

Backgrounds of Early Christianity

Course Description

This course will explore the early development of Christianity as a theological and political movement. We will consider Christian dynamics in the context of Hellenic and Roman empires as well as the contexts of Judaism and, by extending through the 600s, the rise of Islam. More specifically, we'll look at the process through which Christianity was made distinct from Judaism, how Christianity became an imperial religion, dissenting movements among monks and heretics, and how all that informed Christian misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims.

Required Materials

Course Readings:

- Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*
- Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd Edition
- Raymond E. Brown and Marion Soards, ed., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Abridged Edition
- Several selections from volumes in the \ Oxford Very Short Introduction series and additional readings provided via Canvas

Course Objectives

Learning objectives for this course are broad. Students will ...

1. critically assess the New Testament and the development of early Christian thought
2. understand through comparative analysis how early Christian communities navigated the first centuries of their development
3. describe the multireligious and politically diverse contexts of early Christian development
4. Demonstrate proficiency in communicating complex ideas through writing

Major Assignments and Grading

Questions and Quotes (Q & Qs) Discussions: This assignment will be due most class meetings (Tuesdays and Thursdays) beginning week two through twelve. Each due date you will submit one question and one quote from each of the assigned readings (**i.e. if three texts were assigned, you will have, at minimum, three quotes—one from each text**) to the Discussions section on Canvas. You should pose open-ended questions that generate conversation and cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Your question can address a specific reading or a theme running through several readings. Quotes may be anything from the readings that resonate with you. Along with the quote you will discuss why you find the quote significant. Personal reflections that are connected with the readings/discussions are perfectly appropriate for this assignment. **Value: 30%**

Summary Writing Assignment: Twice during the semester, you will submit a typed 2–3 page document analyzing a course reading which will inform your leadership of classroom discussion on the assigned reading. Additional details forthcoming. **Value: 30%**

Seminar Project: At the conclusion of the semester, you will compose a project which will build on your arguments and writing from your Q&Qs, summary writing assignments, and other forms of discussion and documentation utilized throughout the course. In this assignment you will weave together references to our course texts, your writing and documenting, and course discussions to form a project that will comprise your final course submission. Additional details forthcoming. **Value: 40%**

Grade Breakdown

Note: To earn a passing grade, you must complete all major writing assignments.

- 90-100%=A
- 80-89.99%=B
- 70-79.99%=C
- 60-69.99%=D
- 59.99% and less=F

Grading Policies and Tips

This course has a demanding reading and writing load commensurate with an upper-division class. Students will be expected to **read all assigned texts carefully** and to be prepared to discuss the texts analytically and critically on the day that they are assigned. Much of your class time will be spent discussing course readings. If you do not understand or need help, please make arrangements to talk to your instructor right away.

Sometimes you will also engage in collaborative or individual assignments or activities during class. When you communicate with other class members, you should move beyond simply writing about what parts of the texts that you “like.” Work hard to think about how the texts support and contradict one another. Bring experiences and ideas from your own life into the discussion where appropriate. Look for ways that class readings and discussions are relevant in the world around you. Pay attention to what your classmates write and build off of their ideas when you can. Encourage, support, and learn from each other.

Rubrics and Scoring Systems

For the purposes of this course,

- **“A” WORK** will constitute a final score of 90-100% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is impressively sophisticated and illuminating: inventive, balanced, justified, effective, mature, and expertly-situated in time and context
- **“B” WORK** will constitute a final score of 80-89.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is thorough and systematic: skilled, revealing, developed, perceptive, but not unusually or surprisingly original

- **“C” WORK** will constitute a final score of 70-79.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is acceptable but limited: coherent, significant, and perhaps even insightful in places, but ultimately insufficient in organization, articulation, perception, and/or effectiveness
- **“D” WORK** will constitute a final score of 60-69.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is incomplete and severely lacking: incoherent, limited, uncritical, immature, undeveloped, and overall not reflective of the performance expected of UNT undergraduates
- **“F” WORK** will constitute a final score of 0-59.99% of total points, and will represent an overall response that is unacceptable.

READING SCHEDULE

1. Week 1
 - a. Aug 22: Introduction
 - b. Aug 24: Setting the Scene
 - i. Brown 1–32 (Chapters 1-5)
 - ii. González, 1–23 (Introduction; Chapter 2)

2. Week 2
 - a. Aug 29
 - i. Gospel of Mark (*JANT*, 67–106; Brown, 44–57)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 1. Cohen, *The Abrahamic Religions*, 24–40 (Chapter 2)
 2. Johnson, *The New Testament*, 1–15 (Chapters 1, 2)
 3. *JANT*, 580–589
 - b. Aug 31
 - i. Secondary Literature
 1. Johnson, *The New Testament*, 36–59 (Chapter 6)
 2. *JANT*, 614–622 (Jewish Movements of the NT Period; Pharisees)

3. Week 3
 - a. Sept 5
 - i. Gospel of Matthew (*JANT*, 9–66; Brown, 58–74)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 1. *JANT*, 655–665 (The Law; Sacrifice and the Temple; The Synagogue)
 2. González, 25–30 (Chapter 3)
 - b. Sept 7
 - i. Gospel of Matthew, cont.

4. Week 4
 - a. Sept 12
 - i. Gospel of John (*JANT*, 168–218; Brown, 116–132)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 1. *JANT*, 688–690 (*Logos*, A Jewish Word)
 2. Johnson, *The New Testament*, 95–113 (Chapter 9)
 - b. Sept 14
 - i. Gospel of John, cont.
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 1. *JANT*, 674–680 (Baptism and Eucharist; The Burial of Jesus)

5. Week 5
 - a. Sept 19

- i. Gospel of Luke (*JANT*, 107–167; Brown, 75–97)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 - 1. Johnson, *The New Testament*, 36–59 (Chapter 6)
 - 2. *JANT*, 622–627 (Messianic Movements)
 - b. Sept 21
 - i. Acts of the Apostles (*JANT*, 219–280; Brown, 98–115)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 - 1. *JANT*, 628–633 (The Historical Jesus)
 - 2. González, 31–40 (Chapter 4)
- 6. Week 6
 - a. Sept 26
 - i. Paul’s Letters I (following Brown’s ordering)
 - 1. 1 Thessalonians (*JANT*, 419–426; Brown, 163–167)
 - 2. Galatians (*JANT*, 373–387; Brown, 168–173)
 - 3. Philippians (*JANT*, 398–406; Brown, 174–180)
 - 4. Philemon (*JANT*, 455–454; Brown, 181–184)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 - 1. Johnson, *The New Testament*, 60–83 (Chapter 7)
 - 2. *JANT*, 633–639 (Paul and Judaism)
 - b. Sept 28
 - i. Paul’s Letters II (following Brown’s ordering)
 - 1. 1 Corinthians (*JANT*, 321–351; Brown, 185–193)
 - 2. 2 Corinthians (*JANT*, 352–372; Brown, 194–200)
 - 3. Romans (*JANT*, 285–320; Brown, 201–209)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 - 1. *JANT*, 744–747 (Mary in Jewish Tradition)
- 7. Week 7
 - a. Oct 3
 - i. Other NT Literature
 - 1. Hebrews (*JANT*, 460–488; Brown, 252–259)
 - 2. Revelation (*JANT*, 536–575; Brown, 284–298)
 - ii. Secondary Literature
 - 1. *JANT*, 759–767 (Bearing False Witness; NT and Jewish-Christian Relations)
 - b. Oct 5
 - i. González, 41–68 (Chapters 5–7)
- 8. Week 8
 - a. Oct 10
 - i. González, 69–96 (Chapters 8–9)
 - ii. Pelikan, “The Faith of the Church Catholic” (pp. 121–146)
 - iii. “The Martyrdom of Pionius”

- b. Oct 12
 - i. González, 97–126 (Chapters 10–12)
 - ii. Pelikan, “The Faith of the Church Catholic” (pp. 146–171)
 - iii. *EITHER*
Ari Bryen, “Martyrdom, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Procedure”
OR
Candida Moss, “The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern”
9. Week 9
- a. Oct 17
 - i. González, 129–156 (Chapters 13–14; Establishing the Imperial Church)
 - ii. Eusebius, “The Life of Constantine” (pp. 523–533)
 - b. Oct 19
 - i. González, 149–156 (Chapters 14; Imperial Theology)
 - ii. Drake, “A Coptic Version of the Discovery of the Holy Sepulchre”
10. Week 10
- a. Oct 24
 - i. González, 181–198 (Chapters 17–18; Arianism and Nicaea I)
 - ii. Williams, *Arius: Heresy & Tradition* (Introduction)
 - b. Oct 26
 - i. González, 199–208 (Chapter 19; Arianism and Nicaea II)
 - ii. Jones, “Were Ancient Heresies Social Movements Disguised?” (1959)
11. Week 11 (In NYC, 10/29–11/4)
- a. Oct 31
 - i. Reading catch-up day (open Q&Q)
 - b. Nov 2
 - i. Submit proposal for final paper topic and structure
12. Week 12
- a. Nov 7
 - i. González, 157–180 (Chapters 15–16; Monasticism and Donatism)
 - b. Nov 9
 - i. González, 209–224 (Chapters 20–21; Cappadocians and Ambrose)
 - ii. Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (Introduction)
13. Week 13
- a. Nov 14
 - i. González, 225–232 (Chapter 22; John of Chrysostom)
 - ii. Ruether, “The *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition in the Church Fathers”
 - iii. Pelikan, “The Authority of the Fathers” (pp. 1–22)

- b. Nov 16
 - i. González, 233–260 (Chapters 23–26; Jerome and Augustine)
 - ii. Pelikan, “The Authority of the Fathers” (pp. 22–36)
14. Week 14 (NO CLASS)
- a. Nov 21
 - b. Nov 23 (US Thanksgiving)
15. Week 15
- a. Nov 28
 - i. González, 289–314 (Chapters 27–28; The Challenge of Islam)
 - ii. Eliade, “Muhammad and the Unfolding of Islam”
 - b. Nov 30
 - i. John of Damascus on Islam
 - ii. Sahas, pp. 131–159 (Appendices)
16. Week 16
- a. Dec 5
 - i. The Conquest of Jerusalem; Designing the Haram al-Sharif
 - b. Dec 7 (last class meeting)
 - i. Concluding Thoughts