

HISTORY 424
EARLY CHURCH HISTORY
TuTh 9:30-10:45
MJ 101
art.marmorstein@northern.edu

Art Marmorstein
TC 363
MW 11-11:50, W 1-2
TuTh 11-11:50
Phone: 626-2608

INTRODUCTION:

The emergence and growth of Christianity is probably the single most important turning point in all of history. The spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire ultimately brought about changes in virtually every aspect of life, changes that continue to affect the world today. This class will examine the process by which the Christian church grew from a hated and persecuted fringe group to become the single most powerful force within the Roman Empire.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The ESV Study Bible (or any other good study Bible)
Eusebius: The Church History (ISBN 0-8254-3328-2)

If you don't already have one, please purchase a good study Bible for use in this course. I have extra copies of the ESV Study Bible available in my office for a minimal cost.

Please bring a hard-copy Bible to class each day and be sure to have finished the assigned readings (listed below). Make sure also that you have posted a comment on the class blog before each day's class. I strongly recommend that you highlight important passages in the study Bible and make marginal notes.

Note that most classes will focus on discussion of the primary source material (either the Bible readings or the Eusebius readings), and you will probably be lost and confused if you haven't done the reading for that day.

ON-LINE MATERIALS

You can find lecture transcripts and study materials by going directly to my website (<http://www.marmorstein.website>) or by looking at the links on my D2L page. I will try to have Panopto versions of the lecture portion of the class linked via D2L.

BLOG:

For each class day that includes a primary source reading assignment (almost every day the class meets!), I would like you to add an entry to the class blog, *Early Church Keyline Blog 2026* (<http://earlychurchkeyline2023.blogspot.com>).

GRADING:

Your grade for this course will be based primarily on your midterm and final exams, each of which will count approximately 25% when I determine your final grade. In addition, I will take into account attendance, participation, and quiz scores. I expect all students to attend class faithfully, to keep up with the readings, and to participate in class discussion. I do take attendance into account when figuring out your final grade.

My grading method allows for improvement, and I frequently have students who fail the first exam who nevertheless end up earning "A" or "B" grades in the course. Please note, though, that I factor "improvement" into your course grade *only* if you demonstrate your commitment to the course through good attendance and other evidence of hard work.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

- 1/13 Introduction
- 1/15 Roman and Jew in the time of Christ (Matthew 1-14)

- 1/20 The Gospel for Those Who Need No Gospel (Matt. 15-28)
- 1/21 The Gospel for the Gentiles (Luke 1-12)

- 1/28 The Most Beautiful Book Ever Written (Luke 13-24)
- 1/30 Professing Themselves to Be Wise...

- 2/3 ... The Glorious Achievements of Modern NT Scholarship
- 2/5 Crooked Questions and Straight Answers (John 1-11)

- 2/10 The Rest of the Story (John 11-21)
- 2/12 *** **MIDTERM I** ***

- 2/17 (Acts 1-12)
- 2/19 (Acts 13-28)

- 2/24 An Undivided House (I Corinthians)
- 2/26 Who Really Knows? (II Peter and Jude)

- 3/3 Sin, Sins, and Sons (Romans)
- 3/5 The Great Mystery (Ephesians)

- 3/10 When the Going Gets Tough (James)
- 3/12 The Tough Get Growing (I Peter)

- 3/14-22 *** **Spring Break: No Class** ***

- 3/24 Beautiful Things Are Difficult (Revelation 1-12)
- 3/26 Difficult Things are Beautiful (Revelation 13-22)

- 3/31 Catch up day and review
 4/2 *** **MIDTERM II** ***
- 4/7 Eusebius as a Historian (Eusebius Chapters I-II)
 4/9 The Formation of the Canon (Eusebius Chapter III)
- 4/14 The Lost Books of the Bible?
 4/16 Persecution and the Church (Eusebius Chapter IV-V)
- 4/21 Division in the Church (Eusebius Chapters VI--VII)
 4/23 Division in the Church (Eusebius Chapter VIII)
- 4/28 Christian Philosophers (Eusebius Chapters IX)
 4/30 They Say That All Good Things Must End (Eusebius Chapter X)

******* Final Exam: Wednesday, May 6, 9:45—11:45 AM *******

GRADING:

Your grade for this course will be based primarily on your three major exams and your blog entries, each of which will count approximately 20% when I determine your final grade. In addition, I will take into account attendance and participation.

EXAM FORMAT:

Midterms and Final exam--8 ID's, 1 essay

ID's will be selected from the terms put on the board at the beginning of each lecture. You will be asked not only to identify the terms, but also to explain their historical significance. I am impressed when students can include plenty of detailed information, but I am even more impressed when students can show how the ID terms relate to important themes discussed in this class.

Essay questions will deal with major themes discussed in the lectures. Most often, the exam question will be a generalization I have made in class with the additional word, "comment." A student who studies hard and does the required reading should have plenty to say in response to each of these questions. You will be given 75 minutes for each midterm and two hours for the final exam. Most students will need the full time to do a good job.

What is a good job? I tell students over and over again that a good essay consists of a series of good generalizations based on the exam question and backed up with specific support from the lectures and the readings. I am particularly impressed when students include in their essays references to primary source material.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

Cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct run contrary to the purposes of higher education. Cheating includes the use of any notes during the midterm or final exam. Please place no marks of any kind on or in your blue book before I give the signal to begin taking the exam. All exams must be taken on blank bluebooks. On at least one exam, bluebooks will be checked before the exam. Bluebooks that have not been checked, have missing pages, or pages with large erasures will not be accepted.

It is not cheating to study with another student, to share notes, or to prepare essays or ID's together. However, if you do study with another student, be sure you do not sit next to each other during the exam.

Please be especially careful to observe academic integrity standards on the blogs. The blog entries are intended to make sure you have done the primary source readings, and your comments should be based on your own observations, not someone else's ideas. Plagiarism (e.g. copying material from the internet or recycling work done by another student) is not allowed.

Northern State University's official policy and procedures on cheating and academic dishonesty as outlined in the Northern State University Student Handbook applies to this course. Students caught cheating will receive a zero for the assignment, and, since zeros are worse than F's, they are likely to fail the course as a whole.

NSU DISABILITY POLICY:

Northern State University recognizes its responsibility for creating an institutional climate in which students with disabilities can thrive. If you have any type of disability for which you require accommodations, please contact the NSU Office of Disability Services (626-2371, Student Center 217) as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs.

BOARD OF REGENTS ACADEMIC FREEDOM POLICY:

Under Board of Regents and University policy student academic performance may be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards. Students should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled. Students who believe that an academic evaluation reflects prejudiced or capricious consideration of student opinions or conduct unrelated to academic standards should contact the academic dean administratively in charge of the class to initiate a review of the evaluation.

NORTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY STATEMENT:

Northern State University strives to build an academic community of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences who are committed to sharing diverse ideas in a mutually respectful environment. We value open discourse and consideration of multiple perspectives on issues of regional, national, and international importance, in which individuals are free to express their points of view. Our goal is a diverse learning community with equal opportunity for all.

FIRST MIDTERM STUDY GUIDE

POTENTIAL ID'S:

(GOSPEL), PHARISEES, SADDUCEES, GEMATRIYA, NAZAR, RABBI, JOHN THE BAPTIST, SERMON ON THE MOUNT, (PARABLE OF THE SOWER), (PARABLE OF THE TARES), (LITTLE APOCALYPSE)

LUKE, THEOPHILUS, SERMON ON THE PLAIN, SAMARITANS, LAZARUS, UNJUST STEWARD, PRODIGAL SON, ROAD TO EMMAUS

SYNOPTIC PROBLEM, F.C. BAUER, CONSISTENT ESCHATOLOGY, SOURCE CRITICISM, FORM CRITICISM, REDACTION CRITICISM, MARCAN PRIORITY, TEXTUAL CRITICISM

LOGOS, JOHN THE BAPTIST-J*, PHILIP, AGAPE, LAZARUS-J*, PETER-J*, THOMAS, PILATE, PHARISEES-J*, CANA

*When there is a “J” after the term, I want you to discuss how John’s Gospel supplements and complements the synoptic gospel presentation of this figure/term.

POTENTIAL ESSAY QUESTIONS:

- A. The Gospel of Matthew might be described as the gospel for those who do not think they need the gospel. In particular, the gospel seems to be addressed specifically to Jewish sects like the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Comment.
- B. While the Gospel of Luke is in many ways similar to the Gospel of Matthew, there are some important differences between the Gospels. Many of these differences can be explained by the fact that Luke is addressed to a different audience. While Matthew is a gospel well suited to Jews, Luke is a gospel particularly well suited to the needs and interests of gentiles. Comment.
- C. Paul's comment about those who become fools by professing themselves to be wise certainly applies to modern New Testament scholarship. Comment.
- D. The Gospel of John is in some ways very different from the synoptic gospels. However, the picture of Jesus and his teachings given in the gospel does not conflict with that of the synoptics but complements and supplements it--sometimes in surprising ways. Comment.

STUDY GUIDE--MIDTERM II

POTENTIAL ID'S:

(PETER), (PHILIP), (STEPHEN), (SAUL OF TARSUS), (BARNABAS), (SILAS), (PRISCILLA), DAY OF PENTECOST, (AGRIPPA), (FELIX), (FESTUS), FAC I*, FAC II*, FAC III*, FAC IV*

I CORINTHIANS, ROMANS, II PETER, JUDE, CORINTH, APOLLOS, AGAPE, SARX, SOMA, ANASTASIS, GnosticISM, ENOCH, PISTIS, HAMARTIAS, NATURAL THEOLOGY, CHARIS

JAMES, EPHESIANS, I PETER, JAMES THE JUST, AGAPE, SOPHIA (wisdom), GLOSSA, ERGA, PLOUSIOS, MYSTERY RELIGION, EPHESUS, MYSTERIA, UPOTASSO, I PETER

APOCALYPSE, SEVEN CHURCHES, SEVEN SEALS, SEVENTH SEAL, SEVEN TRUMPETS, MYSTERY BABYLON, LITTLE APOCALYPSE, TWO WITNESSES, NEW JERUSALEM, MILLENNIUM

*FAC I, FAC II, FAC III, FAC IV are "Favorite Acts Characters I-IV." For these potential ID's, choose any figures who you find particularly interesting. Any of the figures in parentheses above would make good choices. You might also choose a somewhat more obscure character if you prefer

POTENTIAL ESSAYS:

A. The Book of Acts is a key source in understanding the surprisingly rapid growth of the early church. Comment.

B. Discuss the ways in which Paul, Peter, and Jude tried to eliminate divisions in the church. Make particular reference to the problems addressed in Romans, I Corinthians, II Peter, and Jude.

C. The "mystery" religions went a long way toward helping people in the ancient world feel right about themselves. In James, Ephesians and I Peter, the writers do an even better job helping people feel right, not only about themselves, but about others. Comment.

D. While Revelation is in many ways a difficult book, it is a beautiful book as well. Comment.

FINAL EXAM STUDY GUIDE

POTENTIAL ID'S:

EUSEBIUS, DEMONSTRATION OF THE GOSPEL, PAMPHILIUS, ABGAR, PHILO, JOSEPHUS, THEOPHANIES

CANON, ECCLESIASTICUS, TOBIT, JUDITH, DEUTEROCANONICALS, GOSPEL OF THOMAS, APOCRYPHA, PSEUDEPIGRAPHA, ACTS OF PAUL AND THECLA

NERO, (DOMITIAN), PLINY, TRAJAN, DECIUS, (VALERIAN), POLYCARP, BLANDINA, DIOCLETIAN, GALERIUS

GNOSTICISM, VALENTINUS, MARCION, IRENAEUS, (QUARODECIMIANI), SABELLIUS, PAUL OF SAMOSATA, NOVATIAN, CYPRIAN, MONTANISTS,

CONSTANTINE, EDICT OF MILAN, ARIANS, COUNCIL OF NICAEEA, ECUMENICAL COUNCILS, JUSTIN MARTYR, ATHENAGORAS, ORIGEN

POTENTIAL ESSAY QUESTIONS:

A. Eusebius' History of the Church is an extremely valuable source for anyone who wants to understand the development of the church during the Ante-Nicene period. Playing theater games might help too. Comment.

B. One task facing the early church was to decide what writings would and would not be accepted as authoritative scripture, "canonical." Many have argued that they made a mistake or two in their decisions, but, for the most part, it would be hard to improve on their choices. Comment.

C. It is not surprising that Christians were persecuted by the Romans. It is somewhat more surprising that persecution not only failed to eradicate Christianity but may even have led to its spread. Comment.

D. In some ways, dealing with heresy is as tricky as dealing with cancer. While the early church was able to develop diagnostic tools and surgical instruments effective in containing some forms of heresy, other forms of heresy much harder to diagnose and treat. Comment.

E. Constantine is one of the most important figures in the history of the church. The support he gave the church was certainly an important factor in the eventual triumph of Christianity over paganism. But while the political support of men like Constantine was important, there was something even more important to the success of the church--the triumph of Christian thinkers in the battle for the hearts and minds of men. Comment.

STUDY QUESTIONS: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1. Why does Matthew, with so many interesting and important things to say about Jesus, choose to begin his gospel with a long list of names rather than with something more attention-grabbing?
2. Matthew constantly cites the Old Testament. Why? Do you think that the scriptures he cites would have convinced any of the Pharisees and Sadducees that Jesus was the Messiah?
3. What is Jesus' attitude toward the law? What differences are there between the standards set by Jesus and those in the law of Moses?
4. Why does Matthew (who obviously knew the differences between the two sects) constantly group the Pharisees and the Sadducees together?
5. What does Matthew object to in the conduct of the Pharisees and Sadducees? What does he object to in the doctrines of these groups?
6. What significance does Matthew see in the miracles performed by Jesus? Why does he choose to emphasize the particular miracles he does?
7. How does Matthew explain the fact that so much of Jesus' teaching was in parables? What, according to Matthew, was the purpose of these parables?
8. What does Matthew have in mind when he talks about the "kingdom of heaven"? What does he think this kingdom is/will be like?
9. What is Matthew's eschatology? What does he think things will be like in the "last days"? When does he think these last days will begin? In view of this, how does he think a wise man should behave now?
10. In Matthew's view, who is responsible for Jesus' death?
11. Why is Matthew's account of the resurrected Jesus so brief?

STUDY QUESTIONS: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

1. What reason does Luke give for writing his gospel? What sources does he claim for his information?
2. Why does Luke spend so much time on the events surrounding the birth of Christ? How is his account of Christ's birth different than Matthew's? How do you explain these differences?
3. How does Luke treat the Pharisees and Sadducees? Is his portrayal of these groups any different than Matthew's?

4. Luke does not cite the Old Testament nearly as much as Matthew, but when he does cite the OT he does it at greater length. Why?
5. Luke includes several stories not included in the gospel of Matthew, e.g. the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15), the story of the good Samaritan, and the story of the dishonest steward (Luke 16). Can you think of any particular reason for this?
6. Luke often gives a much briefer account of certain incidents in Jesus' ministry. One example is his account of the sending out of the disciples (Luke 9, Matthew 10). Can you think of any reason this might be so?
7. Is there anything in the Gospel of Luke that might appeal to particular groups among the gentiles, e.g. to women, to the poor, to philosophers, etc.?
8. Compare Luke 21 and Matthew 24. How do you explain the differences between these passages?
9. How does Luke conclude his gospel? Why conclude the gospel like this? With what message does he leave his readers?

STUDY QUESTION ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. Why does John begin his gospel where he does? How is this beginning different from that of the synoptic gospels?
2. How is John's treatment of John the Baptist different from that of the synoptic gospels? Why these differences?
3. Why does the Gospel of John include the calling of Philip and Nathaniel--but not the calling of John? Why does this gospel seemingly make so little reference to John? (But cf. 1:40)
4. John places the "cleansing of the temple" early in Jesus' ministry. The synoptics place it late. Is this a contradiction? Why the seeming conflict?
5. John includes many episodes in the teaching of Jesus the synoptics leave out, e.g. the conversation with Nicodemus, the story of the woman at the well, the turning of water into wine, the healing of the lame man at Bethesda, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. Why does John include these episodes? Why do the synoptics leave them out?
6. Notice the questions put to Jesus in the Gospel of John and the answers he gives. Is this consistent with the synoptic picture of Jesus' technique in dealing with questions?
7. What about the miracles Jesus performs? Are the miracles described in the Gospel of John consistent with the miracles of the synoptics? (cf. John 7:21-23 and Matthew 12:9-14).
8. Is the Christology of the Gospel of John consistent with the Christology of the other gospels, i.e.

does John seem to have the same view of who and what Jesus is as the synoptic writers?

9. In Ch. 13-17 John includes many words of Jesus not found in the other gospels. Are the teaching here consistent with the rest of Jesus' teaching? How do you explain the fact that the other gospels do not include any direct reference to these ideas?

10. How does John's treatment of the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus differ from that of the synoptics? How do you explain these differences?

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is Luke's purpose in writing the book of Acts? Should this book be viewed as completely separate from the Gospel of Luke, or is it simply a continuation of that work?

2. Note how the apostles are portrayed in the Gospel of Luke and how they are portrayed in Acts. In what ways is the portrayal of these men the same? In what ways is it different? How do you account for these differences?

3. How does Acts explain the spread of the Gospel among so many of the Jewish people? How does it explain the failure of many Jews to accept Christianity?

4. What seem to you the main strengths of the church as it is described in Acts?

5. What does the book of Acts teach about the proper relationship between the Christians and secular authority? What does it teach about ecclesiastical authority?

6. Note Peter's sermons in Acts 2 and Acts 3 and Stephen's sermon in Acts 7. What do these sermons have in common? What are the main points stressed by these men in presenting the gospel message to their fellow Jews?

7. Note the portrayal of the Apostle Paul. How does Luke explain the transformation of this man from a hater of Christians to a zealous convert? Does this seem a probable explanation?

8. What kind of man is Barnabas? How would such a man have helped the spread of Christianity?

9. In what ways are Peter and Paul alike? In what ways are they different? Why was Paul so effective in spreading the gospel? Why was he so effective in establishing churches that would last?

10. According to the book of Acts, what were the major obstacles to the spread of Christianity?

11. How did the Roman authorities respond to the gospel and those who preached it? Is there any hint of why Roman officials would later persecute Christians so bitterly?

12. Why does Acts end where it does? Is this a real "conclusion" to the book? With what message does it leave the reader?