

The World of Early Christianity

History 398 B

Spring 2011

Westerman Hall W302

Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

Prof. John F. Romano, Ph.D., L.M.S.

Office: St. Benedict Hall 323

Phone: 913-360-7570

E-mail: jromano@benedictine.edu

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 3 pm - 4:30 pm; Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30 pm - 3:30 pm (and by appointment)

This course examines the Greco-Roman world of the first century. It was into this context that Christianity was born and the New Testament was written. Although students are often familiar with the accounts of the New Testament and other early Christian sources, they do not always pay sufficient attention to the society in which Jesus and the earliest Christians lived. This course is intended to remedy this imbalance and give students a survey of the most important characteristics of this period. In addition, students will have the opportunity to read and analyze the evidence produced by ancient civilization, and encounter the special challenges to its proper interpretation.

Topics covered in this class include the Roman political background; Roman governance; Roman finances, law, and military; the “Roman Peace”; social class and status; family and women; education; slavery; clubs and associations; Greco-Roman religion, magic, and philosophy; life in cities; Gnosticism and mystery religions; Jewish history, beliefs, and groups; and Christianity in the ancient world. Readings will involve primary sources in translation, especially ancient historians like Josephus, but non-written sources will also receive attention. The assignments will focus on significant texts and other material produced by Greco-Roman civilization in and around the first century.

This class is normally open only to students beyond their first year.

Goals of the Course

- To gain knowledge of the chronology of the history of Greco-Roman world of the first century, including major events, ideas, beliefs, and cultural contributions.
- To practice the art of an historian: that is, to learn the defining characteristics of a period and how they changed over time, to understand historical cause and effect, to read the sources upon which historical evaluations are based, and to form interpretations about the period from reading.
- To learn the difference between primary and secondary sources, and how to analyze and evaluate primary texts and other materials produced by the first-century Roman civilization.
- To improve the ability to read, discuss, and write about the past.

Required Texts

- James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). ISBN-13: 9780830815890.
- *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, ed. C. K. Barrett (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989). ISBN-13: 9780060605537
- Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson, ed. E. Mary Smallwood (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).
- Additional required reading material will be made available to students enrolled in the course through PDFs or links.

Please note:

- Be sure to bring assigned reading to class for discussion. You should have *The New Testament Background* or printouts of the PDFs with you at every session.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend class and to be punctual. It is the students' obligation to take notes on lectures; I do not produce written copies of lectures. Much of the information presented in class, which will form part of the material tested on exams and papers, cannot be found in the textbook. In addition, students will not gain any credit for participation or group work if they do not attend class sessions. In accordance with Benedictine policy, you may be dropped from the course after six absences.

In the cases of *documented* illness or family emergencies that make it impossible for students to attend class or complete assignments, students are urged to get in touch with the instructor.

Personal Electronics Policy

Students may not use cell phones in any capacity in this class, including making or receiving calls or texting. Students may use laptops or PDAs, but only with the purpose of taking notes or consulting sources. Violators run the risk of being asked to leave class.

Academic Honesty Policy

Students are expected to adhere to Benedictine College's Academic Honesty Policy for all assignments in this course. It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with the definition of plagiarism, which (even when done inadvertently) is considered a serious offense and may result in failure or even dismissal from the college. I expect that all exams and papers are *your own work*. Any time that you use someone else's ideas in a paper, you must give credit to the person. For further information, speak with me.

Schedule of Classes and Reading

*Thursday, 1/13/11: **Introduction to the World of Early Christianity***

Class reading: *Edict about Manichaeism*

*Tuesday, 1/18/11: **End of Roman Civil War and Rise of Augustus***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 14-18, 313-16

Barrett, pp. 1-10

*Tuesday, 1/20/11: **View from the Top: Roman Emperors***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 316-20
Barrett, pp. 11-22

*Tuesday, 1/25/11: **Governing the Provinces***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 110-19
Sources on provincial administration (to be distributed to enrolled students)

*Thursday, 1/27/11: **Governing Palestine***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 119-41
Roman coins from first-century Palestine
(<http://www.amuseum.org/book/page0.html>)

*Tuesday, 2/1/11: **Roman Finances***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 142-54
Sources on economic life (to be distributed to enrolled students)

*Thursday, 2/3/11: **Roman Law***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 154-71
Sources on Roman law (to be distributed to enrolled students)
Assignment: First quiz

*Tuesday, 2/8/11: **Roman Military***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 171-78
Sources on Roman military (to be distributed to enrolled students)

*Thursday, 2/10/11: **Readings on the “Roman Peace”***

Reading: Readings on the “Roman Peace” (to be distributed to enrolled students)
Assignment: First group work project

*Tuesday, 2/15/11: **Social Class and Status in the Roman Empire***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 180-96
Barrett, pp. 24-31, 38-49

*Thursday, 2/17/11: **Roman Family and Women***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 237-52
Sources on Roman family and women (to be distributed to enrolled students)

*Tuesday, 2/22/11: **Roman Education***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 253-57
Sources on Roman education (to be distributed to enrolled students)

*Thursday, 2/24/11: **First Midterm Exam***

Assignment: Students must bring blue books with them to the exam.

*Tuesday, 3/1/11: **Roman Slavery***

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 220-36
Readings on Roman slavery (to be distributed to enrolled students)

Thursday, 3/3/11: Roman Clubs and Associations

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 71-87
Images of Roman catacombs (to be distributed to enrolled students)

Tuesday, 3/8/11: Greco-Roman Religion

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 89-109
Sources on Greco-Roman religion (to be distributed to enrolled students)

Thursday, 3/10/11: Greco-Roman Magic

Reading: Barrett, pp. 31-38 (other magical texts to be distributed to enrolled students)
Assignment: Second quiz

Tuesday, 3/22/11: Roman Philosophical Schools

Reading: Barrett, pp. 59-91

Tuesday, 3/24/11: Life in Greco-Roman Cities

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 48-70
Sources on Greco-Roman cities (to be distributed to enrolled students)

Tuesday, 3/29/11: Reconstructing Life in Pompeii

Reading: Sources on life in Pompeii (to be distributed to enrolled students)
Assignment: Second group work project

Thursday, 3/31/11: Two Significant Writers: Philo and Josephus

Reading: Barrett, pp. 252-89

Tuesday, 4/5/11: Gnosticism

Reading: Barrett, pp. 93-119

Thursday, 4/7/11: Mystery Religions

Reading: Barrett, pp. 120-34

Assignment: Third quiz

Tuesday, 4/12/11: Jewish History in the Roman Empire

Reading: Jeffers, pp. 211-19

Barrett, pp. 143-77

Thursday, 4/14/11: Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Reading: Barrett, pp. 184-217

Tuesday, 4/19/11: "From Jesus to Christ"

Assignment: Term paper due by 5 pm

Tuesday, 4/26/11: Jewish Parties and Sects

Reading: Barrett, pp. 218-51

Tuesday, 4/28/11: A Pagan Critic of Christianity

Reading: Origen, *Against Celsus (Contra Celsum)* (excerpts to be distributed to enrolled students)

Assignment: Third group work project

Tuesday, 5/3/11: Christianity in the Ancient World

Reading: Sources on Christians in the Roman world (to be distributed to enrolled students)

Thursday, 5/5/11, 10 am – 11:50 am: Final Exam

Assignment: Students must bring blue books with them to the exam.

Grading

Paper (10-12 pp.), due on 4/19	25%
Final exam, on 5/5	25%
Midterm, on 2/24	20%
Participation	15%
Quizzes, on 2/1, 3/10, 4/7	10% (all three equal weight)
Group work, on 2/10, 3/29, 4/28	5% (all three equal weight)

Requirements

- The paper (10-12 pp., exclusive of bibliography; due by 5 pm on 4/19) will construct an argument based on (a) a primary source, normally Josephus' *The Jewish War*; and (b) between four and six secondary sources. Students may also choose their own sources, but *only in consultation with the professor*.
- Late papers will be penalized one "step" per day late (e.g., an A paper would become an A-; an A- paper would become a B+; and so on).
- Descriptions of the format for the paper and the procedure for submitting thesis statements, bibliographies, and drafts will be distributed in class and discussed. The paper must employ footnotes for references, use the Chicago Manual of Style format, and include a bibliography.
- The paper must be submitted in hard copy.
- Students who would like help with their writing are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of the Student Success Center.
- It is within my purview as an instructor to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades.
- The midterm will demonstrate knowledge of significant events, figures, and terms of the period, and an ability to synthesize the primary sources analyzed in class. Students will write essays and identifications of significant terms. To be taken in class on 2/24.
- The final will require a similar mastery of significant events, figures, terms, and sources of the period. Students will write essays, identifications, and analysis of sources assigned for class. The material on the final is not cumulative: it will

focus on what has been covered after the second midterm. To be taken on 5/5 from 10 am to 11:50 am.

- Students are required to bring blue books for the midterm and final exam. Those who do not come prepared with blue books will automatically fail the exams. Students are encouraged to purchase two of these early in the semester.
- Quizzes will require students to discuss passages for primary sources they have prepared for class. Students will have to analyze the wording of the passages and put them into a broader historical context. To be taken at the beginning of class on 2/1, 3/10, and 4/7.
- The format for the midterm, final, and quizzes will be discussed in class.
- There are no make-up examinations, quizzes, or group work projects, save for documented emergencies.
- Group work assignments will require students to discuss a primary source prepared for class with fellow students in the group and to submit a written response to questions posed by the professor. The students in each group will produce one report and will receive the same grade for their final product. To be done in class on 2/10, 3/29, and 4/28.
- Participation grades are assigned based upon your contributions in lectures and class discussion. It is imperative that you prepare the readings assigned for each day before class and are ready to talk about them. Simply attending class does not guarantee you a high participation mark; you must speak about the sources.
- There are no extra-credit assignments in this course.
- Please note that this schedule is subject to change when circumstances make it necessary. Students will be made aware of any modifications as soon as possible.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who need special facilities or consideration should present the appropriate documentation from the Reasonable Learning Accommodation Committee to the instructor.