

Early Christian Literature

Professor Laurence H. Kant

© 1994 Laurence H. Kant, All rights reserved

Cornell University
Spring, 1994
Rockefeller B16
Tu., Th.: 1:25-2:40

Near Eastern Studies 326
Religious Studies 329

Office Hours: Tu., Th., 2:45-3:45 in Rockefeller 129; or by appointment. Telephone number: 5-6275 (NES dept.); (315) 428-1893 (home).

Purpose: The course will approach this material from the point of view of the academic study of religion. There are no prerequisites, nor are there any presumptions as to religious background or commitment. Knowledge of ancient languages is not at all necessary, but students with the background will have the opportunity to use it.

In this course, we will explore the history and beliefs of early Christians through their literature. Close attention will be paid to early Christian aesthetics and hermeneutics. After surveying representative texts from the New Testament, we will examine selected leading writers, including Ignatius of Antioch, the Shepherd of Hermas, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Valentinus, Origen, and Tertullian. Likewise, Gnostic texts will receive considerable attention. We will also investigate texts such as martyrdoms, apocryphal acts and gospels, sayings, apocalyptic, revelatory dialogues, letters, prayers, hymns, homilies, and inscriptions. By the end of the semester, students should have an idea of the broad range of early Christian literature, as well an idea of how to approach texts from a cultural context different from their own.

REQUIREMENTS: I anticipate that this class will be run as a seminar, where students are responsible for presentation of some of the material. Therefore, attendance and active participation are essential and will count for a portion of the final grade. The most important basis of evaluation will be a final paper. Around the middle of the term, I will also expect an outline and a short excursus on one component of your final paper. In addition, each student will have the opportunity to make a brief oral report on their final paper topic which I will try to coordinate with the appropriate class topic.

BOOKS REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE

Cameron, Ron, ed. The Other Gospels. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982.

Chadwick, Henry. The Early Church. Pelican History of the Church, 1.
Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1967.

Holmes, Michael, ed. and rev. 1st ed. edited and translated by J. B. Lightfoot
and J. R. Harmer (1891). The Apostolic Fathers. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids,
Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989.

Origen. Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom; Prayer; First Principles,
Book IV; Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs; Homily XXVII on
Numbers. Translation and Introduction by Rowan A. Greer. Preface by Hans
Urs von Balthasar. Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist
Press, 1979.

Schneemelcher, Wilhelm, and Edgar Hennecke, eds. Translated by R. McL. Wilson.

New Testament Apocrypha. Vol. 2. Writings Related to the Apostles, Apocalypses, and Related Subjects. Cambridge, England and Louisville, KY: James Clarke & Co. and Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, 1992.

BOOKS FOR OPTIONAL PURCHASE (strongly recommended, especially for those interested in having useful reference books)

Duling, Dennis C., and Norman Perrin. The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History. Under the general editorship of Robert Fern. 3rd ed. (1st ed., 1974). Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994.

Layton, Bentley, ed. and trans. The Gnostic Scriptures. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987.

MacMullen, Ramsay; and Eugene N. Lane, eds. Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.: A Sourcebook. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy. New Revised Standard Version. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

All books available for purchase are also on reserve at Uris.

READINGS: Most relevant readings will be found in the books mentioned above or on reserve at Uris Library. Handouts will be provided at appropriate times. When reading, you should consult relevant notes and introductions. For the New Testament, it is best to use the New Revised Standard version, so that we may share the same text. Students should bring the relevant primary texts to every class, since these readings are the central components of the course. Unless you have taken a history of Christianity course, it would be helpful as soon as possible to read H. Chadwick, The Early Church, pp. 9-124 (listed above). For those unfamiliar with Graeco-Roman/Near Eastern background, read the following: D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, The New Testament, pp. 35-136; and R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and Christianity, pp. 1-118.

SYLLABUS

January 25 Survey of the Course: Documents to be Read; Issues for Examination; Methodological Considerations; Requirements.

January 27 Gospel of Mark

Read: Gospel of Mark in its entirety
D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, New Testament,
pp. 295-325 (on reserve)

Read by February 3: Gospel of Matthew

February 1 Divine Men and Missionaries in the Graeco-Roman World

Read: R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and Christianity, pp. 118-51
Selections from the Life of Apollonius of Tyana
(on reserve)

February 3 The Synoptic Tradition and Q

Read: Matthew 4.1-25.46
D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, New Testament,
pp. 1-33, 141-75 (on reserve)
Handouts on Miracles

Optional: Luke 4.1-21.38

February 8 Infancy of Jesus Through John the Baptist

Read: Matthew 1.1-3.17, Mark 1.1-1.14, Luke 1.1-3.38,
John 1.1-1.18
D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, New Testament,
pp. 507-47 (on reserve)

February 10 Passion

Read: Matthew 26.1-27.66, Mark 14.1-15.47,
Luke 22.1-23.56, John 18.1-19.42

February 15 Resurrection Stories

Read: Matthew 28.1-20, Mark 16.1-20, Luke 24.1-53,
John 20.1-21.25

February 17 Paul: 1 Corinthians

Read: 1 Corinthians in its entirety
D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, New Testament,
pp. 177-213, 223-30 (on reserve)

February 22 Book of Acts

Read: Book of Acts in its entirety

February 24 Ignatius of Antioch

Read: M. W. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, pp. 79-118

March 1-3 Early Christian Stories of Martyrs

Read: Martyrdom of Polycarp in M. W. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, pp. 135-44
Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas in H. Musurillo, Acts of the Christian Martyrs (on reserve), pp. 106-31
Martyrs of Lyons, in H. Musurillo, Acts of the Christian Martyrs, 62-85
Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs in H. Musurillo, Acts of the Christian Martyrs, pp. 86-89
R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and Christianity, pp. 164-7, 218-60
J. Stevenson, A New Eusebius, pp. 2-7

Skim: New Testament Book of Revelations

*Note that page totals for H. Musurillo (Acts of the Christian Martyrs) are mis-leading, since half of the pages provide texts in the ancient languages:

March 8 Two Apologetic Texts: Apologies of Athenagoras and Tertullian

Read: Pp. 7-106 in series, "Fathers of the Church" 10 (E. J. Daly, trans.)
R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and Christianity, pp. 173-198

Optional: Epistle to Diognetus in M. W. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, pp. 291-306

March 10 Shepherd of Hermas

Read: M. W. Holmes, Apostolic Fathers, pp. 189-290

March 15-17 Infancy Stories: Infancy Gospel of Thomas;
Protevangelium of James

Read: Ron Cameron, Other Gospels, pp. 107-30

Other Stories in the Life of Jesus: Secret Gospel of Mark,
Papyrus Egerton 2, Gospel of Peter, Epistula Apostolorum,
Acts of Pilate

Read: Ron Cameron, Other Gospels, pp. 67-82, 131-182

March 29-31 Sayings of Jesus: Gospel of Thomas, Dialogue of the Savior,
Gospel of the Egyptians, Papyrus Oxyrrhynchus 840,

Apocryphon of James

Read: R. Cameron, Other Gospels, pp. 38-64
B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 376-99

April 5 Jewish-Christian Gospels: Gospel of the Hebrews,
Gospel of the Nazoreans, Gospel of the Ebionites

Read: R. Cameron, Other Gospels, pp. 83-86, 97-106

The Pseudo-Clementines

Read: W. Schneemelcher, NT Apocrypha, pp. 483-541

General

Read: R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and
Christianity, pp. 152-63

April 7: Acts of Peter

Read: W. Schneemelcher, NT Apocrypha, pp. 271-321

April 12: Acts of Paul and Thecla

Read: W. Schneemelcher, NT Apocrypha, pp. 212-70

April 14: Acts of Thomas

Read: W. Schneemelcher, NT Apocrypha, pp. 322-411

Some might find it interesting also to read the
Acts of Andrew and the Acts of John.

April 19-21: The Gnostic Myth: Secret Book According to John,
Reality of the Rulers, Thunder%%Perfect Intellect

Read: B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. xv-xxxiii, 5-51,
65-76

April 26-28: Valentinus: The Gospel of Truth

Read: B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 217-27, 250-64

School of Valentinus: Ptolemy's Epistle to Flora,
Treatise on Resurrection, Gospel of Phillip

Read: B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 267-353

Basilides

Read: B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 417-25

April 28-May 3 Origen: Selections from On First Principles,
Prologue to the Commentary on Song of Songs,
Homily 27 on Numbers

Read: Origen, pp. 171-269
Handouts

May 5: Three Christian poems: Clement's Hymn to Christ,
Hymn of the Pearl, Inscription of Avercius

Read: B. Layton, Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 366-375
Handouts
R. MacMullen and E. N. Lane, Paganism and
Christianity, pp. 50-63

Optional: Origen, pp. 81-170