**Introduction to Christianity**

**RE 201**

**Spring 2020; M/W 2:00-3:20**



**Instructor:** Dr. Kauffman

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Office hours: T/TH 10:00-1:00; or by appointment

**Description**

This course charts the history of geographically vast Christian movements during the centuries of early Christianity as well as contemporary expressions of Christianity around the globe, particularly the Global South. Methodologically, we will focus not on doctrines, theologies, Biblical studies, or intellectual movements, but rather the complexity of thought and praxis of Christian agents around the world throughout the past two millennia. This course will convey the extent to which Christians’ various beliefs, cultures, experiences, and desires challenge the conformity and uniformity portrayed by ecclesiastical and intellectual authorities.

In this course we will focus on the historical, social, and religious conditions in which Jesus attracted followers and in which those followers have lived their faith. We will learn about the extent to which localized, historical issues and concerns of practitioners shape their religious expressions and intellectual debates. We will begin by exploring Christian communities and movements during the centuries after the death of Jesus including those in Alexandria, Nubia, Axum, Persia, central Asia, and the Mediterranean world. We will then shift to European explorers, traders, and missionaries as the primary factor in the spread of Christianity from the 14th-20th centuries. We will examine what Christian life looked like for various communities of converts and how their social contexts and beliefs shaped their Christian faith and practices. Finally, we will study contemporary Christian expressions and ideas primarily beyond the West, in the Global South, where the majority of the world’s Christians reside.

By the end of the course, students will understand that Christianity was, from the time of its origins, a movement that took root in diverse areas, and has therefore taken just as many forms. Cultural characteristics of these locales shape and come through in the global Christianities of the world and that Christianity’s spread has depended on its translatability to other cultures. Students will therefore be well versed in various, historical, cultural translations of Christianity around the world.

**This course fulfills a Community Interests (CI) Explorations requirement.**

Students will:

* Examine how Christian communities are shaped by multiple contexts
* Assess competing interests in community decision making
* Analyze social problems from multiple angles or methodologies

**Required texts**

* Wilkens, Robert Louis. *The First Thousand Years: a History of Global Christianity.*
* Excerpts provided on Moodle—**you will be required to print copies of these readings and bring them with you to class**

**Requirements**

Attendance and participation 20%

Reading question responses 10%

Reading reflections 15%

Map quiz 5%

Mid-term exam 25%

Final Paper 25%

**Reading Question Responses**

For every class session, I will post reading questions on Moodle as a mechanism to spur fruitful discussion of the assignments and refine reading practices. You do not need to respond in writing to these questions every day. **But you should submit two responses (at least 600 words) to the reading questions per month. If, at the end of the month, you have not submitted two responses, you will receive a zero for each response you have not submitted**. Even if you do not plan to write a response to the reading questions, you should look at them prior to beginning your reading assignment. **Using these questions as you read will be to your great benefit** as these questions are meant to help you pick out important concepts and themes from the readings (instead of trying to absorb or memorize every minute detail) as well as prepare you for class discussions on each reading. These questions may also be asked on reading quizzes, exams, and in-class group discussions.

**Reading Responses**

Several reading responses will be assigned (see schedule below) during the semester and will be submitted on Moodle. These reading responses are meant to spur class discussion, refine reading practices, and enable students to develop and articulate central themes of the course that students will be tested on. **Your responses should be 500-600 words and submitted as a word document on the corresponding Turnitin post on Moodle**. Each set of Reading Responses will be evaluated according to a “check” system. A “check-plus” indicates exceptional, excellent, thoughtful consideration of and response to the question. A “check” indicates adequate response to the question. A “check-minus” indicates less than adequate response to the question. Those who maintain a “check” average will receive an “A-minus” for this portion of their final grade.

**Mid-term exam**

The mid-term exam will consist of a map portion (similar to the map quiz earlier in the semester) and several essay questions from which students will choose three to respond. These questions are meant to gauge how well students have absorbed, synthesized, and reflected upon the widest variety of content from the class so far. Best grades will go to those who demonstrate a knowledge of a wide variety of concepts, themes, and terms from the semester, how they relate to each other, and how they contribute to understanding of broader course questions regarding the nature of orthodoxy/heresy and how culture influences Christian beliefs and practices.

**Final Paper**

Imagine that the World Council of Churches (WCC) is holding an international conference to address the theme: “the decline of Christianity.” The purpose of the conference is to address clergy members’ and lay persons’ concerns about decreasing funds for churches around the world as well as a perceived decline of “traditional” Christian values, church attendance, and membership. According to the WCC, Western Christianity is in a “crisis,” which both Protestant and Catholic leaders must address.

Having completed a college course in Christianity, you have been called on as a specialist to contribute your thoughts on this concern. Your address to the WCC 6-8 pages long and should draw on the expertise that you have acquired in this course. You do not need to research outside sources, but you **DO need to draw on a wide variety of readings, lectures, discussions, and other content from this semester. You also MUST draw on and cite Roar Fotland’s article.**

In addition to your other thoughts and recommendations, your address should also include a response to the following questions: How has your thinking about Christian diversity changed as a result of your Christianity course? What have your learned about orthodoxy and cultural influences within Christianity? How do these shifts in your thinking relate to the concerns of the WCC?

Papers will be graded on the clarity and relevance of the argument, a demonstrated, wide, knowledge of course content, and analysis of broader themes.

**Class participation and discussion**

As detailed above, a large portion of a student’s grade is participation—thoughtful, engaged contribution to class discussions. The time that we are all setting apart to meet is made more valuable and productive if everyone is prepared, having read all the assignments, reflected upon their meanings, and ready to collectively unpack their significance.

**Guidelines for participation assessment:**

**Excellent: Demonstrates excellent preparation:**

* has analyzed the readingsexceptionally well, relating them to other material (e.g., other readings, lectures, discussions, experiences, etc.).
* Offers analysis, synthesis and evaluation of course material, to take the class further.
* Contributes significantly to ongoing discussion in the following ways: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students’ comments, contributes to cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps the class analyze which approaches are appropriate.
* Is present in the classroom during the entire class session
* Has brought hard copies of reading assignments to class
* Consistently has laptop, phone, and other electronics out of sight

**Fair:**  Demonstrates adequate participation: knows basic reading information but does not show evidence of trying to analyze the reading or lectures. Offers straightforward information, without elaboration or very infrequently (perhaps once per class). Does not offer to contribute to discussion but contributes to a moderate degree when called on. Demonstrates sporadic involvement.

**Weak:** Present. Tries to participate when called on but does not offer many insights. Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussions.

**Null:** Absent

**Class Policies**

* Regular attendance is **mandatory.** Excessive absences will damage the final grade. We all learn from each other, whether though discussion, by asking questions during lecture, or in conversation outside of class stimulated by what happens in class. The learning of all is therefore diminished by the absence of some. For this reason, I do not distinguish between excused absences and unexcused absences, except in the case of a student’s institutional obligations, such as travel related to participation in BSC sports or school-sponsored performances. (All athletes should submit their game schedule to me as soon as possible.) More than four absences are grounds for failure of the course. I will take attendance for every class. If you are absent, you will receive zero “participation points” for that day.
* Technology Policy: The use of electronic devices in classrooms has become a growing source of distractions—both for students and professors—that obstructs learning. Screens can be distracting not only for the individual using them, but for other, onlooking students and professors as well. Abstaining from the use of electronic devices is therefore not simply a choice to focus on one’s surroundings, but also a gesture of respect for fellow students and professors. Furthermore, experience and recent studies have shown that students’ learning is largely impeded, rather than abetted, by the use of these devices in class. Please see the following links: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/science/whats-lost-as-handwritingfades>. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/30/this-year-imresolving-to-ban-laptops-from-my-classroom/>.

Therefore, the use of laptops, tablets, and cell phones is prohibited during class sessions. This policy is intended to encourage an atmosphere of collective participation, learning, and respect. However, if you require an accommodation allowing for a laptop to take notes in class, please see me to make arrangements.

* Accessibility and accommodations: If you have completed the process to receive academic accommodations with the Office of Accessibility, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations. If you have a disability but have not contacted the Office of Accessibility, please contact them as soon as possible at one of the following email addresses: awsmith@bsc.edu or [accessibility@bsc.edu](mailto:accessibility@bsc.edu). If you prefer to call the office, the number is (205) 226-7909
* Late work, make-up work, and extensions: I am open to such accommodations according to individual students’ needs. However, if a student wants to turn in late work or needs an extension, he/she/they must come to my office during office hours and negotiate the terms for that work including explaining why the accommodation is necessary, what the new deadline should be, and/or what the penalty should be. This negotiation cannot take place via email. Students who do not meet with me in person should not expect to be able to turn in late work or receive extensions.
* BSC Resources for Writers and Readers: The Writing Center, located in the Humanities Center (Room 102), offers one-on-one assistance for student writers. We serve all writers, in any BSC course, at all levels and at all points in the writing process. Peer tutors spend thirty minutes to an hour per appointment, and there is no limit to the number of tutoring sessions you can have. Our tutors also help with reading assignments. Visit during regular hours (M-Thurs, 3:30-10 & Sunday 5-10) or email writingcenter@bsc.edu to make an appointment. Don’t write alone; every writer needs a reader. And also enjoy free espresso and movie popcorn!
* Academic Misconduct:

*Definition of Plagiarism as presented in the Birmingham-Southern Student Handbook (p. 2): “When you use someone else’s words, ideas, or data derived through experimentation or investigation without giving that person credit, you are plagiarizing. This is contrary to academic integrity and to the BSC Honor Code.”* Meaningful learning is possible only when those in the classroom trust one another. Academic misconduct undermines this trust and therefore my ability to teach and your ability to learn. I therefore have a strict, no-tolerance policy regarding academic misconduct. Any incident of academic misconduct will be submitted to the BSC Honor Council and will result in failure of the course. Please consult your student handbook for a description of the honor code and take it seriously as you embark on this course. I am readily available to discuss any concerns that you may have regarding your academic progress.

**Technology Requirements**

• Student Outlook Email and Moodle accounts (required)

• Access to a computer and stable internet connection

• High-speed internet connection (DSL or cable modem, preferred)

• Microsoft Office products (e.g. – MS Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc.)

• Chrome, Firefox, or Safari Web Browsers

Microsoft Office 365 is available for free download to all current faculty, staff, and students. This can be easily downloaded from the IT Helpdesk Webpage. You will need to sign in with your Birmingham-Southern User Name and Password to download and use this software.

It is expected all written assignments be completed with Microsoft Word since Microsoft Office 365 has been provided to all members of the Birmingham-Southern community. If the student uses another word processing application, require them to convert their document into a PDF or Word document prior to it being uploaded to Moodle.

IT Helpdesk offers telephone, email, and in-person support to all Birmingham-Southern students and employees. Please view the Student Quick Guide for information on how to access BSC technology tools. Hours of operation are listed below.

Hours of Operation

Email: helpdesk@bsc.edu, Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.- 4 p.m.

Phone: 205-226-3033

24/7 Hotline via Apogee: 1-877-478-8861

Web address: www.bsc.edu/campus/it/helpdesk.html

Technology can be problematic: Internet connections can be slow or down; computers may malfunction; power outages can cause delays or the inability to connect. Technological issues are not acceptable excuses for late assignments. Be prepared and have a backup plan.

**Title IX**

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the campus community. The College forbids any type of sexual or gender-based misconduct among its students, faculty, and staff. The College encourages all members of the academic community to report suspected sexual and gender-based misconduct to the appropriate authorities so that it can be investigated, remedied, and eliminated. Such misconduct is prohibited whether the actor is a student, faculty member, staff member, contractor, visitor, or another member of the College community. BSC forbids retaliation against any person who has opposed, reported or participated in an investigation concerning sexual or gender-based misconduct.

In accordance with federal policy, all College employees are required to report information related to discrimination and harassment which includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. For this reason, if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the Title IX coordinator. As a student, you can report allegations of sexual misconduct to officials in Student Development (Assistant Dean of Students, Dana Bekurs; Associate Dean of Students, W. David Miller; Vice President for Student Development, David Eberhardt), Campus Police, or confidential resources in Counseling Services, Health Services, and Religious Life. Please refer to the [Title IX section](https://www.bsc.edu/titleix/index.html) of the BSC website for more information on filing a report and available resources.

**Student Grievance Policy**

Students should follow the complaint process as outlined in the current [Birmingham-Southern College Student Handbook.](https://www.bsc.edu/campus/studev/student-handbook/46/)

**Inclement Weather**

Inclement weather or other events beyond the control of the College that might cause risk or danger to students, faculty, and staff may occasionally result in changes to normal College operations, including cancellation of classes or events; the calendar schedule may be adjusted.

**Schedule**

**\*This schedule may be subject to change as the course proceeds**

**Section 1: The Diversity of Christianity in Antiquity**

**Week 1, February 3-5:**

Monday: **FIRST DAY OF CLASS**

Wednesday:

* Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”
* **REFLECTIVE RESPONSE #1 DUE**

**Week 2, February 10-12:**

Monday:

* Stephen Harris, *The New Testament: A Student’s Introduction, fourth edition*, page 85-92
* Wilken chapter 2

Wednesday:

* Wilken, chapter 3

**Week 3, February 17-19**

Monday:

* Wilken, chapter 4
* Gospel of Mary Magdala, pages 3-27, 37-47

Wednesday:

* Wilken, chapters 8, 10

**Week 4, February 24-26**

Monday:

* Harry Maier, “Heresy, Households, and the Disciplining of Diversity”
* Wilken, chapter 18
* **REFLECTIVE RESPONSE #2 DUE**

Wednesday:

* Wilken chapters 21, 22

**Week 5, March 2-4**

Monday:

* Wilken, chapters 24, 25

Wednesday:

* Wilken, chapters 28, 35
* **PRACTICE MAP QUIZ**

**Section 2: European Expansion, Colonialism, and the rise of global evangelism**

**Week 6, March 9-11**

Monday:

* Sanneh, “Old World Precedents and New World Directions” (pages 89-96);
* COG, pages 133-147

Wednesday:

* Hastings, “The Victorian Missionary” (pages 278-305)
* Comaroff and Comaroff, “Conversion and Conversation”

\*View in class [*Dark Continents: Christianity—a History*](https://vimeo.com/223897022)

* **REFLECTIVE RESPONSE #3 DUE**

**Week 7, March 16-18**

Monday- REVIEW

Wednesday-- MID-TERM

**Week 7, March 23-25: SPRING BREAK**

**Section 3: Pentecostalism and the shift to the Global South**

**Week 8, March 30-April 1**

Monday:

* Cox, *Fire From Heaven,* chapters 2, 3

Wednesday:

* Hickman, “Christianity’s Shift from the Global North to the Global South”
* Daughrity, “The Decline of Christianity in Western Europe”

**Week 9, April 6-8**

Monday:

* Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion,* 11-26; 39-47; 71-83

Wednesday:

* Hartch pages 184-187; 193-201
* Olupona, “Reverse Evangelism”

**Section 4: Contemporary Christianities and Theological Creativity Around the World**

**Week 10, April 13-15—Africa**

Monday:

* Asamoah Gyadu, “Salvation as Healing and Deliverance” (pages 165-171; 178-185)

Wednesday:

\*\*View *African Christianity Rising* in class

**READING RESPONSE #4 DUE**

**Week 11, April 20-22—Africa and Asia**

Monday:

* Tutu, “Liberation as Biblical Theme”

Wednesday:

* Wu, “Pentecostalism as suffering”, pages 96-98
* “China’s Underground Churches”: <https://www.equaltimes.org/china-s-underground-churches?lang=en#.XcRTPVVKiUl>

\*\*View in class: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china_705/>

**Week 12, April 27-29—Latin America**

Monday:

* Hartch, *The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity*, pages 62-72
* Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, pages 162-173
* “The Truth Behind Banana Republic”: https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.panoramas.pitt.edu/other/truth-behind-banana-republic

Wednesday:

* Hartch, *The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity*, 91-103; chapter 6

**Week 13, May 4-6—Europe and the United States of America**

Monday:

* Larry Rasmussen, “Is Eco-Justice Central to Christian Faith?”
* Katharine Hayhoe, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/opinion/sunday/climate-change-evangelical-christian.html

Wednesday:

* **STRUCTURED DIALOGUE—FOTLAND (READING/REFLECTIVE RESPONSE #5)**

**Week 14, May 11 (LAST DAY OF CLASS)**

Monday:

* **FINAL MAP QUIZ**

**\*\*FINAL PAPER DUE Thursday, May 14th @ 2pm**

**Best practices for exam and final essays**

1) Identify the central thesis

For papers and essays assigned in this course, your introductory paragraphs should be short and concise. Begin by introducing the broader topic that you are going to address and then segue way to your own thesis. Your thesis should not simply be a response (“yes,” “no,” “interesting,” etc.), but rather a nuanced, new take on, or insight into, your topic, considering what you have learned in this course. **For all papers and writing assignments in this course, you should *italicize* your thesis statement, which should be 1-2 sentences in length.**

2) Consider the work in light of previous readings

An objective of this course is to help you develop an increasingly fuller understanding of the multiplicity of historical, global Christianity. However, "understanding" is not achieved passively! Whatever you learn from the readings in a given week should be "held up" against the insights gleaned from previous readings and lectures, whether you are writing a critique or not. Bring all your knowledge from this course and how those ideas relate to each other to bear as you approach your assignment.

3) Substantiate your argument with examples.

All your assertions should be supported with examples, evidence, or quotes from the reading(s) in question. In all writing assignments you will be asked to answer a question or address a theme. Your ideas and main points should be based on what you have gleaned from the readings. You should be able to cite the relevant text in order to substantiate your primary claim(s). In other words, this is not a “reflection paper” (unless otherwise specified) in which you freely muse over the topic of the week or digress into personal tangents. It is meant to be a careful, thoughtful, critical evaluation of the assigned material and course content.

4) Select a title *that is also a comment*

Like a newspaper headline, your title needs to creatively convey, in a nutshell, your main point.