

History of Christian Experience I

TF 1123

Spring 2020

Fellowship Hall, Caldwell Chapel

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:00-11:20 am

Instructor: Christopher Elwood

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Course description

This is the first part of a two-semester sequence introducing students to the global history of Christianity. Special attention will be paid to formation of Christian identity and theological expression in relation to other religious traditions. Class sessions will include both lecture and discussion.

Goals and objectives:

This course aims to help students develop their capacity for faithful and coherent theological expression in pastoral practice by giving them a basic understanding of Christianity's global history and equipping them with tools of historical and contextual theological interpretation.

In LPTS's structure of assessment, this aim is most closely related to Master of Divinity Student Learning Outcome (SLO) 2:

Students will learn to become skillful interpreters of the history of Christian experience; Master of Arts (Religion) SLO 2:

[Students will] Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the global history of the Church; and MA(R) SLO 3:

Demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary.

(It also contributes indirectly to aspects of the following specified outcomes: SLO 3: *Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs.* SLO 4: *Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice.* SLO 6: *Can articulate own theological perspective, mindful of the global, multicultural, multi-religious context of contemporary ministry.*)

Students will

- through reading of primary and secondary sources, listening to and viewing audio and visual media, and participation in lectures and class discussion, develop an appreciation and basic understanding of the diverse contexts of Christian experience in the ancient and medieval periods, as well as key elements of controversy and struggle for Christian identity in changing times;
- through reading, lectures, discussion, and writing, explore the variety of ways ancient and medieval Christian communities understood and responded to religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, and status difference and sought to shape religious identities in various cultural settings;
- through reading, discussion, and in writing, develop skills of theological/ethical-cultural analysis;
- through writing essays and in an exam, clarify their own theological and ethical positions.

Required texts:

John. W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, eds. *Readings in World Christian History, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004. ISBN 1570755205.

Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001. ISBN 1570753962.

Other (primary source) readings are posted on the class CAMS site or are made available on print reserve in the library.

Course requirements:

1. Preparation for class and active, thoughtful participation in discussion.
2. 50-word sentences. Students will record their response to the reflection question posed in the syllabus for each class's reading. These will take the form of one 50-word (maximum) sentence (see description by Professor Charles Cohen of the University of Wisconsin in Appendix 1, p. 11, below). Turn in a typed, hard copy of this assignment to the instructor at the beginning of the class for which it is assigned (with a word count). You are required to do your choice of 18 sentences. Late sentences

will not be accepted. A passing mark depends on your submitting, on time, the minimum number of required sentences. (30%)

3. Three short essays (1200-1400 words, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double-spaced), chosen from the following six questions. However, you must turn in at least one of the first two essay assignments. (50%)

a. Essay 1: *Interpreting Early Christian Witness*: “We make our confession without fear,” asserted Justin the Martyr in his *Second Apology*—even in the face of governmental hostility. How do you interpret the confidence Justin attributes to Christian confessors? In your discussion, give particular attention to the theological grounds Justin cites for the boldness of early Christian witness. Be sure to discuss his understanding of the character of Logos (or Word). How does Justin use this concept in the service of his apology? Finally, engage questions of the significance of this interpretation and witness for other and different contexts and later practice: What aspects of this theological approach do you find helpful, or not so helpful, for ongoing witness in particular settings? **Due Monday, March 2.**

b. Essay 2: *Formative Christological Traditions*: Both Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Constantinople (§ 34 in *RWCH*) assert that their understandings of Christology are faithful to the Council of Nicea. Show how each is interpreting this Creed from within the framework of the Christological traditions they represent (Alexandria and Antioch). What is important for each to defend? What are the deficiencies they see in the other? How do you evaluate the interpretations? **Due Friday, March 23.**

c. Essay 3: *Images of Female Holiness*: Write an essay on the “Lives” of holy women as edifying stories for early Christians. Draw on the “Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity” and on “The Martyrdom of Martha, Daughter of Posi, Who Was a Daughter of the Covenant”; consider also the “Life of Macrina” and the “Life of Susan.” What common elements do you see in these stories? What elements root them in particular times and places? What differences did it make that Christians told stories of women as well as men who excelled in holiness? **Due Monday, March 30.**

d. Essay 4: *Christian Apology and Medieval Islam*: In his *Apology before the Caliph Mahdi*, the East Syrian Patriarch Timothy I asserts: “Muhammad is worthy of all praise, by all reasonable people.” Why do you think he made such a claim? In his exchange with the caliph, how did the patriarch suggest that this view of the Prophet of Islam was compatible with basic elements of Christian confession? In your view, is the approach taken by Timothy a helpful one (in such a circumstance)? In writing your essay, utilize the historical evidence you have at hand, including evidence drawn from the text of the *Apology*. **Due Monday, April 20.**

e. Essay 5: *Christians and Culture in China*: Describing the East Syrian Christian mission in China from the seventh to the ninth century C.E., Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist assert that these “Christians borrowed from the Buddhist and Taoist archive of ideas to find ways to articulate their own messianic faith” (HWCM, p. 321). Using the assigned selections from “Chinese Christian Sutras” as well as the inscription of the stone monument at Xian as evidence, give a brief account of how the writers of these texts borrowed from other traditions, suggest why they might have done so, and interpret the results of their efforts. Do these writings appropriate borrowed ideas or images in ways that are conducive to a faithful rendering of Christian faith in a particular context? Do you find the suggestion that such a “mixing of ideas” was partly responsible “for the downfall of these first Christian [Chinese] communities” persuasive? Why or why not? **Due Monday, April 27.**

f. Essay 6: *Suffering and Grace in Julian of Norwich*: Julian of Norwich wrote her *Showings* during a period of history several historians have described as calamitous. Her own city of Norwich was disastrously affected by outbreaks of bubonic plague—at least three during her lifetime, the first of which claimed the lives of approximately forty-five percent of the city’s inhabitants. Write an essay on the theological message of Julian’s *Showings* regarding sin, suffering, and grace by placing the assigned selection from her work into this setting and interpreting it historically and contextually. What theological picture does one find in Julian’s text? How do her reflections constitute a theological response to suffering? Is this a practically useful theology, in your view? Why or why not? **Due Friday, May 8.**

The papers will observe conventions of academic writing. Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center (ASC). For help with citation, voice, development of argument, or other aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the ASC early in the semester. ****Also, PLEASE study carefully and refer regularly to the writing guidelines distributed with this syllabus (Appendix II, pp. 12-14).****

All papers must be saved as a Word document (please save with the file name following this form: “Yourlastname HCE essay 1”—with the essay number corresponding to the information above, and not to the number of your submission) and submitted to the CAMS course site (<http://mail1.lpts.edu/estudent>) before the end of the day on which the paper is due.

4. A comprehensive final examination, Wednesday May 15, format to be described in class. (20%)

N.B. In order to pass the course, students must complete and submit all assigned work, as stipulated above.

Evaluation and grading:

This course is being offered on a Pass/Fail basis. This means that the student’s final grade for the class will appear on their transcript as either P or F, and that the grade will have no impact on their GPA, negative or positive. *If a student believes that P/F grading will affect them adversely, they may talk to and petition the instructor for a letter-grade option.* Students should understand that evaluation for this course will seek to maintain standards commensurate with a graduate level of teaching and learning. Assessment of student work will be communicated in written comments on returned assignments, as well as by the following symbols, which summarize strengths and deficiencies in a general way:

- ✓ indicates work that meets basic expectations for graduate level academic work, in terms of effort and outcome (passing work).
- ✓+ indicates work that exceeds basic expectations for graduate level academic work (passing work).
- ✓- indicates work that shows strong effort toward achieving a basic level of academic competence, while reflecting some significant deficiencies in comprehension and/or expression (passing, but marginal work).
- 0 indicates work that does not meet basic expectations for graduate level academic work (failing work).

Academic Honesty:

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another’s language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Accessibility and Accommodation:

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu) during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructors.

Inclusive Language:

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct

quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. For more information, see <http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>.

Policy on late work:

All written assignments are due, unless indicated otherwise, by 11:59 pm on the date given in the syllabus. Students who encounter unusual obstacles to getting an assignment in may ask for an extension of the due date. They should contact the instructor to request an extension before the work comes due, giving the reason for the request, and a proposal for a new, extended due date for the instructor's consideration. Students may speak to the instructor directly, but they are required to communicate *by email* so as to provide a record of the request. Extensions are granted solely at the discretion of the instructor. Assignments submitted late, when no extension has been granted, will be penalized in the grading by one letter grade increment for every day (a ✓+ paper becomes a ✓ if one day late, a ✓- if two days, etc.). Assignments submitted more than four days after the agreed due date will not be accepted. *N.B. When submitting late work (with or without an extension), always send an email notification to your instructor.*

Use of electronic devices in class:

Do not send or read text messages during class. Cell phones should be turned off. In the event that you have a legitimate need to be accessible during class, you may ask the instructor for an exception to this rule. Laptops should not be used if you cannot trust yourself to restrict your use to note-taking and referring to the assigned primary source readings for the day. You may not access the Internet during class time unless specifically for purposes directly relevant to the course and approved by the instructor. Do not record class sessions or make use of video chat applications without the express permission of the instructor. Any misuse of electronic devices during class time, including checking of email or social networking sites will negatively affect the course grade.

Attendance Policy:

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructors of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a reduced or failing grade in the course.

Contacting the instructor:

While students are always welcome to speak to the instructor at any time about questions or issues that arise, the most reliable and efficient means of setting up an opportunity to meet and talk over important matters is through email. Students are strongly encouraged to contact the professor when they feel they need clarification on topics and questions that arise in the class, or when they are confronting significant challenges in their learning.

Schedule of classes and assignments:

Th 2.6 Introduction to the course: Christian history in global perspective
Before class: listen to the podcast, "The Hidden Brain: Spoiler Alert! The Psychology of Surprise Endings" (around 29 minutes):
<https://www.npr.org/2019/12/18/789441553/spoiler-alert-the-psychology-of-surprise-endings>

T 2.11 From the beginning: patterns of diverse trajectories
Reading: *HWCM*, pp. 1-2, 47-49, chs. 1, 3, begin Part II
RWCH 1. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*

3. *Didache*11. *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

Reflection: *How do these readings (Ignatius, the Didache, the Acts of Paul and Thecla) testify to diversity among ancient Christians in understandings and experience of what is central to Christian identity, practice, and community?*

Th 2.13

Cities of God: Alexandria and Edessa

Reading: *HWCM*, complete Part II

RWCH 15. Origen, *On First Principles*

17. Bardaisan of Edessa, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*

*CAMS:

Introduction to the Reading

Philo of Alexandria, "Moses and the Law"

Reflection: *How did Origen propose we correctly read Scripture, and how might his approach have been influenced by the earlier writer, Philo?*

T 2.18

Emergence of the "Great Church"

Reading: *HWCM*, pp. 99-101, chs. 10, 13

RWCH 5. Correspondence of Pliny & Trajan

6. The Martyrs of Lyons

8. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*

9. Certificate of Sacrifice

Reflection: *Why were narratives such as "The Martyrs of Lyon" important to the church in the early centuries of the Christian movement?*

Th 2.20

Gnostic currents and early Christian diversity

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 11

RWCH 2. *Gospel of Thomas*

12. *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*

13. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

Reflection: *How did the teachings about Jesus propounded by Christians labeled as "Gnostic" differ from the presentations of Irenaeus and other "Catholic" apologists?*

T 2.25

Jews and Christians: Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 12

*CAMS

Introduction to the Readings

"The Preachings of Peter" (selections)

Marcion, *Antitheses* (selections)

Justin the Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho" (selections)

John Chrysostom, "Homily against the Jews," 83-91

Reflection: *How do the four primary source readings for today testify to developing Christian interpretations of Jewish scriptures and worship? What factors influenced these developments?*

Th 2.27

Donatists and Catholics, Rome and Carthage

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 15, 20

RWCH 7. *Martyrdom of Perpetua & Felicity*

10. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*

16. Cyprian, *Letter 55*

40. Augustine, *City of God*

Reflection: *Explain how the primary source readings for today depict Christian attempts to interpret and respond to the cultural settings, including cultures of violence, of the churches in different times and places.*

(M 3.2) *Due today – Essay 1*

T 3.3 Constantine and the Coming of a “Christian Empire”

Reading: *HWCM*, pp. 155-159, ch. 14

RWCH 18. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*

Reflection: *How does Eusebius’s message of divine peace and the witness of Constantine compare to Augustine’s view of Christian experience in history in his City of God?*

Th 3.5 Nicea and Trinitarian Controversies

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 16

RWCH 19. Letters of Arius & Alexander of Alexandria

20. Nicene Creed & the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

27. Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Graecos*

Reflection: *What was “the Arian controversy” and how did the Council of Nicea seek to address it?*

T 3.10 Chalcedon and Christological Controversies

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 17

RWCH 34. Letters of Cyril of Alexandria & Nestorius of Constantinople

35. *Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon*

36. Zacharias the Scholastic, *Life of Severus* (optional)

Reflection: *What were the key differences between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria (represented, in your readings, by Nestorius and Cyril) and how did the Council of Chalcedon attempt to manage the dispute?*

Th 3.12 Meanings and forms of holiness

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 13

RWCH 29. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of Anthony of Egypt*

31. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*

41. Pelagius, *To Demetrias*

42. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*

Reflection: *How does a Christian pursue holiness, according to Athanasius, Gregory, Pelagius, and Augustine (each proponents of Christian asceticism)? What is similar and what is different in their depictions?*

3.16-3.20 **RESEARCH AND STUDY WEEK**

(M 3.23) *Due today – Essay 2*

T 3.24 Possibly: Continuation of Meanings and forms of holiness
Main focus: Eastern churches

- Reading:** *HWCM*, chs. 18, 19, 21
RWCH 23. Christianization of Ethiopia and Georgia (ss. 10.9-10.10)
 24. Martyrdom of Martha, Daughter of Posi, Who Was a Daughter of the Covenant
 25. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymn I* (sample quickly)
 28. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (pp. 122-124: ss. 180-224; pp. 129-130: ss. 873-881)
 37. John of Ephesus, *Life of Susan*
 38. John of Ephesus, Evangelization of Nubia
- Reflection (optional):** *Reflect on the diversity of Christianity in the churches of the East. How did the differences after Chalcedon—between those who approved of the resolution adopted by the Council and those who opposed it—affect Christian life and the patterns of Christian expansion?*

Th 3.26 The rise of Islam

- Reading:** *HWCM*, pp. 257-9, ch. 22
 *CAMS:
 Introduction to the Readings
 Fazlur Rahman, “The Qur’an”
 Qur’an translation (selections)
- Reflection:** *Using your readings (the Qur’an translation and Fazlur Rahman): What, in the view of Muslims, is the Qur’an, and what sort of message does it carry?*

(M 3.30) *Due today – Essay 3*

T 3.31 Cities of God: Baghdad & Córdoba

- Reading:** *HWCM*, ch. 23
RWCH 45. *Apology of Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad before the Caliph Mahdi*
- *CAMS:
 Introduction to the Readings
 Selected Poetry from Medieval Spain
 Eulogius, [“On Isaac the Martyr”] (c. 852)
 Abu ‘Isa al Warraq, “Against the Incarnation” (9th c.) (optional)
 [Averroes/Ibn Rushd], “Doctrine of Divine Unity” (1183)
 “In Support of the Trinity” (1130-1200)
- Reflection:** *Compare Isaac the Martyr and the Patriarch Timothy as examples of Christians testifying to their faith in situations of Islamic dominance. What does each seek to achieve through a Christian encounter with Muslims?*

Th 4.2 People of the Book and shifting Houses

- Reading:** *HWCM*, chs. 24, 28, 31, 32
RWCH 55. John of Damascus, *On Divine Images*
- *CAMS:
 Introduction to the Readings
 “A Jewish Administrator under Caliph Hisham” (optional)
 “Market Regulations in Muslim Seville” (early 1100s)

Ramon Llull, “On Preaching and Conversion” (c. 1285)
 (optional today, required for 4.25: “Paris and Jerusalem”)
 “The Legal Status of Jews and Muslims in Castile” (14th c.)

Reflection: *Explain John of Damascus’ view of a Christian use of visual images in prayer and worship and the context for his expression of this position.*

T 4.7 Asian expansion of Christianity

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 25

RWCH 39. Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*
 46. Inscription of the Monument of the Church of the East at Xian
 47. Chinese Christian Sutras

*CAMS:

Introduction to the Reading

“Saints Barlaam and Josaphat,” from *The Golden Legend* (c. 1260) (you may read over this fairly quickly)

Reflection: *What questions about the movement of Christian traditions from one cultural setting to another are raised by today’s readings?*

Th 4.9 *Holy Week Recess*

T 4.14 Making of Christendom in the Medieval West

Reading: *HWCM*, chs. 26, 27, 29

RWCH 44. Patrick, *Confession*
 49. Columbanus, *Letter 2*
 50. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*
 51. Rudolph of Fulda, *Life of Leoba*
 52. *The Heliand*
 53. Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, *Dulcitius* (optional)

Reflection: *What role did monasticism play in the “making” of “Christendom” in the West? How did monastics and their writings engage the encounter of Christianity with pre-Christian and non-Christian cultural and religious traditions?*

Th 4.16 Religion, society, and reform in the West

Reading: *HWCM*, 383-386, chs. 30, 32, 33

RWCH 59. Gregory VII, *Letter to Hermann of Metz*
 64. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*

Reflection: *Why is Anselm considered “a bridge between the older tradition of monastic and cathedral schools, and the universities of learning that still lay in the future” (HWCM)? What evidence for this view do you find in his *Cur Deus Homo*?*

(M 4.20) *Due today – Essay 4*

T 4.21 Searching for faithful shapes for living

Reading: *RWCH* 65. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*

66. Thomas of Celano, *First Life of Francis of Assisi*
 68. Letters and Visions of Hadewijch of Brabant

*CAMS:

Bernard McGinn, "Julian of Norwich"
Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (selections)

Reflection: *How do the readings for today illustrate growth in religious fascination with and theological development of the significance of the humanity of Christ in the 12th-14th centuries? What do you think contributed to the rise of this interest?*

Th 4.23 Cities of God: Paris and Jerusalem

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 31

RWCH 67. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God
33. Egeria, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*
60. Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*
61. Ibn al-Athir on the Fall of Jerusalem, 1099

*CAMS:

Ramon Llull, "On Preaching and Conversion" (c. 1285)
(read quickly for a general sense of theme and concerns)

Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy* (selection) (read quickly)

Timothy Renick, "Reading Aquinas," from *Aquinas for Armchair Theologians*

Reflection: *What theological interpretations supported the crusaders, who, following "a general slaughter of the pagans" of Jerusalem (Guibert of Nogent), prayed in thanksgiving to Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for accomplishing great things through their military victory?*

(M 4.27) *Due today – Essay 5*

T 4.28 Endings and beginnings

Reading: *HWCM*, chs. 34, 38 (chs. 35, 36)

RWCH 56. Letters of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople and Pope Nicholas I on Disputed Issues
73. Gregory Palamas, *Triads*
58. *Russian Primary Chronicle*
69. Lives of Mâr Yahbh-Allâhâ and Rabban Sâwmâ (optional today; required 5.9)
70. *The War Chronicle of Amda Tseyon* (optional today; required 5.9)
71. *Kebrâ Nagast* (ss. 69-71; optional today; required 5.9)

Reflection: *What is theosis, what role does it play in spiritual and theological traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, and how does Gregory Palamas's defense of the prayer practices of monks of the Greek-speaking East illumine its meaning?*

Th 4.30 Limits of heterodoxy in Christendom

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 32

*CAMS:

Introduction to the Readings

Readings on Waldensians and Spiritual Franciscans from
 Peters, ed., *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*
 “The Black Death and the Jews” and “The Passau Host
 Desecration” from Marcus, ed., *The Jew in the Medieval
 World*

“Augustine and Bernard: A Tradition of Christian Theological
 Interpretation of Jews as ‘Witness’ People”

Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, On the Jews (optional)

Reflection: *Based on the readings for today, how do you think the line between acceptable or tolerable difference in religion and unacceptable and dangerous difference was determined in late medieval European Christianity? What explains the appearance of repressive measures taken against certain “Others”?*

T 5.5 Challenge of reform in the Western Church

Reading: *HWCM*, ch. 35, 36, 37

RWCH 72. Documents by or about Boniface VIII

74. Geert Grote, *Letter 29*

75. Council of Constance, *Haec sancta & Frequens*

76. Council of Florence: *Laetentur caeli*

Reflection: *What is conciliarism, how did the Council of Constance seek to invoke its principles, and to what problems was the council seeking to respond?*

Th 5.7 Conclusions

Reading: *RWCH* 69. Lives of Mâr Yabhbh-Allâhâ and Rabban Sâwmâ

70. *The War Chronicle of Amda Tseyon*

71. *Kebrâ Nagast* (ss. 69-71)

Reflection: *What aspects of the story told about Makeda and Bayna-Lehken point to a unique or distinctive Ethiopian-Christian identity?*

(F 5.8) *Due today – Essay 6*

W 5.13 **Final exam** (emailed to you in the morning) due 10 pm.

Appendix I

Charles L. Cohen on the 50-word assignment

A single-sentence exercise with a finite word limit counters students' proclivity for aerating their prose with superfluities. Given at most fifty words, students must distill their arguments' fundamentals and phrase them concisely, for, as my syllabus warns, the fifty-first word and its successors face a terrible fate. (I have been known to cut out extraneous verbiage and turn the tattered remnant into a paper airplane—a practice proved sound pedagogically if not aerodynamically.)

Fifty words might appear too many—the contests cereal companies run, after all, ask for only twenty five—but I prefer giving students sufficient rope. For one thing, the fifty-word limit allows them to cope with the assignment, which often requires complicated responses. For another, it weans them from dependency on simple declarative sentences and challenges them to experiment with multiple clauses. Some can handle compound-complex sentences, but most require—and appreciate—tutelage in them. Nor are fifty words too few; no student has ever complained about an inability to pare down the verbiage. Had Goldilocks stumbled into my section instead of the Three Bears' den, she would have found the word limit “just right.”

Consider, for example, the assignment that I recently gave students in History/Religious Studies 451, entitled “Constructing a hypothesis”: “Using the maps in the front of the packet, compare the distribution of churches within Anglo-America east of the Mississippi River in 1750 with the distribution in 1850 and, in one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (need I say more?), hypothesize the reasons for the difference.” To complete the exercise, students must examine a series of maps, aggregate data presented graphically and convert it into written form, analyze that data and develop a hypothesis to explain patterns they may have found. They must attend carefully to the material (not the least of the minor assignment's benefits is its capacity to monitor students' preparation), read the maps against each other, and offer a succinct but accurate conclusion, thereby rehearsing several critical skills simultaneously.

The quality of the responses varied, as one might expect, but the best submission hit the mark exactly, intellectually and, at fifty words, quantitatively: ‘The maps show a relative decline in Anglican and Congregational Churches in relation to the growth of other churches between 1750 and 1850, which reflects the shift towards the disestablishment of state churches and the demand for a constitutional guaranty of religious freedom that occurred during the American Revolutionary Settlement.’ Even more impressive, English is not the writer's native language.

Appendix II

History of Christian Experience I Guidelines for Writing Your Essays

(1) *What am I writing?*

You are asked to write a short paper (1200-1400 words, twelve point Times New Roman font, double spaced) on the topic defined in your syllabus. You are given a question or series of questions to prompt your engagement with a particular assigned text or texts. You should be sure that the paper you write clearly responds to these essay prompts. The focus of your essays should be the assigned primary source texts (texts by historical authors—not textbook readings). You are **not** expected to use resources beyond those given in the course to write your paper.

(2) *Why am I writing this?*

We are asking you to write essays so that you exercise and develop a number of skills that are useful to you for the work of theological education and for your continuing theological and ethical growth. Among these skills are the ability to:

- read and comprehend theological texts;
- engage texts and other evidence pertinent to the history of Christianity in their historical contexts;
- express yourself clearly and sustain a cogent argument or a fluid exposition;
- develop a distinctive, thoughtful, and responsible theological voice through engagement with a variety of historical and contemporary perspectives.

(3) *What does it mean to say that this paper should “observe the conventions of academic writing”?*

It means, first, that this is a formal writing project, and thus your form of expression will be different from informal conversation or what is sometimes called a “reflection paper.” Writing this paper, then, will involve attention to the craft of writing: introducing the topic, clearly stating and developing themes or ideas, carefully guiding your reader through the subjects to be explored and/or the process of your thinking, supplying evidence to support your interpretations, underlining the key point or points made in your paper in a conclusion. It means also that you will need to demonstrate that you can correctly cite sources you have used for your paper.

(4) *Are there formatting requirements I should be aware of?*

Yes. Some basic requirements are:

- Use Times New Roman twelve point font.
- Double space your text.
- Do not include a title page. Do give your essay a descriptive title (on page one, above the first paragraph).
- Citations follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. (See below.) Don’t make up your own method of citation.

(5) *Do I always need to formally cite the sources I am using?*

Yes, always. You must use a form approved in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. There are several options. But you must use one; and you need to cite your sources in every paper, consistently and correctly.

(6) *But only when I am quoting directly from the source, right?*

Wrong. Your restatement of the original ideas of an author, or paraphrase of another’s exposition, needs to be clearly indicated. And every assigned essay in this course focuses on the interpretation of one or more sources. These need to be formally cited. For help with these matters, including a refresher course in paraphrasing and methods of citation, seek help from the Academic Resource Center (ASC).

(7) *If I am not writing a reflection paper, does that mean that personal reflections or observations are not acceptable?*

Not necessarily. You may have a personal connection to the subject matter, and it may be that some observations drawn from your experience may be useful in highlighting some aspect of what you are examining. Here we need to exercise some care. Experienced writers may find a natural means of introducing a personal experience in a way that doesn’t end up making the paper “all about ourselves”—a subjective journey into how we feel about what we have read without careful, critical analysis of the ideas and experiences of others and of times and places that may be distant from our own. If we are less confident about avoiding that trap, then we might limit personal references until we gain a surer sense of how to balance experience and interpretation/analysis. But this does not mean that your point of view is absent from these papers (see the next paragraph).

(8) *Can I write a successful essay if I just paraphrase an argument I have found in our textbook?*

No. Your textbook, along with other secondary sources, is frequently helpful to you as a way of setting in context a primary text, author, or a particular movement; and there are occasions when reliance on your textbook is necessary. But the interpretation you are asked to supply in your paper should be your own. It is important to acknowledge dependence on the thoughts and interpretations of others, and your own interpretation may appropriately be in conversation with these, but your goal should be to develop your own skills of critical reflection and your own theological-ethical voice.

(9) *For whom am I writing?*

Although your paper will be read and evaluated by your instructor, you should imagine yourself writing for an educated reader who does not have all of the inside knowledge you have gained from sitting in class. So references such as, “As we discussed last week” or “The article you made me read” are best avoided. Imagine yourself using this paper in a few years, perhaps to refresh your memory about the content of a theological debate or a challenging historical circumstance when the memory of the class’s day-to-day content has faded, or to pass along to a friend or parishioner who has expressed interest in the topic. Use a voice that would seem appropriate for this use.

(10) *Do I really have to use inclusive language?*

Yes. See the guidelines in the syllabus.

(11) *Why?*

First, because it is the policy of Louisville Seminary, but also because it helps to build an ethos that includes and is responsible to more persons and experiences and that resists dynamics of domination and exclusion. These last reasons reflect a particular moral stance, and one not everyone may share. But the global orientation of this course tends to move us in this direction, and we encourage you to try out practices that may be conducive to this movement.

(12) *Do I hand in a hard copy or email it directly to the professor?*

Neither. First, make sure to save your essay as a Word document with a title following this form: **Yourlastname HCE essay 1**. The essay number always corresponds to the number given in the syllabus; it does not indicate the number of your submission. Then submit the file to the CAMS course site, before the end of the day on which the paper is due. If you have trouble managing this, consult with staff at the Library. You may send a note to your instructor explaining any difficulties you may be having, but you must tend to submitting your assignment via CAMS. If you are submitting your essay after the due date (with or without an extension) you must let the professor know of your submission by sending an email.

(13) *How will my essay be evaluated?*

Your instructor will read your essay and return it with comments and a summary symbol (✓, ✓+, ✓-, 0; see explanation of evaluation and grading policy, above). Evaluation will focus on the student’s progress toward developing the skills listed above (*Why am I writing this?*) and will assess the relative degree of success in meeting the following aspirational goals:

- Correct formatting: the essay should have a title (on page one; no title page); it should be formatted according to the supplied directions, submitted in the form required, and should be the required length.
- Strong writing: the essay should observe correct grammatical forms, correct use of punctuation, and avoid syntactical and other errors of writing; the writing should be clear and comprehensible, employing a structure that aids in communication, and should utilize effective transitions; sources should be clearly and correctly cited, following approved methods and forms.
- Addressing the topic as a historical theologian: the essay should successfully address the essay prompt; it should focus on the identified theological, historical, and ethical issues and discuss these issues with attention to appropriate elements of context: time, place, culture, social and/or political location.
- Concentrating on primary sources: the essay should focus on the text/s identified as a primary source for the engagement of the essay topic and should avoid unnecessary distractions or detours.
- Achieving clarity of theological or ethical understanding: the essay should focus on a theological or ethical issue, give adequate voice to the theological or ethical position of the author or authors central to the essay topic, and show that the student understands the issues and can interpret the pertinent ideas thoughtfully with attention to their coherence and their ramifications.
- Growth in one’s capacity for theological engagement: the essay should demonstrate the student’s developing capacity for theological interpretation and assessment, supplying a framework for theological engagement that is supported by evidence and argument, and displaying the student’s own emerging, distinctive theological and ethical voice.

(14) *Writing essays scares me. I struggle with academic writing. I'm not sure I understand the prompt. I'm not really grasping the content of the reading. What can I do?*

Don't panic. Breathe. Email your instructor and set up a time to talk. Your instructor can give you guidance on the substantive—theological and historical—aspects of the writing assignments. For the formal aspects—the writing—you should contact the Seminary's Academic Support Center. It is a good idea to work with the staff at the ASC early on as you are preparing to write your essays. If you begin working with the ASC at a point in the semester after you have *already* submitted essays and have had them returned to you, *always* share with the ASC tutors the returned work, with instructor comments, so that they are better equipped to assess particular challenges and help you in addressing them.