

Christianity Before Constantine Davenant Hall, Michaelmas Term 2021

Course Lecturer: Dr Matthew Hoskin, hoskin@davenantinstitute.org

Description of Course

The first three centuries of Christianity laid the earliest layers of the tradition of the faith. These centuries are not unlike the world we live in today, with a pluralist world beyond the church and the rise of old heresies again within. Besides that, the era before Constantine's conversion in AD 312 is crucial for the rest of the history of Christianity—in these years we see the rise of the episcopacy, liturgical worship, prayer practices and other spiritual disciplines, the canon of Scripture, Christian patterns of exegesis, the identity-forming experience of persecution, and a rich Trinitarian theological heritage that awaits the fourth century for clarified means of articulation.

In this course, students will consider the historical journey of the faith from the post-apostolic age to around the year 300. Students will also be given the opportunity to grapple first-hand with some of the early church's great thinkers, such as the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian of Carthage, besides the liturgical and legislative texts that ordered the lives of ancient believers.

Course Format

This course will have a weekly two-hour session. The first hour will consist of a lecture covering the history of the church as it moves towards Constantine, and the second hour will be a discussion of an ancient text read in preparation for the class. Read well and come prepared to talk!

Google Classroom will be the central hub for all official communications. I will also double up via e-mail and the course's Discord channel.

Course Outline

Week beginning...	Lecture Topic	Eusebius	Other Readings
September 27	Introduction and overview	<i>EH</i> 1-2 (Penguin 1-64)	
October 4	Christianity in the Roman Empire (1 st c.)	<i>EH</i> 3 (Penguin 65-104)	Letters of Ignatius (Penguin, 53-112)
October 11	The Apologists	<i>EH</i> 4 (Penguin 105-137)	Justin, <i>First Apology</i> (FotC 33-111)
October 18	Irenaeus: Authority and Symphony	No Eusebius	Irenaeus, <i>On the Apostolic Preaching</i>
October 25	Heresy: The Rise and Fall of Gnosticism (and Montanists)	<i>EH</i> 5 (Penguin 138-178)	Selections from Valentinus to be distributed
November 1	Christianity in Alexandria	No Eusebius	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paedagogus</i> (ANF 2: 208-296)

November 8	Latin Christianity	No Eusebius	Cyprian, Treatises 1 (<i>De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate</i>) and 3 (<i>De Lapsis</i>)
November 15	Exegesis and Christology (3 rd c.)	<i>EH</i> 6 (Penguin 179-220)	Origen, <i>On the Gospel of John</i> , Books I-II (ANF 9:297-345)
November 22	Liturgy, Worship, Sacrament	<i>EH</i> 7 (Penguin 221-255)	<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> Books II and VII (ANF 7: 465-478, 396-425); <i>Didache</i> (Penguin 185-199); Anaphora of <i>Apostolic Tradition</i> ; Liturgy of Addai and Mari
November 29	Persecution	<i>EH</i> 8-9 (Penguin 256-302)	Martyr texts to be distributed

Readings

No textbook is required. All of the readings are from primary sources available online, primarily Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (abbrev. *EH*). Recommended translations are provided alongside links to readings online. Outside of Irenaeus, all readings are available in the Ante-Nicene Fathers ten-volume series edited by Philip Schaff and others, published in 1885. This is abbreviated ANF in the list below and then the volume and page numbers follow. Eusebius is in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2 (NPNF2), vol. 1.

Eusebius, *The History of the Church*. Recommended translation: G. A. Williamson, rev. Andrew Louth. London: Penguin, 1989. Also in the *Loeb Classical Library* and online here: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iii.vi.i.html>

Weekly Readings besides Eusebius:

Week 2

Epistles of St Ignatius of Antioch. Recommended: *Early Christian Writings*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth, rev. Andrew Louth. London: Penguin, 1987. Also available in any series of the *Apostolic Fathers* (consider the Loeb by Kirsopp Lake or the edition and translation of Michael W. Holmes). Online here: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01/anf01.v.i.html>

Week 3

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*. Recommended: Thomas B. Falls, trans. *St. Justin Martyr*. Fathers of the Church vol. 6, pp. 33-111. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948. Also available in the *Oxford Early Christian Texts* series with Greek edition and English translation by Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, 2009, and *Ancient Christian Writers* by Barnard, 1997. Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01/anf01.viii.ii.html>

Week 4

Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Recommended: trans. John Behr. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1997. Public domain: *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Trans. J. Armitage

Robinson. London: SPCK, 1920. Available online:

https://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/irenaeus_00_proof_eintro.htm

Week 5

Gnostic texts to be distributed.

Week 6

Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* (ANF 2: 208-296). Online:

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02/anf02.vi.iii.html>

Week 7

Cyprian of Carthage. Treatises 1 (*De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*) and 3 (*De Lapsis*). NB: Dr Hoskin will hopefully be using the out-of-print edition of Maurice Bévenot (Oxford 1971). A modern, in-print translation is: Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Church: Select Treatises*. Trans. Allen Brent. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2006. Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05/anf05.iv.v.i.html> and <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05/anf05.iv.v.iii.html>

Week 8

Origen, *On the Gospel of John*, Books I-II (ANF 9:297-345). Online:

https://ccel.org/ccel/origen/epistle_john/anf09.xv.iii.i.i.html

Week 9

Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles (Addai and Mari) (ANF 7: 561-568):

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07/anf07.xii.iv.html>

Anaphora of ch. 4 of the *Apostolic Tradition* attrib. to "Hippolytus". *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition*, trans. Henry Chadwick and Gregory Dix. London: SPCK, 1968. Online version:

<http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Historical/hippolytus.htm>

Week 10

Martyr texts to be distributed by Dr Hoskin.

Assessment

Attendance and participation: 10%

Ante-Nicene Book Review (1000 words): 40% (Due Friday, 12 November)

Research Essay (4500 words): 50%

Attendance and Participation

Students enrolled in the course for credit are expected to be present for all lectures, prepare by doing the readings, and engage in class discussion.

Ante-Nicene Book Review

Students will be given the chance to write a review about a book by an author from before the year 312 who is not included in the readings for the course in order to broaden their knowledge of the period. Recommended texts for review:

Hermas. *The Shepherd*. Often included with Apostolic Fathers (see Ignatius of Antioch above).

Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/hermas/pastor/anf02.ii.ii.i.html>

“Hippolytus” (attrib.). *The Refutation of All Heresies*. Trans. M. David Litwa, *Refutation of All Heresies. Translated with an Introduction and Notes*. Atlanta: 2015. *This edition does not give Hippolytus as author since that is disputed*. Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05/anf05.iii.iii.i.i.html>

Lactantius. *Divine Institutes*. Trans. Anthony Bowen, Peter Garnsey. Liverpool: 2003.

<https://ccel.org/ccel/lactantius/institutes/anf07.iii.ii.i.i.html>

Minucius Felix. *Octavius*. Available in the Loeb Classical Library volume with Tertullian (vol. 250), trans. Gerald H. Rendall. Harvard, 1931. Online:

<https://ccel.org/ccel/felix/octavius/anf04.iv.iii.i.html>

Novatian. *On the Trinity*. Trans. Russell J. DeSimone. *The Trinity, the Spectacles, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1972. Online:

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05/anf05.vi.iii.i.html>

Tertullian, *Apology* and *De Idolatria*. Available in Loeb Classical Library vol. 250, trans. T. R. Glover. Harvard, 1931. Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/apology/anf03.iv.iii.i.html> and

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03/anf03.iv.iv.i.html>

Research Essay

Students are required to complete an essay of their own original research into either one of the lecture topics or one of the primary sources assigned. **You are required to run essay topics past Dr Hoskin by November 8.** This is a formal academic essay that will require proper argumentation, citation of primary and secondary material, and formal English prose (no dactylic hexameters!). **The essay is due December 10.**

Further Reading

Some recommended secondary literature

Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. London: Penguin, 1968.

Clark, Gillian. *Christianity and Roman Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Green, Bernard. *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries*. London: T & T Clark, 2010.

Wilken, Robert L. *The Christians As the Romans Saw Them*. New Haven ; London : Yale University Press, 1984.