

Special Instructions for Spring Semester 2021

This is a hybrid course which means that the intention is to teach it both online and in-person in the classroom. The class will obviously begin online, but the hope is to move to in-person instruction when the Los Angeles public health authorities allow that. It is, therefore, important for students taking this class to be ready to transition to instruction on the USC campus. I understand that there are recording capabilities in the classrooms but these will not allow students to participate remotely in class discussions on a par with those students attending class in person. If you cannot attend class in-person throughout the spring semester, then you will have a better learning experience in a class which is taught entirely online rather than a hybrid one.

Those who were enrolled in this course by late December have already received an email about textbooks in this course. First, you must buy the edition exactly as it is listed in the syllabus. This applies to the two ancient writings among the textbooks: the *Didache* and the *Acts of Andrew*. The full bibliographic data for these are as follows:

Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, trans. and ed. Clayton N. Jefford (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 2013).

Acts of Andrew, trans. and ed. Dennis R. MacDonald (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2005).

There are other versions of these texts available but they are very different from the required texts. There are large differences in how the ancient languages of these texts are translated, how obscure passages are reconstructed and the information the editor/ translator provides the reader. If you are not using the required editions, you will be totally lost in the course.

Second, buy paper versions of the textbooks. Avoid Kindle versions because the page numbering is often different from the printed version and you will have difficulty following references. Electronic textbooks will put you at a disadvantage in the open-book but timed exams, taken through Respondus. It is much easier to mark up and flip through a printed textbook.

Transposing a course from an in-person classroom to an online environment requires many changes. These are detailed in the syllabus and in instructions for specific assignments. Let me make you aware of some of the most important.

Until we get back in the classroom, Monday class sessions will be asynchronous and on Wednesdays we will have synchronous ("live") Zoom sessions. Asynchronous means that class lectures and student exercises will be posted on Blackboard. We will not meet on Zoom on Mondays. Students will be able to access the class material and complete student tasks at a time that is convenient for them. This will make it easier for students who are currently residing outside the Pacific Time Zone. Wednesday "live" Zoom sessions will be reserved for class discussion rather than class lectures.

Students should read carefully the section in the syllabus on expectations for student behavior in online classes that explains the "netiquette" rules for the course.

Although the intention is to move course meetings into an in-person classroom during the course of the semester, office hours will only be conducted online throughout the whole semester.

GESM 120g—SECTION 35383

Spring 2021

Christianity in the Roman Empire

Instructor: Prof. Sheila Briggs

Place and Time: WPH 102 and online, MW 3.30 - 4.50

Office Hours: only online

W 12.50-1.50

Or by appointment

email: sbriggs@usc.edu

Course Description and Learning Objectives

In this course we study the development of Christianity in the ancient Mediterranean during the early centuries of the Common Era. You will read original texts, written not only by ancient Christians but also by adherents of other religious traditions in the Roman Empire. The goal of this course is to place early Christianity in its original historical context, i.e., as a Greco-Roman religion. We will explore the great diversity among and between early Christian groups and communities and the conflicts which this engendered. By the end of the course a comprehensive picture will have emerged of Christianity's place among and interactions with other Greco-Roman religions and of how Christianity and Greco-Roman religions in general were related to the society and culture of the Roman Empire.

In this course you will:

- Define the basic concepts of religion in the Roman Empire
- Identify how these basic concepts were translated into the practices, structures and institutions of religion in the Roman Empire
- Interpret what ancient texts about Christians and Christianity meant in their original context
- Compare the different forms of Christianity, represented in the ancient texts
- Distinguish later interpretations of these texts (including our own) from those of the original context.

- Analyze how modern scholars have interpreted texts and other evidence about ancient Christianity
- Critique modern scholarship on ancient Christianity and its texts

Assessment and Assignments

One **research paper** of 7-8 pages that will carry 30% of the grade. This entails students doing their own research. The paper is due on **April 28**, our last class session. Further details for the preparation and submission of the paper will be given later in the semester.

Cumulative mid-term examination (40% of the grade in total). These are four short exams that take place online (through Respondus) or in-class on the following dates **February 10, March 10, March 31 and April 14**.

One final examination (Respondus or in-class) from 2-4 pm on **Friday May 7**. It will carry 20% of the course grade.

All examinations (midterm and final) are open-book, which means that you can use textbooks, notes and other material, distributed in the course, in the exam. For in-class examinations you are not allowed to use a computer or any electronic device during the exam and you will also need to bring with you a blue book to write your answers.

Students should have completed the required reading by the session for which it is assigned.

Course attendance and participation make up 10% of the grade. Students are allowed **four** excused absences for any reason but these four also **include illness, personal emergency, USC sporting events, religious holidays, etc.** After that students will lose a course point (1% of the course grade) for each absence from class.

Detailed instructions will be given for each assignment.

I recommend that all students take this course for a letter grade until the end of the semester. You have the option to change to Pass/ No Pass until **April 30**.

Grading Scale

Grades in the course final will be determined using the following scale

- A 95-100
- A- 90-94
- B+ 87-89
- B 83-86
- B- 80-82
- C+ 77-79
- C 73-76
- C- 70-72
- D+ 67-69

D 63-66
D- 60-62
F 59 and below

Required Reading

Please, use only the editions of textbooks specified. Do not use Kindle editions or ebook formats that are not exact equivalents of the print edition, especially in regard to page numbering.

J. B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007)
Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, trans. and ed. Clayton N. Jefford (Salem, Oregon: Polebridge Press, 2013).
Acts of Andrew, trans. and ed. Dennis R. MacDonald (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2005).

Other readings from Pagan, Jewish and Christian sources and about their background will be made available through Blackboard.

Course Schedule

January 20: Introduction to the Course.

Religion in the Roman Empire

January 25: Identifying "religion" in the Greco-Roman world. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 1-53.

January 27: The diversity of religious traditions in the Roman Empire. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 54-88.

February 1: The gods and their communities. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 89-131.

February 3: Religion and empire; religious options. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 132-181.

February 8: Roman religious policy; religious change in the empire. Reading: Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, pp. 182-210.

February 10: Midterm 1

February 15: President's Day Holiday

Roman and Greek Attitudes to Christians in the First Two Centuries

February 17: Pliny: A Roman gentleman. Reading: Wilken, pp. 1-30; ancient source on Blackboard;

February 22: Christianity as a burial society. Reading: Wilken, pp. 31-47. The piety of the persecutors. Reading: Wilken, pp. 48-67; ancient sources on Blackboard.

February 24: Galen: The curiosity of a philosopher Reading: Wilken, pp. 68-93; ancient sources on Blackboard.

March 1: Celsus: A conservative intellectual. Reading: Wilken, pp. 94-125; ancient source on Blackboard.

Christianity and Judaism

March 3: The development of scripture in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. Reading: Martin, Development of the Canon (available on Blackboard); Christians in the Jewish tradition. Reading: *Didache*, pp. 1-18.

March 8: Christians in the Jewish tradition. Reading: *Didache*, pp. 19-47.

March 10: Midterm 2

March 15-17: When and how did Jews and Christians part ways? Reading: Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (extract available on Blackboard).

The Apocryphal Acts and Popular Christianity

March 22: Reading: *Acts of Andrew*, pp. 1-42.

March 24: Reading: *Acts of Andrew*, pp. 43-115.

Martyrdom in Early Christianity

March 29: Reading: "Blood of the Martyrs," a chapter from: Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (available on Blackboard).

March 31: Mid-term 3.

April 5: Jewish and Christian Martyrdom. Readings (available on Blackboard): 2 Maccabees 7, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*

April 7: Wellness Day (no class)

April 12: Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas. Reading: *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (available on Blackboard).

April 14: Mid-term 4.

The Transition to a Christian Empire

April 19: Porphyry: The Most Learned Critic of All. Reading: Wilken, pp. 126-163.

April 21: Julian the Apostate: Jewish Law and Christian Faith: Reading: Wilken, pp.164-196.

April 26: Winners and losers in the Christian Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Heretics. Reading: Wilken, pp. 197-205; the law codes of Theodosius and Justinian. (available on Blackboard).

April 28: The Christian suppression of pagan religions. (Reading available on Blackboard).

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

You can contact the instructor through email. If your email needs a response, you will receive one in 48 hours (except at weekends).

You will find this course more manageable if from the outset of your college career you develop good academic habits.

Don't cut class. You are expected to attend every session. If you miss class, then you are left to your own resources to make up the lost work.

Submit written assignments punctually. Late assignments may lose points or not be graded at all! If you are having difficulties completing an assignment, contact the instructor as soon as possible, before or by the time the assignment is due. It is always easier to accommodate student requests for time extensions on assignments, when these are presented *before* an assignment is due. The instructor must submit the final course grade soon after the final examination. The final course grade is precisely that. The instructor cannot alter it, and even students with compelling reasons for not completing the work on time have to undergo a long petition process, which is often unsuccessful.

You **must be available** to take the **midterm exams** at 3.30 pm (Pacific Standard Time) on **February 10, March 10, March 31 and April 14** and the **final** from 2-4 pm (Pacific Standard Time) on **Friday May 7**. If you cannot make these dates and times, don't take the course!

Use Blackboard and check your USC e-mail account for course information. In this semester Blackboard will be the major platform for delivering the course online. Your access to the Zoom address for class sessions is to be found in the Tools section through the "USC Zoom Pro Meeting Lab." Instructions on assignments, course materials and announcements will be posted on Blackboard. I will also contact students through their USC e-mail accounts.

This course requires substantial writing, but is not intended to offer instruction in writing. Many of you will find it hard to reach the standards of college-level writing. The **Writing Center** is there to help you. You can have up to two 30-minute appointments per week depending upon availability. Writing Center consultants will help you develop ideas and arguments and revise rough drafts for the research paper you produce in the course. There are also workshops covering every aspect of writing where you can improve your skills in specific areas. The Writing Center is still delivering its services during the pandemic and you can access them through:

<https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>

When the campus is open, the Writing Center can be found on the second floor of Taper Hall (Room 216) and appointments and sign-ups for workshops can be made over the phone (213-740-3691). You can also try just walking in, but then you are not guaranteed an appointment, and the center at times will be very busy

All students are expected to know and follow USC's rules on **academic integrity**. Students must acknowledge all sources (books, journals, videos, web-based and electronic materials, etc.) used in an assignment, whether these are directly quoted, paraphrased or their main ideas summarized. Students should retain notes and any other material that can substantiate that they produced their work consistent with the rules on academic integrity. Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards"

<https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b>.

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a **disability** is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m. -5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. During the pandemic you can access their services through the website: <https://dsp.usc.edu/>

If an officially declared emergency (other than the current pandemic!) makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

NETIQUETTE

Setting up for our synchronous (“live) Zoom sessions

- Use a laptop or desktop for the online course, especially for the synchronous sessions. You will find it difficult to follow class discussions and presentations on the small screen of a smartphone or a tablet.
- Attend our virtual class from a private, quiet location where you will not face distractions such as noise, interruptions, etc. If you must be at a location where other people are likely to wander into the room, please let them know you are attending class and they should not interrupt you, talk to you, or do anything that might distract you, your classmates and the instructor.
- It is preferable to use headphones to reduce background noise.
- The default expectation is that you will have your camera on so we can see you. However, a student may have a good reason for not wanting to switch on their video, This should be communicated to the instructor.
- Please try to have a background that will not be distracting to others. If possible, sit in a well-lit space.
- Your microphone is muted when you join the meeting. Unmute it to speak, and then re-mute it when you are done.

Dress code and behavior

- Please, attend the Zoom meeting as if you are attending the session in an actual classroom.
- Dress as you would for a class on campus. No nightwear, swimwear or other inappropriate (lack of) dress.
- During class time, it is expected that the students will use their electronic devices only to participate in classroom activities.
- No eating or drinking in class. It is much more distracting on Zoom than when you do it at the back of a physical classroom.
- Use the chat function only for class-related matters. Private chats are disabled.

Participation in class discussions

- Please use the "raise hand" function to ask a question. You can also use the "chat" function to ask questions or make comments.
- It is best to use the "gallery view" in Zoom for discussions of the whole class or in breakout rooms.
- The synchronous Zoom sessions are recorded. USC requires you to not share these recordings (or course material on Blackboard) beyond our class.
- Be an attentive and respectful listener. Don't interrupt others when they are speaking. When you speak, show respect to students who disagree with your perspectives and opinions.