

HPTR4002: Early Christian History
Dr. Llewellyn, coursework

Coursework: type your responses and bring them to class. Please, these answers can be brief, I am not asking for huge paragraphs, just well-written and thoughtful reflection based on the reading. I am not looking for short essays, but short answers that you can use in your discussion of the material. If you are concerned with word count, you can think about limiting yourself to 250 words.



Topic: Social Values in the Roman World

Please Read:

1. Lynch, "Preface" and pages xvii-xix.
2. Handout on Moodle: DeSilva, Chapter 3, pages 111-44.

When analyzing primary sources that are removed from us by several centuries, it is essential to have a sense of the social framework of the society that you are studying. This is why to start this class I have assigned chapter three from DeSilva's *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* as your first reading for this semester. Chapter three is titled "The Cultural and Social World of the Early Church," and provides you with an extensive definition of the cultural values of the social world in which Christianity will develop. These values are known as the *mos maiorum* (customs of the ancestors); these were the principles, behaviours and social practices that influenced public and private Roman life, practices that shaped the development of Christianity.

AFTER YOU READ, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BELOW.

1. How does the author link the values with bodily behaviors in the first century? In other words, how do these values (pick one, for example) shape the way a person operates or "is operated" in the world?
2. What do these values—purity, honor, patronage and kinship—teach you (in general terms) about the culture within which Christianity will emerge?
3. Which one of these social values intrigues you, makes you want to learn more, and why?

Finally, if you have a question inspired by your reading of the Desilva text, write it down and we might have time in class to discuss it.

Figure 1: Imperial Roman. Patrician with Portrait Busts of Two Ancestors.



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Topic: The Jesus Movement within its Social Context



Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.
2. Handout on Moodle: Passages from the NT
3. Handout on Moodle: Passages from Graeco-Roman Religions

1. Lynch, Chapter One. Identify how the historical memory of Jesus has been preserved; in other words, how does this chapter answer the question: “What do we know about Jesus and how do we know it?”
2. Lynch, Chapter Two: Forced Hellenization and the war that it brought had consequences for the social and religious context into which Jesus would be born and raised; please identify some of those consequences.
3. NT Passages: What does Jesus *do* and what does Jesus *say* (according to the authors) in these texts? Pick one of his interactions with people and describe it, and analyze how the teaching might challenge Roman social values.
4. Greek and Roman Religions. Identify some of the different ritual behaviors that are mentioned in the texts (note the presence of specific activities, items or ideas that are employed to explain religious behavior). What do you think that these texts teach us about religion in the ancient world? Can we identify something of what mattered to them?
5. Lynch, Chapter Four: What was the Jesus Movement distinctive *belief* that set them apart from other sects within Judaism?
6. Lynch, Chapter Four: What were some of the social values held by Jews that Jewish-Christians violated? What are the two ‘stumbling blocks’ that come between Jews, Jewish-Christians and Gentiles who were interested in converting to the Jesus Movement?
7. What historical questions do you have about the Jesus Movement that the Lynch reading did not address?

Above left: an early fresco of Jesus with the hemorrhaging woman; below, a mosaic that depicts a central message of Jesus activity in the world and the Jesus movement.



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Topic: Roman Society & Christianity I: Proto-Orthodoxy

Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapter Five
2. Ehrman, *NT*, from Chapter 8, “Apostolic” Writings
Outside the Canon:
 - a. 8.42: *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*
 - b. 8.46: *The Gospel of Mary*
3. **OPTIONAL:** “Wife of Jesus’ reference in Coptic 4th Century script,” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-19645273>.



Lynch, Chapter Five:

1. What are the basic features of Gnostic Christianity?
2. What are the results of Marcion of Sinope’s theological claims?
3. Why do figures like Marcion and Valentinus matter for the history of a movement?



The Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

1. What question do you think drives the narrative of *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*? Put another way, why would someone want to write this text?
2. Identify three stages of life in the *Infancy* text, and consider what they reveal about Jesus at that stage.

Fragments from *The Gospel of Mary*.

1. Consider the relationship between Mary and other figures named in the dialogue; what might this reveal to us about the dynamics of groups that valued this text?
2. What is the basis of Mary’s knowledge, and how is it received by others? What might this tell us about male/female dynamics in early Christian communities?



OPTIONAL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19645273>.

Reflect: Consider the implications of Jesus as married; for whom would this be a problem, and why? What, precisely, would change about the *historical* understanding of the person of Jesus if he *were* to have been married?



Left: Dr. Karen King holds a fourth century fragment of the papyrus (I love how happy she looks!). Above middle, a close-up of a scrap of papyrus which makes reference to Jesus’ of a wife. Above right an Orthodox icon of Mary, whose title is “Equal to the Apostles.”

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Topic: Roman Society and Christianity II ~ Martyrs

Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapter 7, “Roman Society and Christians.”
2. Handout on Moodle: Stark, Chapter 8, “Martyrs: Sacrifice as Rational Choice.”
3. Ehrman, *NT*, Chapter 3: **select one** of the following and answer the questions appropriate to your choice.
 - 3.4: “Pliny’s Letter to Trajan.” What is Pliny’s ultimate question for the Roman Emperor? What does this letter teach you about approaches to new religious movements, Roman control over belief systems and civic behavior?
 - 3.5. “The Letter of Ignatius to the Romans.” It is easy to be repulsed by the attitude Ignatius takes towards his impending death. Try to move beyond that, and consider what the purpose of his letter might be; what does he want to accomplish? What can this text teach you about the way Ignatius is pushing against Roman social values?
 - 3.9 “The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas.” This is a fascinating text written by a woman, and it can reveal a great deal about the socio-historical context of early Christianity. Identify places in the account where you learning something about: women in late antiquity, women and education or Christian persecution in North Africa.
1. Lynch, Chapter Seven. What are the distinct responses that Christians will have towards the Roman state? What do these distinctions *teach* us about early Christianity? Is there anything in Lynch’s explanation that differs or challenges what we have considered in this class?
2. According to Lynch and Stark, how does martyrdom shape early Christianity?
3. What historical questions do you have about the martyr events or martyrdom that the Lynch or Stark reading did not address?



Right, Saints Perpetua and Felicitas are killed with their companions; left, Ignatius of Antioch gets his wish.

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Topic: Roman Society and Christianity III ~ The Apologists

Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapter 8, “Christian Intellectuals.”
2. Ehrman (please read both).
 - a. 4.10: “Minucius Felix, Octavius.” What is at the root of the concern about Christian behavior? Can you find any merit in his argument?
 - b. 4.13: “Justin’s First Apology.” Justin is optimistic that his approach to explaining Christianity through cultural norms will be convincing; identify how Justin makes use of the prevailing culture in his defense of Christianity.



1. Lynch: Identify ways that the apologists attempted to counter negative views about Christianity.
2. Lynch: What are Origen’s methods for working with Christian scriptures? Why is he interested in working with these texts? What are his motives? Is there anything that is surprising to you about the way in which he works with biblical passages?
3. What historical questions do you have that the reading raised or did not address?



Above right: St. Justin Martyr clutches his martyr’s cross; left, a 17th century vellum copy of the “Minucius Felix, Octavius.” Right, Origen sits at his writing table, composing his rough draft version of his treatise against Celsus.



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Topic: Roman Society and Christianity IV ~ Gender

Please read

1. Stark, Chapter 5: The Role of Women in Christian Growth, from *The Rise of Christianity*, and answer the following: What is Stark’s argument for *why* and *how* women contributed to the rise of Christianity? Identify how Christian ethics of the body will support the role of women, how primary/secondary conversion will contribute to greater numbers of Christians and how the issue of status plays into the equation. Finally, offer—if you have one—a critique of his claims.
 2. Ehrman, 14.83. “The Acts of Thecla.” St. Thecla establishes a powerful model for women in early Christianity, and she is one of the most popular female saints in Christian history. How does this text present her as a model beyond expected social and sexual roles? What enables her to take the actions that she takes? In other words, what is the source of her superpower? (Hint: the answer is *not* Jesus).
1. Put Stark in conversation with the Thecla text; how does his research help you understand the text better?
 2. What historical questions do you have about the martyr events or martyrdom that the Lynch or Stark reading did not address?



Above, Thecla stands proudly with her lions in a 5th century Egyptian limestone plaque. To the left, a contemporary depiction of Thecla. Keep in mind: searching for women’s experiences and voices in historical texts can be disappointing and deceiving. Women’s experiences are recounted, but are often done so by men. It might not really be a woman’s voice you are hearing.

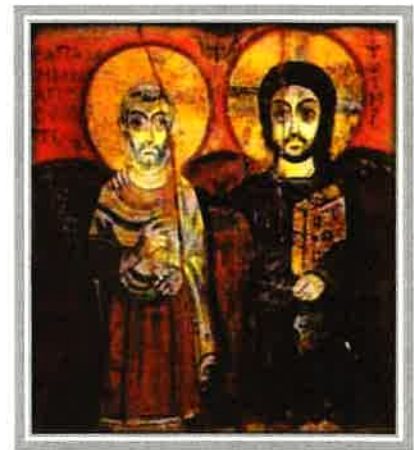
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Topic: Ritual and Worship ~ Getting In and Staying In

Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapter 9, “Proto-Orthodox Christian Communities in the Third Century” and from Chapter 15, “Worship and Piety in the Christian Empire,” pages 179-185,
 2. Handout on Moodle: passages from the NT.
 3. Handout on Moodle: Paulinus of Nola, “Song on Felix’s Church.”
 4. Ehrman: 13.78, “Justin: The First Apology.”
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1. Identify in Lynch some element of early Christian customs, art, architecture or rituals that is surprising to you. In other words, what did you learn in this chapter about the early Christian experience that you did not know before?
 2. From your reading of the biblical passages, identify particular rituals or behaviors that *will lend themselves* to emerging Christian communities, and link them to the Justin text.
 3. Paulinus of Nola: I am very suspicious about this “fire.” What kind of prescient might this tale set? Identify a modern day example of a dispute over “sacred space,” and identify what the argument is about as well as the deeper issues, ideas or fears that the dispute represents.
 4. What historical questions do you have that the reading raised or did not address?



Above left: a Roman statue of a “good” shepherd; **center:** a famous mosaic of “justice” located in the Church of the Loaves and Fishes on the sea of Galilee; **right:** a Coptic icon of Jesus and St. Menas.

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Topic: Christian Empire & Imperial Christianity



Please Read:

1. Lynch, Chapters 10, 11 (skim) and 12.
2. Handout on Moodle: Selections from *The Life of Constantine*, *The New History* and *The Nicene Creed*.

1. Lynch, Chapter 10. Please identify the reasons why the final persecutions came about; what did it entail and why did it fail?
2. *The Life of Constantine*: What does Eusebius (the author) provide as “proof” Constantine was chosen to protect and foster the growth of the Christian church? Cite examples.

3. *The Life of Constantine* and *The New History*: Compare ways Constantine is presented by historians Eusebius and Zosimos. Identify one way in which Roman social values are evident in the text by Zosimos.

4. Lynch, Chapter 12, “The Government of the Church.” This chapter is about management and administration of a religion that is becoming centralized. Please identify in general terms reasons why the bishop of Rome became a person of prominence.
5. What historical questions do you have that the reading raised or did not address?



Above, left and below: various body parts that remain from the massive statue of Apelle Constantine.



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Topic: Monasticism and Monastic Life

Please read:

1. Lynch, Chapter 16, “The Ascetic Movement.”

a. According to Lynch, how did the rise of asceticism and the institution of monasticism influence the basic idea of what it meant to be (a) a Christian and (b) a Christian leader?



2. Handouts on Moodle:

a. *The Pachomian Rules*. Identify two passages that reflect the concerns that individuals living in community faced.

b. *The Life of Pelagia*. How did monastic life provide an opportunity for “liberation” for men and—most especially—for women?

c. Theodoret’s *Religious History*. Identify how asceticism enables a holy person to function in society; in other words, what does it “liberate” them to do?

3. What historical questions do you have that the reading raised or did not address?

Optional Q: Are there any ascetic practices in which you engage?

(Remember, one does not have to be ‘religious’ to engage in ritual behaviors).





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You are responsible for presenting to the class in any visual form you wish (within reason) a review of the topic (as organized and identified below) that you are given for review. You may (for example):

- Create a teaching moment that asks us to think about early Christian issues in a completely modern context
- Create a visual presentation that identifies key elements of what you learned (i.e. a magazine cover, a poster presentation, etc.).
- Create a class activity that highlights what new thing you have learned (i.e.

Topic: Review

- The Jesus Movement within its Social Context & Roman Society & Christianity I: Proto-Orthodoxy
- Roman Society & Christianity II: Martyrs & Roman Society & Christianity III: Apologists
- Roman Society & Christianity IV: Gender & Ritual & Worship
- Christian Empire & Asceticism and the Holy Soul

Here is what we covered in our study, and what I will expect you to address:

1. The Jesus Movement within its social context. The Jesus Movement was part of a complicated and often dangerous relationship that first-century Palestinian Jews had with the Roman government. Begin by identifying in general terms the historical context of Roman political control and Greek culture against which Jews would struggle, sometimes at the expense of Jewish unity. Second, identify the social values of the Roman Empire and how they operated, and demonstrate that you comprehend—by referencing a primary source of your choice as evidence—how early followers of the Jesus Movement subverted one value of your choice. Finally, analyse the Jewish/Roman context as a factor in the development of the Jesus Movement. (Lynch, DeSilva, New Testament passages (provided) and primary sources).

2. Roman Society and Christianity I: Proto-Orthodoxy. In the development of Christian identity, diversity is present. While no single group will initially dominate, in time, proto-orthodoxy will emerge as representative of those whose theology is most appealing (which is different than ‘winning’). Using respectable degrees of caution and citing Lynch and primary sources, in general terms identify the variety of beliefs held by early Christian groups who will eventually be relegated to the margins, and identify how their beliefs differ from those whom Lynch calls the ‘proto-orthodox.’ Finally, analyse the role of Gnostic Christianity in the development of religious identity; in other words, why did Gnostics matter? (Lynch and primary sources).

3. Roman Society and Christianity II: The Martyrs. As Christianity developed independent of Judaism, factors set Christians apart from Jews and practitioners of indigenous or state-sponsored religions. First, identify what sent Christians apart from their neighbours. Second, identify and explain why, specifically, Christians might choose to be martyred. In process, address the needs that stories of martyrs fulfil for developing Christian communities and Christian identity. Using Lynch, Stark and examples from the primary sources, identify and analyse how the process of martyrdom will transform social values such as honour, purity and kin, and consider what impact this might have on living Christians (jailed and not jailed) who might be influenced by the martyr process. (Lynch, Stark, DeSilva and primary sources).

4. Roman Society and Christianity III: The Apologists. As Christianity developed independent of Judaism, factors set Christians apart from Jews and practitioners of indigenous or state-sponsored religions. First, identify and explain the rationale for some Christians choosing to take a different route other than either quietism (staying out of the limelight) or martyrdom in their quest to live a Christian life. Using Lynch and primary sources, identify how the work of apologists such as Justin or Origen interacted with high cultured Jews and practitioners of pagan religions. Finally, using examples from the primary sources, identify how apologists will contribute to the creation of Christian identity and analyse how that identity might differ from those attracted to the martyr option (Lynch, DeSilva and primary sources).

5. Roman Society and Christianity IV: Gender. Early Christian authors were ambivalent in their attitudes about women. First, use a variety of primary sources we have read in class to identify early Christian attitudes towards women as they are depicted in the texts. Avoid sweeping generalizations, be cautious in your claims. Second, using Stark and primary sources, identify how early Christian ethics will contribute to female conversion. Finally, using primary sources, analyze how the social value of “kinship” is interpreted by early Christian communities as it pertains to women (Lynch, Stark, DeSilva and primary sources).

6. Ritual & Worship. According to Lynch, by the third century there were some general communities of early Christians who were beginning to define who they were and what they believed against one another, not just against Roman and Jewish society. Referencing examples from texts we read for class (in Ehrman and Lynch), identify and explain the basic components of the early Christian liturgy and—using DeSilva’s definition of Roman social values—evaluate the degree to which Christian liturgy either supported or subverted a social value of your choice (Lynch, Stark, DeSilva, NT and primary sources).

7. Christian Empire. Identify and explain basic governmentally sanctioned benefits that Constantine provided for Christianity. Further, identify the emperor’s role in the Christian church, and evaluate the way Constantine’s role would impact Christianity: for better, or for worse? Though elements of the Empire were struggling (economics, politics, civic works in decline, social issues), stabilizing elements within Christianity allowed the religion to survive as the Empire transformed. Identify how the doctrine of early Christianity (what Christians believed) supported their responses to urban decay and misery. Further, evaluate to what degree these responses (which can be identified as the “soft push”) differed from the “hard push” that emerged in the post-Constantinian “heresy” that Roman Christianity encountered in Germanic tribes and when Roman Christians and Celtic Christians (Lynch and primary sources).

8. Asceticism and The Holy Soul. Identify influencing ascetic elements that early Christian monastics will inherit from Roman and Jewish culture (Jewish culture includes Jesus and Paul) and from the martyrs. Further, evaluate the impact that the ascetic movement will have on gender and social relations in Christianity; in other words, how does the ascetic movement expand the social value of “kinship” and “liberate” (to a certain degree) the individual human? (Lynch and primary sources).

Ideas/options/choices

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| 1. Create a poster | 20. Create an episode of a reality show |
| 2. Make a PowerPoint presentation | 21. Create a game show |
| 3. Create a twitter account and compose a series of tweets relevant to the topic | 22. Have a panel discussion of “experts” |
| 4. Create a Facebook account and compose a series of posts relevant to the topic | 23. Design a comic strip about the topic |
| 5. Create a Pinterest board relative to the topic | 24. Write a fable or myth about the topic |
| 6. Design a model | 25. Create a help wanted add and a letter/resume to answer it |
| 7. Use a 3-panel display board | 26. Write a text message dialogue relevant to the topic |
| 8. Make a timeline | 27. Create a cereal based on the topic (cover a cereal box) |
| 9. Create a board game incorporating key elements. | 28. Write a recipe relevant to the topic (good for showing causes of an event) |
| 10. Write and perform a skit | 29. Do a newscast |
| 11. Make a TV or radio commercial | 30. Write an advice column with several problems related to the topic |
| 12. Create a flow chart or diagram | 31. Make a short documentary film |
| 13. Write an interview of a relevant person | 32. Create a museum exhibit |
| 14. Create questions and an answer key | 33. Create a top 10 list relevant to the topic |
| 15. Write journal/diary entries | 34. Create a video game |
| 16. Make an instructional video | 35. Make a “Choose Your Own Adventure” |
| 17. Make a pamphlet or brochure | |
| 18. Hold a debate | |
| 19. Hold a mock court case | |