

PAPER B6 - Christianity in Late Antiquity (to circa 600)

Paper Coordinator:

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Supplementary Regulations

This paper is concerned with the main historical and theological developments in Christianity in Antiquity set within the social, historical, political and cultural contexts of the Roman Empire and its immediate successors. The period surveyed is that of Late Antiquity dating roughly from the 4th to the 6th c. CE.

Prescribed Texts

There are no prescribed texts for this paper but a list of recommended readings will be available from the end of full Easter Term. However, in order to acquaint themselves with the period and the sources, the students are encouraged to consult in advance Gillian Clark, *Late Antiquity: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2011 (for the historical framework) and relevant chapters in Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford 2003.

Main sources may be found in *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings*, esp. vol. 2, Part II-III-IV and vol. 3, Part I, chs. 1-5. *Further texts will be identified and discussed in the Lectures and the Classes.*

Course Description

Many important features of Christianity emerged and developed in the late antique period. The paper examines the development of Christian churches and groups, their organisation, institutions, identities and ways of life in the context of the political, social and cultural life of the Roman Empire. It studies main strands of Christian theological reflection and discussion in the period with a focus on the Trinitarian and Christological controversies, and introduces exemplary texts from what is often called the “Golden Age” of patristic literature.

Aims

Teaching for this paper is intended to assist knowledge and understanding of Christianity in the patristic period (to ca. 600). In particular the paper aims:

- To aid the knowledge and understanding of the history of Christianity in the context of the Roman Empire
- To assist in the appreciation of the development of Christian thought in the period
- To introduce students to primary texts by major patristic authors and teach them skills of close analysis and interpretation of such texts
- To help students understand and evaluate critically current scholarship on the period

Learning Outcomes

As a result of taking this course, students should attain:

(a) *Knowledge of:*

- the key historical events and developments that shaped Christian life and culture in the set period
- the main discussions that informed Christian theological reflection in the period

- the principal elements in the intellectual and social formation of the church(es) in the period
- the variety of sources available for the evaluation of the period

(b) The ability to:

- identify major issues and problems inherent in the study of Christianity in the period
- assess critically the character, limits and tendencies of the primary sources
- analyse and interpret primary sources in a variety of genres and address the difficulties and challenges in this task
- analyse and discuss the main theological and historical developments in the church(es) of the time in critical conversation with scholarship

Form and Conduct of Examination

The paper will be assessed by a three-hour examination.

Teaching

The course will be taught by 12 hours of lectures and 12 hours of classes. Lectures will provide an outline of the main theological and historical developments in Christianity of the period, present important sources and introduce central debates in modern scholarship. Classes will engage in a close reading and interpretation of selected primary sources. Students are expected to have read the text and the relevant articles before coming to their classes to facilitate the discussion. 5 hours of college supervisions are recommended for the paper.