and ritual tendencies.
- ▣ Constructed and tested various narratives about the social history of early Christianity based on its literary culture, expansively understood.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIAL

All of the material you will need for this class is included in a course reader which you hopefully will have purchased before the start of the semester. If you still need to buy it, you can purchase it for \$14.37+S&H at <http://www.lulu.com/shop/steven-payne/early-christian-writings-a-reader/paperback/product-23753012.html>. Just make sure you use one of the quicker shipping methods.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: A class succeeds based on the participation of its members. Therefore, I take for granted your attendance at each class session. Since lateness interrupts class discussion, I also assume timeliness on your part: you should aim to be in class no later than 9:55 am. Repeated absences or tardiness without explanation will result in a reduction of your final participation grade.

Active class participation: All of us shall come to class having carefully completed the readings. Always bring the course reader to class, along with notes, questions, and passages you would like to discuss. During class, participation includes clearly engaging in group discussion or activities, answering questions posed, raising new questions, listening respectfully and attentively to what others say, entering into the discussion, and being an active contributor.

Electronics in the classroom: Laptops, cell phones, tablets, and other electronic devices should be put away before class begins unless prior arrangements are made with me beforehand.

Email: Your @fordham.edu email address is the primary email address through which you shall be contacted in the course. I answer email exclusively during regular work hours, 9 am–5 pm,

Monday through Friday. Emails sent outside of these hours or on the weekends shall not be answered until the following business day. Before sending questions via email, please make sure your question cannot be answered by the syllabus or by a fellow student. If your issue requires a face-to-face conversation and cannot be handled via email, I shall ask you to come to my office hours or set up an appointment with me.

Late work: Given the nature of the means by which you shall be evaluated in this course (see below), no late work will be accepted.

EVALUATION

The final grade will be computed as follows:

40%	Participation
20%	First Take-home Exam (first or second module)
20%	Second Take-home Exam (second or third module)
20%	Team Oration (one of the modules)

Participation (40% of overall grade): Each member of this class shall be evaluated on participation based on the following components.

1) One meeting with instructor: Each student (ideally with their teammate) should meet with me once leading up to the day you have been assigned to deliver your oration. This meeting shall allow you to test ideas you have for arguments with me and to clear up any lingering confusion about the topics of the debate.

2) Attendance and promptness: Each participant should attend every class and be on time unless you have given me notice in writing *prior* to the class in question.

3) In-class discussion and activities: Every class will consist of group discussions or activities based on the texts assigned for that day. Each student

should show up to each class thoroughly prepared and ready to discuss the readings. A consistent record of contributions in class and clear engagement with your small groups will yield a good participation grade. Note: I shall deduct severely from the participation grade of those who regularly recuse themselves from small-group discussions.

4) Interaction with classmates: I trust each participant in this class to cultivate and to maintain the highest standards of intellectual honesty, respect for a plurality of positions, generosity, empathy with others, and so on. Repeatedly insulting or dismissing other participants in this class or positions other than one's own will result in a poor participation grade. On the other hand, showing true intellectual curiosity and engaged dialogue with others will result in a high participation grade.

*** Note: you shall additionally have an opportunity to engage in a self-assessment regarding your participation grade at the end of the semester. I shall distribute self-assessment forms on the final day of class during the regular semester, before the exam period, and shall take these into serious account when determining your final participation grade.

Two take-home exams (20% each of overall grade; 40% altogether): I shall post take-home exams on Blackboard a week before the end of each module (Tues., Sept. 25; Tues., Oct. 30; and Fri., Dec. 7). These shall include a list of essay questions both on individual items and on the entire unit. You shall be able to choose among them, answering one question on individual items we have read or discussed in class and one on the entire module. Each exam will be due on the day of the debate at the end of each module (Tues., Oct. 2; Tues., Nov. 6; and Fri., Dec. 14). Those delivering an oration on one of those days will not be accountable for the take-home exam due on that particular day. Accordingly, each student shall have completed two take-home exams by the end of the semester. More specific instructions shall be given on each exam.

Team Oration (20% of overall grade): On the first day of class, you will fill out a note card. On the back of this note card will be a number in the range 1–18. One other person in the class will have the same number as you, and you shall be teamed up with this person to deliver an oration at the end of one of the three modules. The first module’s orations will be delivered by numbers 1–6; the second by 7–12; and the third by 13–18. During the second week of class, I shall post your name, number, and oration day on Blackboard. Instructions for delivering the oration will be posted to Blackboard at that time as well. In short, of the two people assigned the same number, one shall deliver the primary oration of around 5 minutes, advancing a coherent and well-evinced argument for the specific question of that module. In close collaboration with their partner, the other person with that number shall be prepared to respond to the different arguments put forth by the other students and shall have 3 minutes to argue why their own team’s position is the most plausible after the first round of orations. As noted above, you will not be accountable for completing the take-home exam due on the day on which you will be delivering an oration.

GRADING

We shall be using the university’s grading scale in this course:

<i>GPA</i>	<i>Letter</i>	<i>Number</i>
0.0	F	0–59
1.0	D	60–69
1.7	C–	70–72
2.0	C	73–76
2.3	C+	77–79
2.7	B–	80–82
3.0	B	83–86
3.3	B+	87–89
3.7	A–	90–92
4.0	A	93–100

*** Note: what you are being assessed on is the demonstrable effort, time, creativity, and energy you put into doing your work and your proficiency in grasping the basic methods and concepts of this class. Grades by no means serve as an accurate measure of your intellectual capacity or capability.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I trust participants in this class to maintain the highest standards of intellectual honesty, and to abide by Fordham University's policies on academic integrity. Remember: plagiarism is the use of unacknowledged sources, copied word for word or paraphrased. Use outside sources when appropriate, but do not forget to cite the source and to place quotation marks around any words that are taken from it. This applies to websites as well as to written sources. In cases of plagiarism, in addition to the work being given zero credit, each case will be referred to the Dean of Fordham College at Rose Hill. This is the policy of Fordham University (please refer to the pages on Academic Integrity in the *Student Handbook*, pp. 66–71). See me first if you have any doubts about the academic integrity of any of your work.

ADA NOTICE

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services, at Rose Hill, O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655.

COURSE CALENDAR, FALL 2018

Fri., Aug. 31: Introduction to the Course

- Activity Collective Myths of Christian Origins
- Lecture An Overview of the Course
- Up next Read syllabus and bring your questions.
 Read Sayings Source (pp. 1–32 in the course reader).

*** Mon., Sept. 3: Labor Day; university closed.

Module 1. From Galilean Social Critics to Mediterranean Cult

Tues., Sept. 4: The Sayings Source and the Early Jesus Movement in Galilee

- Handout Jesus or Demonax?
- Lecture The Earliest Jesus Movement in Galilee
- Up next Read Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache) (pp. 33–46).

*** Thurs., Sept. 6: Last day to add/drop courses.

Fri., Sept. 7: The Early Christ Cult in Greek Cities

- Lecture Cults, Associations, and Greek Urban Life
- Discussion Authority and Ritual in the Didache
- Up next Read Odes of Solomon, Selections (pp. 47–75).

Tues., Sept. 11: Hymns and Sacred Space in the Early Christ Cult

- Handout Themes in the Odes of Solomon
- Lecture The Christ Cult Building at Dura-Europos
- Up next Read Narrative Gospels, Selections (pp. 76–103).

Fri., Sept. 14: Christ as “Divine Man” in the Early Christ Cult

- Handout Competing Portraits of Jesus

Lecture Christ Amid Other Gods and Demigods
Up next Read Gospel of Truth (pp. 104–26).

Tues., Sept. 18: Scripture in the Early Christ Cult, Day 1

Handout Papyri and Early Christian Scribal Culture
Lecture Inventing Scripture in the Early Christ Cult
Discussion Scripturing Christ in the Gospel of Truth
Up next Read Origen, *On First Principles*, Selections (pp. 127–45)

Fri., Sept. 21: Scripture in the Early Christ Cult, Day 2

Discussion Origen on Scripture
Lecture Adopting Scripture in the Early Christ Cult
Handout Scripture or Not?
Up next Read Spells, Curses, and Incantations, Selections (pp. 146–69)

Tues., Sept. 25: Spells, Curses, and Incantations in the Early Christ Cult

Discussion Early Christian “Magic”
Lecture Early Christians, the Household, and Local Worlds
Up next Read Apostolic Constitutions, Selections (pp. 170–74); Augustine, Letter 22, Selections (pp. 175–82); and Paulinus of Nola, Poem 27, Selections (pp. 183–87)

Fri., Sept. 28: The Early Christ Cult and Commemoration of the Dead

Lecture Commemoration of the Dead in the Early Christ Cult
Discussion The Early Christ Cult and *Refrigerium*
Up next Complete Take-home Exam or Prepare Oration

Tues., Oct. 2: First Debate: Was Christianity unique in the ancient Mediterranean?

Orations Numbers 1–6
Rebuttals Numbers 1–6

Discussion Entire Class

Up next Read Ignatius of Antioch, Letters, Selections (pp. 218–36)

Module 2. Religious Specialists in the Early Christ Cult

Fri., Oct. 5: Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons

Lecture The Conflict of Authority in the Early Christ Cult

Handout Why Does Ignatius Want to Die?

Up next Read Acts of Paul and Thecla (pp. 237–60)

*** Monday, Oct. 8, 2018: Indigenous Peoples' Day; university closed.

Tues., Oct. 9: Apostles

Handout Play Planning

Theater Themes on Thecla the Apostle

Up next Read Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Selections (pp. 261–80)

Fri., Oct. 12: Visionary Prophets

Discussion Prophecy and Authority in *The Shepherd*

Lecture Apocalyptic and Other Otherworldly Encounters

Up next Read Oracles of the New Prophecy (pp. 281–94)

Tues., Oct. 16: Oracular Prophets

Lecture Oracles in the Roman Mediterranean

Handout Opposition to the New Prophecy

Up next Read Acts of Perpetua and Felicity (pp. 295–320)

Fri., Oct. 19: Martyrs

Discussion The Figure of the Martyr in the Acts of Perpetua and Felicity

Lecture Spectacles and Athleticism in the Roman World

Up next Read Ptolemy, Letter to Florus (pp. 321–33) and Letter to Rheginos
(pp. 334–41)

Tues., Oct. 23: Teachers

Handout Write a Reply
Lecture Cosmology in the Early Christ Cult and Beyond
Up next Read Gospel of Thomas (pp. 342–68)

Fri., Oct. 26: Sages

Lecture Popular Philosophy in the Roman Mediterranean
Discussion Weaving Wisdom in the Gospel of Thomas
Up next Read Allogenes (pp. 369–90)

Tues., Oct. 30: Shamans

Discussion Making Sense of Allogenes
Lecture Gnostics, Platonists, and Other Shamanic-Like Figures
Up next Read Life of Onuphrius (pp. 391–417) and Life of Abba Moses, Selections
(pp. 418–35)

*** Friday, Nov. 2, 2018: Last day to withdraw without incurring “WF” on transcript.

Fri., Nov. 2: The Holy Man

Lecture The Emergence of Christian Monasticism
Discussion Onuphrius and Abba Moses: Two Models of the “Holy Man”
Up next Complete Take-home Exam or Prepare Oration

Tues., Nov. 6: Second Debate: Who should have held authority in the Christ cult?

Orations Numbers 7–12
Rebuttals Numbers 7–12
Discussion Entire Class

Up next Read Pliny, Letters, Selections (pp. 462–66) and Celsus, *The True Word*,
Selections (pp. 467–84)

Module 3. The Early Christ Cult and Aspirations of Empire

Fri., Nov. 9: No class; professor ill.

Tues., Nov. 13: Roman Perspectives on the Christ Cult

Lecture Christians and Romans, A Bad Romance

Discussion Celsus's Criticisms of Christianity

Up next Read Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Selections (pp. 485–506)

Fri., Nov. 16: The Appeal to Empire — Work from home; delayed opening: snow day

Handout Why Does Justin Appeal to Rome?

Up next Read Martyrdom of Polycarp (pp. 507–523)

Tues., Nov. 20: No class; professor away at conference.

*** Wed., Nov. 21, 2018: Thanksgiving recess; university closed.

Tues., Nov. 27: Christians and Others

Discussion Who Loses in the Martyrdom of Polycarp?

Lecture Christians Amid Jews and Others

Up next Read Clement of Alexandria, The Rich Man's Salvation, Selections (pp.
558–575)

Fri., Nov. 30: Accommodation and Compromise 1

Discussion Clement's Interpretation: Do You Buy It?

Lecture Social Transformations in the Christ Cult and Beyond

Up next Read Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lapsed*, Selections (pp. 576–599)

Tues., Dec. 4: Accommodation and Compromise 2

- Handout Linger with the *Libelli*
- Lecture Martyrdom Reexamined
- Discussion Cyprian and Clement: Two Models of the Upper-Class Christian
- Up next Read Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Selections (pp. 600–620)

Fri., Dec. 7: The Enthusiastic Embrace of Empire

- Handout Questioning Eusebius
- Discussion Christianity and the Imperial Court in the Fourth Century
- Up next Complete Take-home Exam or Prepare Oration

Final Exam — Fri., Dec. 14, 9:30 am, Duane 353: Third Debate: Was Christianity's embrace of empire a betrayal?

- Orations Numbers 13–18
- Rebuttals Numbers 13–18
- Discussion Entire Class