

**RS 214: Early Christian Literature**  
Fall 2006  
TTh 9:30-10:45am



Professor Bernadette McNary-Zak  
Clough 400 (x3578; home: 751-7347, before 9pm)  
email: mcnary\_zak@rhodes.edu  
Office hours: M-F, 1-2 pm and by appointment

**Course Description:**

This course is a thematic survey of literature that emerged in the early Christian church during the period of late antiquity (300-450 CE). Of this period, Bart Ehrman and Andrew Jacobs have observed that “Christians in Late Antiquity lived through a vibrant period of Mediterranean and Near Eastern history, as new cultural and social forms emerged from old ones and new modes of thinking and living took hold in a world that managed to merge innovation and tradition at all levels of life...the study of Christianity in Late Antiquity has become the study of religious revolution: unpredictable, multifaceted, and diverse.” (*Christianity in Late Antiquity*, 1) This course has a particular emphasis on literature that reveals emerging forms of Christian piety in this period and it takes particular care to situate this literature in its generative context and in the political, historical and cultural milieu of the Roman Empire in order to understand the role of such foundational practices in this period.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To explore the construction and development of piety in late antiquity through a thematic survey of the period (300-450CE).
2. To engage students in active dialogue with primary texts from this period.
3. To provide opportunities for critical reflection by engaging primary and secondary source material in written work.

**Required Texts:**

Augustine, *Confessions*  
Ehrman and Jacobs, eds. *Christianity in Late Antiquity, 300-450CE: A Reader*  
Ramsey, Boniface. *Beginning to Read the Fathers*  
Supplemental Readings

**Course Assessment:**

Attendance and participation	10%
Quizzes	10%
Mid-term examination	20%
Four papers	40%
Paper #1, 5%	
Paper #2, 10%	
Paper #3, 10%	
Paper #4, 15%	
Final examination	20%

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Attendance and active participation** are expected and absences will adversely affect a student's grade. Only through class attendance will students gain sufficient mastery of the course material. Except for official events of the college, permission to be absent will not be given and should not be sought. This course is built on guided discussion of common readings. Adequate time must be budgeted to successfully complete reading assignments. As well, each student will be asked to help lead class discussion. This entails a more thorough preparation of the assigned reading material for the assigned day. You will be responsible for preparing, in advance, a handout to be distributed at least one class period prior to your assigned day. The handout should contain at minimum the following:

1. Some statement of the thesis (if present) and argument(s) advanced by the author/text. Do not supply a summary of the reading.
2. List of themes related to the course that can be drawn from the text.
3. Consideration of how the ideas and/or values conveyed in the text differ from our own. What presuppositions do we bring to bear on the text? What has this reading challenged you to think about?

These questions might be supplemented by those found in the handout distributed on the first day of the course, "How to Read a Primary Text." One-half of your attendance and participation grade, which is ten percent (10%) of the final grade, will be based on this assignment.

2. **Daily quizzes** will assist in assessing comprehension. There will be several brief, unannounced quizzes over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester you will select five (5) of these to comprise your daily quiz grade for the semester. Quizzes will be worth twenty (20) points each, for a total of 100 points. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class only. Only quizzes missed due to official events of the college can be completed after consultation with the professor. The daily quiz grade is worth ten percent (10%) of the final course grade.

3. **Examinations.** The mid-term examination is in class on Thursday, October 12. The final exam is in class on Saturday, December 9, 5:30pm. Each exam is worth twenty percent (20%) of your final grade. Each exam will be based on the reading assignments and other class materials and will test material not covered on the previous exam. Exams will have any of a number of types of short answer and brief essay questions.

4. **Papers.** Four papers will be assigned over the course of the semester. The first paper is due on August 31; the second paper is due on September 28; the third paper is due on October 31; the fourth paper is due on December 5. The first paper is 3 pages in length; the second and third papers are 4-5 pages in length; the fourth paper is 5-6 pages in length. The topic and details for the first three papers will be distributed one week prior to the due date. The details of the final paper, a book review, will be given early in the semester. You will be asked to provide a supplemental handout and to give a brief presentation of this fourth paper. All papers are to be double-spaced and in final form. Papers turned in after class but on

the same day (before 5pm) will be penalized 1/2 letter grade; papers turned in after 5pm on the day due will be penalized a full letter grade for every day the paper is late. One writing workshop has been set to hone writing skills on September 21. You may be asked to discuss and to share at length and in detail your paper in class on the day it is due.

5. Some helpful websites and bibliography information for further exploring the world of early Christianity include the following:

Medieval Studies Online Reference Book at <http://www.the-orb.net>

Coptic Christianity at <http://www.coptic.net>

Early Christianity at <http://shell5.ba.best.com/~gdavis/ntcanon/index.shtml>

Encyclopedia at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/html>

Byzantine Sources at

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/alltexts.html#CONTENTS>

### **Grading Standards for Written Assignments**

1. The A paper or essay demonstrates originality of thought, independence of opinion and maturity of interpretation in stating and developing a central idea. Its basic notions and observations are clear, logical, and thought provoking. The evidence provided in the paper warrants its conclusions. The A essay contains all of the following characteristics: (a) concentration on a central purpose, demonstrated by an adequate development of its arguments and the specific support of valid sources; (b) careful construction and organization of sentences and paragraphs; (c) careful choice of effective words and phrases; (d) full understanding of the concepts central to the reading material used; and (e) correctness of mechanical procedures (spelling, typing, etc.).

2. The B paper or essay has a clearly stated thesis, has been logically argued, and has been supported by specific evidence from the texts read. Its ideas are clear and its organization is coherent because it contains most of the characteristics described above. It is relatively free of errors in the use of expository English prose. Although competent, the B paper lacks the originality, stylistic maturity, and the precision of thought of the A paper.

3. The average paper or essay will receive the grade of C. The essay has a central purpose and is organized clearly enough to convey its thesis to the reader. It demonstrates adequate familiarity with the concepts and material in question and it relates them to the course's reading assignments. It avoids serious errors in English grammar and usage. It may, in fact, require few corrections, but it lacks the vigor or complexity of thought and expression, which would entitle it to a higher grade.

4. The grade of D indicates a below-average achievement in the correct and effective expression of ideas. Most D papers contain serious logical errors and grammatical mistakes. The D paper fails either to present a central thesis or to develop and support it adequately.

5. The grade of F indicates a failure to state or develop a main idea. It may also indicate serious errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or sentence structure. Typing errors or poor proofreading are signs of haste and poor presentation. The following major errors are to be avoided: (a) misunderstood ideas used without discrimination; (b) poorly constructed essays without introduction, logical development, or conclusions; (c) essays that miss the point of the question(s) asked; (d) papers that demonstrate derivative use of source material; (e) comma-splicing or run-on sentences; (f) sentence fragments; (g) misspelling common words; (h) lack of verb-subject agreement; (i) lack of antecedent-pronoun agreement; (j) faulty use of tense or person; (k) misplaced or dangling modifiers; and (l) faulty punctuation.

**Grading Scale.** The final grade will be determined on the basis of the following scale:

A (94-100)	C+ (77-79)	D- (60-63)
A- (90-93)	C (74-76)	F (below 60)
B+ (87-89)	C- (70-73)	
B (84-86)	D+ (67-69)	
B- (80-83)	D (64-66)	

## Schedule of Topics and Readings

- 8/24 Introduction  
Assignment: Favazza and Kaltner, "How to Read a Primary Text"
- Unit I: Contextual Considerations**
- 8/29 Imperial Involvement (Constantine, Julian, Theodosius)  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 3 texts 26, 30, 48
- 8/31 Councils and Creeds I (Nicea, Constantinople)  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 8 texts 33, 34  
Paper #1 due.
- 9/5 Councils and Creeds II (Ephesus, Chalcedon)  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 8 texts 35, 36
- 9/7 Scripture  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 2  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 12 texts 50 and 51  
Discussion sheet:
- Unit II: Forms of Personal Piety**
- 9/12 Virginitiy  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 7 (pages 135-148)  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 9 text 37 and chapter 11 text 49  
Discussion sheet:
- 9/14 Monasticism I  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 8  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 9 texts 38, 39, 40, 41  
Discussion sheet:
- 9/19 Monasticism II  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 9  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 10 texts 46, 47, 48  
Discussion sheet:
- 9/21 In class writing workshop.  
Assignment: Bring in a thesis statement and opening paragraph for paper #2.
- Unit III: Forms of Public Piety**
- 9/26 Pilgrimage I  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 10 text 42  
Discussion sheet:
- 9/28 Pilgrimage II  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 10 texts 43, 44  
Discussion sheet:  
Paper #2 due.
- 10/3 Sacred Objects: Relics  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, ch. 3 text 8, sections 41-51 and ch. 10 text 45  
Discussion sheet:
- 10/5 Sacramental Life  
Assignment: Hazlett, "Ministry, Worship, and Christian Life" (distributed in class) and Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 5 texts 14, 15  
Discussion sheet:

- 10/10 Ministry  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 6  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 6 texts 16, 17, 19
- 10/12 Mid-term examination (in class)
- 10/17 Fall Recess.
- 10/19 Sacred Space I  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 13 all texts
- 10/24 Sacred Space II  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 13 all texts  
Discussion sheet:
- 10/26 Social Justice  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 10  
Discussion sheet:

**Unit IV: The Language of Piety**

- 10/31 The Language of “Inner” Experience  
Assignment: McGinn, “The Language of Inner Experience in Christian Mysticism”  
Paper #3 due.
- 11/2 Human Condition  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 4  
Augustine, *Confessions*, 21-23, 43-70  
Discussion sheet:
- 11/7 Conversion  
Assignment: Augustine, *Confessions*, Books 3-4 and 170-190  
Discussion sheet:
- 11/9 Restoration  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 5  
Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 7 text 26
- 11/14 Adoption  
Assignment: Ramsey, chapter 12  
Discussion sheet:
- 11/16 Discernment  
Assignment: Letters of Abba Ammonas (distributed in class)  
Discussion sheet:

**Unit Five: Impact and Influence**

- 11/21 Film, “Trappist” and in class written response. [American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting]
- 11/23 Thanksgiving Recess.
- 11/28 Christianity Outside the Roman Empire  
Assignment: Ehrman and Jacobs, chapter 14 text 59
- 11/30 Christianity in the Middle Ages.  
Assignment: Selections from Cook and Herzmann and *Rule of St. Benedict*
- 12/5 Christianity Reconsidered: Presentation and discussion of paper #4 (book review).

**Class Discussion Sheet**  
**Religious Studies 214 (McNary-Zak, 2006)**

As part of your attendance and participation for the course, you will be asked to prepare a discussion sheet for one class period during the semester. As indicated on the syllabus, this entails a more thorough preparation of the assigned reading material for the assigned day. You will be responsible for preparing, in advance, a handout to be distributed at least one class period prior to your assigned day. This can be distributed electronically as an attachment sent to the entire class if you wish (17324@rhodes.edu) The handout should contain the following:

1. Some statement of the thesis (if present) and argument(s) advanced by the author/text.
2. List of themes related to the course that can be drawn from the text.
3. Consideration of how the ideas and/or values conveyed in the text differ from our own.  
What presuppositions do we bring to bear on the text?

You should also come to class with one or more ideas for the discussion, such as those questions found in the first assigned reading for the course, "How to Read a Primary Text." Furthermore, you might consider any or all of these angles:

1. What are the key ideas in the text? While the text may contain many ideas, try to identify what you think are the one or two most important ones, or the ideas upon which other ideas rest. As part of this process, direct the class to one or two key passages in the text where these ideas are best articulated by the author.
2. Do the ideas of this text connect to other texts you read in RS 101 or RS 102 or other texts you have read in other classes? The connections you make might be very obvious or they might be much more obscure. What I am most interested in is your ability to think synthetically and contextually beyond a single text or author.