

HIST 805 Christianity and Culture in the Early Church
Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, Spring 2024

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This course is conducted online with occasional synchronous meetings:

Synchronous meetings are: Monday Evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 pm central time

On the following dates: **Feb 5, 19, Mar 4, 18, Apr 8, 22, May 6.**

Course Description

This course is meant to be an overview of the historical, social and political context in which the early Church found itself. In other words, this is "Roman History for students of the New Testament and the early Church." We will survey Greco-Roman religion, the lives of average people, and the history of the Roman Empire, from New Testament era up to the reign of Constantine.

Prerequisite: HIST 501

Both Masters and PhD students may take the course.

Student Learning Outcomes: As a result of the course, students will be able to...

- 1) Gain experience locating and reading in the wider primary sources from the historical context of the new Testament and the Early Church.
- 2) Gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the Church interacted with its neighbors in the Roman Empire, as well as an understanding of the ways in which both Church and Empire influenced each other.
- 3) Articulate an understanding of the history of the Church, including the development of such aspects as reaction to persecution and the effect that the legalization of Christianity had on the Church.
- 4) Discuss themes that are parallel to issues in the contemporary Church, as a way to engage contemporary interaction of Church and society.
- 5) Recognize the value of the spirituality and traditions of the historical Church and consider incorporating some elements into one's own spiritual formation.
- 6) Improve research and writing skills.

Required Textbooks for All Students (prices are from Amazon as of October 2023):

1) Cohick, Lynn. *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*
(Baker Academic Press, 978-0801031724, \$35.00)

2) Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*
(InterVarsity Academic Press, 978-0830815890, \$32.50)

3) MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity AD 200–400*
(SBL, 978-1589834033, \$24.95)

4) Papandrea, James L. *A Week in the Life of Rome*
(InterVarsity Press, 978-0830824823, \$20.00)

5) Papandrea, James L. *Reading the Church Fathers: A History of the Early Church and the Development of Doctrine* (Sophia Institute Press, REVISED VERSION 2022, ISBN: 978-1644136560). **This is for review, and you should already have this from History 1. If you took History 1 before 2022 and had the older version of the book, you will need to get the new one.**

6) Holman, Susan R. *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*
(Baker Academic, 978-0801035494, \$35.00)

7) Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity*
(Princeton, 978-0691248042, \$17.29)

8) Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*
(Blackwell, 978-0631200475, \$42.49)

Additional Required Textbooks for PhD Students:

1) Horn, Cornelia B, and John W. Martens. *“Let the Little Children Come to Me”:
Childhood and Children in Early Christianity*
(Catholic University of America Press, 978-0813216744, \$44.95)

2) Knapp, Robert. *Invisible Romans*
(Harvard/Profile Books, 978-1846684029, \$22.65)

3) Rhee, Helen. *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (Routledge, 978-0415354882, \$31.00)

4) Salisbury, Joyce E. *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*
(Routledge, 978-0415918374, \$41.26)

5) Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*
(Wipf & Stock, 978-1592447473, \$30.00)

6) Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (Harper One, 978-0061349881, \$11.79)

Course Requirements:

All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course. (NOTE: This course is separate from the Rome pilgrimage travel course, and students are not required to attend the pilgrimage to take this course, nor are they required to take this course to join the pilgrimage. However, students who do take this course and participate in the Rome pilgrimage may negotiate with the professor for a combined final project. Note that the Rome pilgrimage requires a deposit by November 30th, 2023, which is prior to the summer course registration.)

Reading and Video Assignments: Reading assignments are to be done *after* the Unit lecture/discussion in the synchronous meeting. Each unit, which is about 2 weeks, will have one primary source (accessed online, and subject to change), one secondary source, and one or more video lectures. PhD students will have an additional secondary source to read.

Synchronous Meetings: Attendance, participation, and professionalism will be counted as a participation grade.

FINAL PROJECT

Master Students – Historical Brief: TOP SECRET – FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

A graduate student in the physics department of Northwestern University, [NAME REDACTED] has invented a time machine. One of your colleagues, a Garrett-Evangelical student fluent in *koine* Greek, has been chosen to go back in time to the early Roman Empire. This student [NAME REDACTED] has been tasked with traveling back into the early Church, to the city of Rome, to retrieve a copy of an important early Christian document which at the present time is no longer extant. The document is not known to

exist after the turn of the fourth century, so the time traveler must go back to a time when Christianity is still illegal and persecuted. Your assignment is to decide what year is the best destination, create a cover identity, and write a historical brief which will allow your colleague to travel undetected within the Roman world. You must assign your colleague an occupation, as well as a cover identity as a devotee of one of the accepted religions or cults of the Empire, to prevent our time traveler from being executed as a Christians or as a sorcerer. In your brief, explain what the time traveler should expect, what will be different from the world we know, and what the time traveler will need to know in order to navigate the ancient world. Explain the chosen occupation and cover religion/cult. Then explain how to act as a Christian in the early Church, so that the time traveler will be able to gain the trust of the Christians of the time and enlist their help to obtain a copy of the document.

Your brief should be around 4,000 words. Use footnotes, but keep in mind that agreed-upon facts of history do not need footnotes. You are not required to do research beyond the required materials from this course, but if you do use resources not assigned for the course, make sure to footnote your sources. As long as your first footnote for any source is a full bibliographic footnote, you do not need a bibliography or "works cited" page.

PhD Students - Research Paper: The research paper will focus on any particular issue that interests you, within the appropriate time period, and subject to approval by the professor. Presumably, one would choose a topic that will provide background information for a dissertation chapter, or perhaps even become a dissertation chapter. A topic proposal with preliminary bibliography (at least five non-internet sources) will be due about halfway through the course. The paper should be the equivalent of a dissertation chapter or journal article).

All papers for this course must have standard sized margins, spacing and font size. The font must be easy to read, such as Times New Roman or Palatino. Papers must be created in Microsoft Word, as they will be turned in via moodle. The header must include the student's name, the instructor's name (spelled correctly) and the date (you should always date your papers – they reflect your thoughts at a certain point in your journey), as well as page numbers. All papers for this course should conform in style to the standard scholarly format outlined in A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations by Turabian. All footnotes MUST have page numbers (ebook locator numbers and/or parenthetical citations are not acceptable). Create a file name for your paper that has the following format: Your last name, first initial, an S (for Spring) and

then two digits for the year). So for example if Marty McFly was turning in his paper, the file name would be: **McFlyMS24.doc**.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Unit 1 (Discussion Feb 5)

Introduction to the Roman Empire

READ: Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*

READ: Papandrea, *A Week in the Life of Rome*

PhD Students *READ:* Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*

Unit 2 (Discussion Feb 19)

Religious Options in the Greco-Roman World

READ: Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*

READ: Tertullian, *Apology* (online)

PhD Students *READ:* Rhee, *Early Christian Literature*

Unit 3 (Discussion Mar 4)

The Life of Christians in the Roman Empire, part 1

READ: Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*

REVIEW: Sections from *Reading the Church Fathers* on persecution, etc.

READ: Vibia Perpetua, *The Diary of Perpetua*

PhD Students *READ:* Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*

Unit 4 (Discussion Mar 18)

The Life of Christians in the Roman Empire, part 2

READ: Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*

REVIEW: Sections from *Reading the Church Fathers* on persecution, etc.

READ: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* (excerpts)

PhD Students *READ:* Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children...*

SPRING BREAK: March 25 – April 1

PhD Students: Submit research paper topic & preliminary bibliography

Unit 5 (Discussion Apr 8)

Christian Worship and Devotion in the Early Church

READ: MacMullen, *The Second Church*

READ: Justin & Athenagoras *On Resurrection* (online)

PhD Students *READ:* Knapp, *Invisible Romans*

Unit 6 (Discussion Apr 22)

Converting the Empire

READ: Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*

READ: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*

PhD Students *READ:* Stark, *Cities of God*

Unit 7 (Discussion May 6)

The Church After the Milvian Bridge

FINAL PROJECTS ARE DUE May 6

NB: All work for this course must conform to accepted standards of academic ethics, including, but not limited to, the understanding that cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable (cf. Jeremiah 23:30!), and may result in failure of the course (all students are expected to read and understand the relevant sections of the Academic Handbook for further information about plagiarism). **Copying and pasting from the internet or any other source (even with changes) is a form of plagiarism. No outside research is needed for this introductory course, and students may not use internet searches for help on written assignments. The use of an AI or any other writing service does constitute academic cheating and will be treated as a form of plagiarism. Even the reuse of your own work from outside the course, if used without citation, constitutes a form of plagiarism/cheating. Students are not allowed to share their essays (finished or unfinished) with other students. Study groups are encouraged, but students may not collaborate on written assignments. Students who need editorial help on writing assignments may not consult other students, but must go to the Garrett Writing Center.** All professors are required to respond to all suspected incidents of academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism. Incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from the school.

Please note that permission is not granted to record this course or any discussions that take place during this course. No one is allowed to record video. An exception may be

made for the recording of audio only, in the case of a necessary accommodation for a documented disability. Such accommodations can only be approved by Student Access personnel, in consultation with the professor, for students with disabilities under the ADA/Section 504. If any part of the course will be recorded for reasons of disability accommodation, all students will be informed that the course is being recorded, though the identity of the person for whom it is recorded will remain confidential. Resulting audio-recordings are for personal use only, they may not be shared, and are to be destroyed at the conclusion of the course.

If you believe that you have a disability which requires any kind of accommodations in order for you to receive equal access to the benefits of this course, please know that Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact Student Access to move forward with the established accommodation process.

Email: student.access@garrett.edu

If you already have established accommodations with Student Access, please let the professor know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential under FERPA regulations.