Course Description
The first four centuries of the Christian era will illustrate the lively twists and turns of social experimentation that set the stage for the emergence of the Christian religion. The course will be concerned with fundamental arenas of intellectual and social conflict, including: constructions of Christian myths of apostolic origins and authority; the appropriation of the Jewish epic; the intellectual challenge of gnostics; the domestication of Greek philosophy; interpretations of sexuality and gender; experiences of martyrdom and prosecution; theological reflections on human nature and society; and the ways Christians were seen by Romans. The objective will be to grasp the beginnings of the Christian religion as a human achievement of cultural consequence.

Course Requirements
1. Punctual attendance at every meeting of the class.
2. Careful preparation of the assigned readings prior to their discussion in class. This course is designed to develop skills in close reading. You must keep up with the scheduled readings, study them carefully, and come to every class with a solid grasp of the texts.
3. First paper (5-6 pp.) due online on Fri., Oct. 7.
4. Second paper (5-6 pp.) due online on Fri., Nov. 11.

Fair Warnings
1. Laptops and other electronic devices are very distracting and must be used judiciously.
2. You are responsible for knowing and adhering to the University’s Honor Code.

Course Textbooks

Course Xerox Packet (of 15 texts)
Syllabus

1. Tues., Sept. 6   INTRODUCING THE STUDY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITIES
   *Hegesippus’s Memoirs (179-189 C.E.), in Eusebius, Church History 3.32:
   “Until then the Church had remained a virgin, pure and uncorrupted, since those who
   were trying to corrupt the wholesome standard of the saving message, if such there
   were, lurked somewhere under cover of darkness. But when the sacred band of the
   apostles had in various ways reached the end of their life, and the generation of those
   privileged to listen with their own ears to the divine wisdom had passed on, then
   godless error began to take shape, through the deceit of false teachers, who now that
   none of the apostles was left threw off the mask and attempted to counter the
   preaching of the truth by preaching the knowledge falsely so called.”

   *Justin’s First Apology 26 (ca. 150 C.E.), in Eusebius, Church History 2.13; 3.26; 4.11:
   “After the Lord was taken up into heaven the demons put forward a number of men
   who claimed to be gods. These not only escaped being persecuted by you, but were
   actually the objects of worship--for example Simon, a Samaritan from a village called
   Gittho, who in Claudius Caesar’s time, thanks to the art of the demons who possessed
   him, worked wonders of magic, and in your imperial city of Rome was regarded as a
   god, and like a god was honoured by you with a statue in the River Tiber between the
   two bridges. . . . Almost all Samaritans, and a few from other nations too,
   acknowledge him as their principal god, and worship him. And a woman named
   Helen, who travelled around with him at that time and had previously lived in a
   brothel, they call the First Emanation from him. . . . Another Samaritan, called
   Menander, from the village of Caparattaea, became a disciple of Simon and like him
   was driven mad by the demons. It is known that he arrived in Antioch and deluded
   many by magical trickery. He even persuaded his followers that they would not die:
   and there are still some who on the strength of his assertion maintain this belief. . . .
   There was one Marcion of Pontus, who is still busy teaching his adherents to believe
   in some other god greater than the Creator. All over the world, with the help of the
   demons, he has induced many to speak blasphemously, denying that the Maker of his
   universe is the Father of Christ, and declaring that the universe was made by another,
   greater than He.”

2. Thurs., Sept. 8   Topic 1: CONSTRUCTING THE CHRISTIAN EPIC


4. Thurs., Sept. 15   Topic 2: MARTYRDOM AND PROSECUTION
   *Moss, Ancient Christian Martyrdom, introduction, chap. 1
   *Old Testament Apocrypha: 2 Maccabees 6-7 (www.biblegateway.com/nrs)
5. Tues., Sept. 20  IMITATING CHRIST
*Moss, Ancient Christian Martyrdom, chap. 2
*Ignatius, Letter to the Romans (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 102-6)
*Martyrdom of Polycarp (in Richardson, 141-58)

6. Thurs., Sept. 22  CONTESTING PHILOSOPHY
*Moss, Ancient Christian Martyrdom, chap. 3

7. Tues., Sept. 27  MARTYRDOM AND THE SPECTACLE OF SUFFERING
*Moss, Ancient Christian Martyrdom, chaps. 4-5
*Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons (xerox: Eusebius, Church History 5.1-2)
*Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas (xerox: Musurillo, 106-31)

8. Thurs., Sept. 29  HISTORIOGRAPHIES AND IDEOLOGIES OF MARTYRDOM
*Moss, Ancient Christian Martyrdom, chap. 6, conclusion

*Clement’s First Letter (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 33-73)

10. Thurs., Oct. 6  CONTESTING CHURCH ORDER
*Letters of Ignatius (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 74-120)

*First Paper (5-6 pp.) due online on Fri., Oct. 7*

11. Tues., Oct. 11  CONSTRUCTING CHURCH ORDER
*Letters of Ignatius (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 74-120)
*Letter of Polycarp (in Richardson, 121-37)
*The Didache (in Richardson, 161-79)

12. Thurs., Oct. 13  CLAIMING APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY
*New Testament: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus (www.biblestudytools.com/nrs)

*Brakke, The Gnostics, chap. 1
*The Hymn of the Pearl (xerox: Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, 366-75)
*Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.29 (xerox: Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, 163-69)
14. Thurs., Oct. 20   IDENTIFYING GNOSTICS AND THEIR LITERATURE  
*Brakke, The Gnostics, chap. 2  

*Oct. 25: FALL BREAK*  

15. Thurs., Oct. 27   ON THINKING WITH MYTH  
*Brakke, The Gnostics, chap. 3  
*The Secret Revelation of John (xerox: King, The Secret Revelation of John, 25-81, 95-121)  

16. Tues., Nov. 1   ON THE HUMAN CONDITION  
*Brakke, The Gnostics, chap. 4  
*Hebrew Bible: Genesis 1-6 (www.biblestudytools.com/nrs)  

17. Thurs., Nov. 3   Gnostic Schools of Thought  
*Brakke, The Gnostics, chap. 5  

18. Tues., Nov. 8   The Gospel of Truth  

19. Thurs., Nov. 10   Topic 5: Christian Apologetics  
*Irenaeus’ Against Heresies (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 343-97)*  

*Second Paper (5-6 pp.) due online on Fri., Nov. 11*  

20. Tues., Nov. 15   Early Christian Heresiological Literature  
*First Apology of Justin (in Richardson, Early Christian Fathers, 225-89)*  

21. Thurs., Nov. 17   Topic 6: Scripture and Interpretation  

*Nov. 22: NO CLASS (American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings)*  

*HAPPY THANKSGIVING*  

22. Tues., Nov. 29   Contested Readings of the “Old” and “New” Testaments  
*Origen, The Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs (xerox: Greer, Origen, 217-44)*
*Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, introduction, chaps. 1-3
*Pliny, Epistles 10.96-97 (xerox: Radice, *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, 293-95)

24. Tues., Dec. 6  PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUES OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY
*Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, chaps. 4-5

25. Thurs., Dec. 8  RELIGIOUS CRITIQUES OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY
*Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, chaps. 6-7, epilogue

*Final Paper (7-8 pp.) due online on Wed., Dec. 14*