

Religious Studies 3110  
HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT  
Fall 2008

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Jesus of Nazareth taught, died, and according to his followers was raised from death in the early first century CE. By the end of the second century CE there was a well-organized Christian movement all over the Roman world and beyond. Christian bishops had developed a common base of authoritative teachings, offering a certain unity in Christian thinking but also a platform for profound ongoing debates. The Christian *ekklesia* (church) was well on its way to becoming an alternative civilization—as Augustine saw it, the earthly representation of the heavenly City of God. Under Emperor Constantine in the early third century the Christian movement became fully legal and was socially mainstreamed, with major consequences for the character of its thought and life (for example, pacifism had been the presumption for Christians but was no longer). More great changes were to affect the Christian movement including the collapse of Roman authority in the West, the rise of monasticism, rivalry with Islam, the formal split between Western and Eastern Christendom, the breakup of Western Christendom into many different churches in the Protestant Reformation, and struggles with modern science and politics that continue to preoccupy Christian thinkers today. To understand Christianity at any point in time (including now), it is necessary to consider the movement's historical trajectory. What has been going on, in the world and in the church, and how have instituted forms of Christian thought and practice responded to changes in the situation in which Christians live?

In this course we will monitor the historical evolution of the whole Christian movement (though with relatively more attention to Western Christianity) up till the beginning of the modern age with the help of Paul Johnson's superb one-volume account. Against this background, we will get acquainted in depth with several leading Christian thinkers who interestingly reflect their own pivotal moments in the history of Christianity and also exert great influence on times to come. We will treat their writings as their tradition treats them, as classics of theological insight. That does not mean we must agree with them or adhere to any one interpretation of them. It means we will seriously consider their suggestions for how best to think about a supreme ground and goal of life. In the course of doing this, we will strengthen (a) our grasp of the possibilities of theological reflection and discussion, and (b) our understanding of the spiritual challenge of Christianity.

Course readings will be assigned mainly in these required books, available in the bookstore:

Paul A. Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, Touchstone

Origen, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, Paulist

Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin

Thomas Aquinas, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton Pegis, McGraw-Hill

Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger, Anchor

Grading will be based on class participation (10%), Theological Notebook entries (40%), a term essay (30%), and a take-home final examination (20%).

## SCHEDULE

Subject to change by announcement in class and/or e-mail

### Week 1

W 8-27 Introduction to course.

### Week 2

M 9-1 The early Christian movement.

Read: Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, pp. 3-63

W 9-3 How does a Christian live in the world?

Read: "Introduction," Origen 1-6; Origen, "An Exhortation to Martyrdom," *Origen* 41-79

### Week 3

M 9-8 What to make of "scriptures."

Read: Origen, *On First Principles*, *Origen* 171-205

W 9-10 The concept of a divine trinity.

Read: Origen, *On First Principles*, *Origen* 205-216

### Week 4

M 9-15 The Constantinian turn.

Read: Johnson 67-103

W 9-17 Augustine's world.

Read: Johnson 103-122

"Introduction" in Augustine, *City of God*, pp. ix-xxxiii

### Week 5

M 9-22 How Christian values relate to pagan values; the significance of events.

Read: Augustine, Book 1, Preface and Chaps. 1-12, 16-22, 26-36; Book 2, Chaps. 3-4, 19-20, 29; Book 14, Chap. 28 (great thesis statement); Book 15, Chap. 4

W 9-24 More on Providence, virtue, and true religion.

Read: Augustine, Book 4, Chaps. 4, 15, 25; Book 5, Preface and Chaps. 1, 8-26; Book 7, Chaps. 30-33; Book 10, Chaps. 1-6; Book 11, Chaps. 1-3

### Week 6

M 9-29 Making sense of time and eternity.

Read: Augustine, Book 11, Chaps. 4-8, 24-28 (on the Trinity); Book 12, all

W 10-1 Where salvation (and damnation) history is headed.

Read: Augustine, Book 19, Chaps. 12-14, 17; Book 20, Chaps. 1-2, 6, 9; Book 21, Chaps. 9, 15, 17, 27; Book 22, Chaps. 5, 17

### Week 7

M 10-6 The Western "Dark Ages," the Byzantines, and the West-East split.

Read: Johnson 122-188

W 10-8 Aquinas's world: Scholasticism, or Theology in the University.

Read: "Introduction," *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* xi-xvi; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Q. 1, pp. 1-19; Q. 2, Art. 3, pp. 24-27 (the Five Ways).

Week 8

M 10-13 The will of God, Providence, freedom, and evil.

Read: Aquinas 192-224

W 10-15 Happiness.

Read: Aquinas 429-467

Week 9

FALL BREAK.

W 10-22 Law: eternal, natural and human.

Read: Aquinas 609-614, 616-650

Week 10

M 10-27 Christendom.

Read: Johnson, pp. 191-264

W 10-29 Mysticism.

Read: Medieval women mystics TBA

Week 11

NO CLASS MONDAY (Instructor at AAR)

W 11-5 The Reformation.

Read: Johnson, pp. 267-328

Week 12

M 11-10 Salvation by grace and faith alone.

Read: Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (controversy with Erasmus), *Martin Luther* 166-203

W 11-12 Kinds of righteousness; law and gospel.

Read: Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, *Martin Luther* 99-133, 139-145

Week 13

M 11-17 The nature of the church and sacraments.

Read: Luther, *On the Pagan Servitude of the Church*, *Martin Luther* 249-291

W 11-19 Sacraments, cont.

Read: Luther 291-314 (on baptism)

Week 14

M 11-24 The spirituality of Christian freedom.

Read: Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, *Martin Luther* 52-85

PAPER DUE.

THANKSGIVING.

Week 15

M 12-1 Christianity enters modernity.

Read: Johnson, pp. 331-375

W 12-3 Conclusion, cont.

Read: TBA

The take-home final exam is due at our class period's assigned time in finals week.

The revised term essay is due by the last day of finals week.

## THE THEOLOGICAL NOTEBOOK—GUIDELINES

For your course notebook, a loose-leaf binder is recommended. This will make it easier to hand in and take back your entries, and also to keep handouts together.

Each Monday that a reading assignment has been made in one of our featured theologians, you will be asked to bring to class a new entry in your Theological Notebook—about 2 pp., if typed double-space (500-600 words)—in which you discuss how our most recent work (including class discussion, as appropriate, in addition to the latest reading) fits into your historical study of Christianity. In each entry you should briefly analyze something that makes sense in a more positive way (e.g., a theological argument that seems strong, or that helps explain something you'd wondered about) and something else that is hard to make sense of (e.g. a theological argument that seems wrong, or an idea that sticks out at an odd angle from your own conception of Christianity—what's up with that?).

The Theological Notebook is an important learning tool that will enable you to keep track of what we come up with in a cumulative way.

Individual Notebook entries and responses will be graded unsatisfactory (-), satisfactory (✓), or very good (+) depending on the attentiveness and thoughtfulness they show. The Notebook as a whole will get a letter grade.

## THE ARGUMENT REVIEW

At least once in the semester you will provide guidance to class discussion by preparing a 1-page handout for us in which you address such questions as these: What basically is going on in the assigned reading? What do you think is a particularly important passage? How does the reading seem to fit into our picture of the development of Christian thought so far? How, if at all, does it speak to your own theological concerns?

## GUIDELINES FOR THE TERM PAPER

For your 10-12 pp. term paper (typed, double-spaced), you will tackle an issue in historical theology. This issue will have to do with religious teaching, e.g. what Christianity has to say about the creation of the world, divine providence, sin, human moral capacity, love, the ideal community, etc. The issue will have attracted the attention

of leading Christian thinkers, and you will either feature one such thinker's position (e.g. Origen on salvation) with some consideration of how other Christian positions differed from it, or two or three thinkers' positions (e.g. Origen vs. Augustine on salvation), in effect setting up a debate. You will choose key primary-source texts for the purpose of explaining and evaluating the theological positions. You will also touch base with current scholarship, discussing at least one other substantial discussion of your thinker(s) on your issue (e.g. a recent article on Origen or on salvation debates among church fathers). For how your issue is seen today is part of what you are studying.

By Week 6 you will have consulted with me on your topic and on how to find appropriate resources.

Work hard; have fun. You will have an opportunity to rewrite the essay to improve it.

### SOME COURSE RULES

1. **Class attendance.** Being in class, being engaged with the work of the class, and behaving courteously are all expected. One discourtesy to avoid is coming into class late. Better late than never, definitely; but lateness counts as half an absence—that is, the assignment of sharing in the class's work that day will be counted as only half done. (The math of this: a course point is lost for every absence after the second.)

2. **Late papers.** Written assignments turned in late will lose a letter grade or equivalent. Homework may not be turned in more than one week after its due date. No work of any kind will be accepted after the last day of final examinations. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted to the victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.

3. As a general rule, **no e-mail submissions.** Unless the instructor allows it under specified circumstances, e-mail submissions of assigned writing are not accepted.

4. **Incompletes.** An "Incomplete" grade for the course will only be given to students who, due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, find themselves unable to complete course requirements during the term and can reasonably be expected to complete them within a few weeks after the term's end. The "Incomplete" must be requested and appropriately justified before the end of final examinations.

5. **Disabilities.** Students with documented disabilities should discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester.