

**CH 1A03 – HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY 1**  
**McMaster Divinity College**

**Fall Semester 2010**

Monday 10:30am-12:20pm

Instructor: James Tyler Robertson

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course will examine the development of the Christian Church from its apostolic origins up to and including Medieval Christianity. Special attention will be given to the social, political and cultural background that inspired some of the more defining ideas that have shaped the global Christian community. Because this course will focus on events prior to the Reformation, many of the lectures and assignments will be used to emphasize the common and universal history that all Christians share.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

**Knowing:** The course will help the student better grasp the various cultural, political and social environments that existed throughout the history of the Christian Church.

The student will analyze the development of Christianity and gain a better understanding of the general course of the Christian Church.

**Being:** Understand how the world in which prominent theologians and church leaders lived and worked impacted and guided their theology and decisions.

To give the student access to some of the teachings of the church in order to enhance his/her own spiritual growth and awareness of the depth of the Christian tradition.

**Doing:** To develop in each student an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective

This course will increase the student's ability to judge and critique how his/her own culture and period in history impacts personal decisions, including beliefs and theological constructs.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. San Francisco: Harpers, 1984. **G**
- Maunder, Chris and Bettenson, Henry (eds.). *Documents of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. **B/M**
- Heath, Gordon L. *Doing Church History*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- Thomas a Kempis. *Imitation of Christ* (Any version will suffice)
- Augustine. *City of God* (Any version will suffice)

**NOTE: The letter at the end of each book indicates how it is referenced in the reading schedule.**

### **SUGGESTED TEXTS**

- Bockenkotter, Thomas. *A Concise History of the Catholic Church: Revised & Expanded Edition*. New York: Doubleday, 1998.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2008.
- Maier, Paul L. *Eusebius: The Church History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999.
- White, Caroline. *Early Christian Lives*. Penguin, 1998.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Personal History** (2pages): The student will compose a brief history of an episode of his/her own life. Select an event that is deemed funny, important, and/or memorable and write about it in the third person. This assignment is not telling a story but recording a history of an event in the life of a person. As such, it must be documented by sources so that statements made can be supported with external evidence. Examples of such sources might include: yearbook quotes, interviews with people present at the event, journals, newspaper clippings, family photo albums, etc.

Value of Assignment: 10%

Purpose: To help the student better understand the importance of accurately recording the life of an historical person in a manner that is faithful to the person being studied, supported by evidence, and relevant to the modern reader. Also, this assignment will allow the students to better understand what will be expected of them with regards to grammar, sentence structure and sophistication of arguments for the remaining assignments.

Due: September 20 (at the beginning of class)

**Book Review/Critique** (3 pages): The student will select one book listed under the “Books for Review/Critique” section of the syllabus (Following “Course Schedule”), read it and offer a critique of one of the book’s main points based on historical evidence. The books offered for review/critique challenge some of the basic tenets of traditional Christianity based on historical claims that, the authors argue, undermine the traditional teaching of the faith. In this assignment the student will argue the claims of the author based on personal research from relevant sources.

Value of Assignment: 15%

Purpose: Recent literature promoting alternative views of the Christian faith are popular in the twenty first century. Whether or not a student is in a church setting, it is likely that, at some point, he/she will be asked about such literature or his/her views on these

“alternatives.” It is the purpose of this assignment to help the student intelligently and accurately state his/her own opinions and defend his/her assertions accurately.

Due: November 15 (at the beginning of class)

**Historical Study/Sermon** (7 pages): This assignment can be successfully completed one of the following ways:

1) Design a multi-week study of a person, event or historical development of a certain theology that could be used in a specific ministry setting. Included in this assignment should be a brief (no more than a paragraph) explanation of the ministry setting so that it can be discerned how accurately the study will meet the needs of the people being taught. The format of the assignment can be shaped to meet the student’s specific setting but the content of the work should demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter, intelligent and sophisticated arguments and should adequately defend a thesis based on historical evidence. For example: “This three-week study on Clovis will argue that his baptism introduced a more militaristic Christianity which would impact generations of believers to follow.”

2) Write a sermon for your church based on a person or event in Christian history. As with other sermons, this assignment should focus on being accurate, supported with evidence, and relevant to the listeners in the pew. The sermon should defend why this person or event matters to the modern church member as well as bringing to them a deeper understanding of their own faith tradition. An example of such a sermon could be “Vandalized: How the Collapse of Rome Changed Our Church”

3) Write a fictitious sermon in the voice of a famous person from Church History. What would Augustine think of the war in Afghanistan? How would Theresa of Avila speak to women’s issues? Would Bernard of Clairvaux support environmentalism? Obviously, such an assignment requires certain creativity but the paper must be supported by evidence, faithful to the person’s voice, and relevant to the modern listener.

**NOTE:** Whatever person/event chosen must be from the periods in time discussed in this half of the course. Do not write about any character/event from the Reformation or beyond.

Value of this assignment: 35%

Purpose: To help the student increase his/her ability to utilize knowledge of the past to enhance ministry in the present and to increase the student’s ability to accurately and creatively bring the past to bear on the present in meaningful and helpful ways.

Due: November 29 (at the beginning of class)

**In-class Final Exam** (6-10pages): This exam will be written on the last day of classes during the allotted time. The exam will feature 5 essay questions of which the student will be expected to choose two to answer. Each answer should demonstrate the student’s knowledge of the time period as well as any relevant, significant developments that

occurred at that time. Each answer should be no less than three pages, but no more than five.

**NOTE:** *For students who prefer to type rather than write, computers will be permitted. Any student wishing to type their answers are asked to bring a USB key to save their exam on, and then hand that into the professor at the end of class time. All keys will be returned once grading is completed. If the student is caught using the internet to access information, the exam will automatically become null and void and the student will be charge with academic dishonesty.*

Value: 30%

Purpose: To assess the student's ability to intelligently discuss and define historical events without the aid of a textbook or time to research.

Due: December 13 (in class)

**Participation in class and online:** Partaking in class discussions as well as asking questions will make the class much more educational and helpful. No one likes to sit and listen for two hours so make the class relevant by asking questions that matter to you and give the other students a break from hearing only one voice. The added bonus is that asking questions and commenting actually can help improve your mark.

In addition, each semester the student will be expected to have read a central theological work and be able to engage in an in-class dialogue regarding the book, its value today, and relevant historical information related to setting, authorship and prominent theological themes. For this semester the book being discussed in class will be Augustine's *City of God* in the class of October 25.

This in-class discussion needs to be attended in order to get participation marks.

Value: 10%

### **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

September 13: Introduction to the Course & the Power of telling the Christian Story

September 20: From Koshur to Christian: The Jesus Sect sent out into the world.

Readings: **G** chapters 3-6 & 11; **B/M** pages 67-84.

***Personal History Due***

September 27: The Word Dwells Among Us: Rise of Orthodoxy, Formation of the Canon and Intellectual Christianity

Readings: **G** chapters 7-9; **B/M** pages 25-31.

October 4: Conquer!: Constantine Converts, the Council of Nicaea, and the Church as a force within the State

Readings: **G** chapters 13-14 & 16-17; **B/M** pages 7-24.

**October 11: NO CLASS THANKSGIVING WEEKEND**

October 18: Called Out: The Rise of Monastic Orders & Barbarian Churches

Readings: **G** chapter 15, 22 & 26; **B/M** pages 86-93

October 25: Augustine and the great thinkers of early Western Christianity

Readings: **G** chapters 19-21; **B/M** pages 59-64.

**In Class Discussion about *City of God***

November 1: In the Valley of the Shadow of Death: The fall of Rome, the rise of the Papacy, Celtic Christianity

Readings: **G** chapters 24-25; **B/M** pages 167-172;

November 8: United We Stand: Charlemagne and the Birth of Christendom

Readings: **G** chapters 28-29; **B/M** pages 106-109.

November 15: This We Believe: A Review of Prominent Creeds and Councils (up to 1000)

***Book Review/Critique Due***

November 22: Rent Asunder: Divisions between Eastern & Western Christianity. The Eastern Church Contrasted to the Western Church

Readings: **G** chapter 27; **B/M** pages 97-105.

November 29: "God Wills It!" The Crusades and Medieval Spirituality

Readings: **G** chapters 30-31; **B/M** pages 110-126.

***Historical Sermon/Lesson Plan Due***

December 6: Seeds of Discontent: The decline of the Papacy & the early Reformers Wycliffe and Hus.

Readings: **G** chapters 32-34; **B/M** pages 191-201.

December 13: Final Exam (in class)

**BOOKS FOR REVIEW/CRITIQUE**

Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh. *Holy Blood Holy Grail*

Michael Baigent. *The Jesus Papers*

Bart Ehrman. *Misquoting Jesus*

Tom Harpur. *The Pagan Christ*

Christopher Hitchens. *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*

Lynn Picknett. *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ*

Lynn Picknett. *The Sion Revelation: The Truth About the Guardians of Christ's Sacred Bloodline*

Margaret Starbird. *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail*

**NOTE: If there is another book the student would like to use please get it approved beforehand.**

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

This is a list of some other books that explore Christian history at the survey level.

Bainton, Roland, *Christianity*. Boston: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Christendom Parts I & II*, 1984.

Baumer, Christoph, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

Cairns, Earle E., *Christianity Through the Ages: A History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

Dowley, Tim, ed., *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Johnson, Paul, *A History of Christianity*. London: Penguin Books, 1988.

Jones, Timothy Paul. *Christian History Made Easy*. Torrance: Rose, 2009.

Lane, Tony. *A Concise History of Christian Thought: Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

Latourette, Kenneth, *A History of Christianity (Vol.1 & Vol.2)*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975.

Noll, Mark. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2008.

Peterson, R. Dean, *A Concise History of Christianity*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2000.

Shelley, Bruce. *Church History in Plain Language: Second Edition*, 2006.

Walker, Wiliston/ Norris, Richard A./ Lotz, David W./ Handy, Robert T. *A History of the Christian Church Fourth Edition*. Toronto: Scribner, 1985.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ [www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php](http://www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php).

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Essays must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. All other essays will be considered to be late. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 3% per day (not including weekends) if they attach to their essay a letter explaining the genuine emergency that delayed them. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will not receive comments and constructive criticism from the professor.

The essay should be handed directly to the instructor. To avoid any potential problems, students are advised to keep their working notes and a copy of their paper until a final mark has been received.

Unless noted otherwise, all written work must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*.

Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins.

Please do not attend class if you are ill and contagious (e.g. the flu).

This syllabus and all its contents remain the possession of the professor and are subject to change. The final version will be available on the first day of class.