

Global History of Christianity (Spring 2021)

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Course: HIST 384 and RELI 384 (https://historyarthistory.gmu.edu/courses/hist384/course_sections/58939). Spring 2021. Department of History and Art History, George Mason University. 3 credits. Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30am to 11:45am in Innovation Hall 204 and online.

Instructor: Lincoln Mullen (<https://lincolnmullen.com>) <lmullen@gmu.edu (<mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu>)>. Office: Research Hall 484. Office hours: By appointment on Zoom. [Book an appointment.](#) ([/page/office-hours/](#))

Course description

This course is organized around a comparative examination of the many forms global Christianity has taken over the past two thousand years. Chronologically, it begins with the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman contexts of early Christianity and continues through the present. Students will become familiar with many kinds of Christianity across the globe, including Asian, African, Latin American, European, and North American Christianities. In each geographic and chronological context, students will explore several themes, including the adaptation of Christianity to local cultures, the transmission and reception of Christianity, the translation and use of sacred texts, the experiences of a typical church service, and the relationship between Christianity and politics. Students will also consider Christianity as an element of global systems organized around missions, empire, migration, trade, and warfare.

Learning goals

At the end of this course, you will be able

1. to display familiarity with Christianity in a variety of global contexts across time;
2. to understand key questions of transmission, reception, and inculturation that affect Christianity's relationship to empire and other global systems;
3. to demonstrate specific knowledge of topics in the history of Christianity, such as Christendom, the Reformation, missions, and Pentecostalism; and
4. to write clearly and coherently about the history of Christianity.

This course fulfills the Mason Core requirement for [Global Understanding](https://catalog.gmu.edu/mason-core/#global) (<https://catalog.gmu.edu/mason-core/#global>), and you will also meet those learning goals in addition to the course-specific learning goals.

Essential information

For spring semester 2021, this class will be taught both in-person and online, depending on which section you registered for. Of course, given ongoing developments of the pandemic and the possibility of COVID-19 exposure, we will all have to remain flexible. In addition to following all GMU policies about COVID-19, I ask that you communicate with me if you will be absent from class or if you will turn in an assignment late. Likewise, please check for emails and other messages from me in case it is ever necessary to hold class entirely online. By working together, we will make this a semester where you stay safe and learn a great deal about the history of Christianity.

The Zoom connection information is available on Blackboard.

This class will include a combination of lecture, discussion, and in-class assignments. Doing the reading is absolutely essential. Attend class having read any assigned material and be prepared to discuss those readings in class. You must have a copy of the texts assigned for each day available to you during class (electronic copies are fine, of course).

To facilitate our hybrid model, communication for this course will happen in our Slack group (<https://mason-dh-grad.slack.com/signup>). Please sign up and join the #christianity-2021 channel. Read this [getting started guide](https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/218080037-Getting-started-for-new-users) (<https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/218080037-Getting-started-for-new-users>) if you need help.

Before the start of class each week, I will send you a message about what to expect. This will help guide your participation in class each week. Please read it carefully and note any actions you should take.

You are always welcome to talk with me during office hours. To do so, please [book an appointment \(/page/office-hours/\)](#). If the scheduled times don't work for you, [email me \(mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu\)](mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu) and suggest a few other times that would work for you.

Required readings. These books are required. Any edition will do, and the Achebe reading in particular is available in many versions. All other readings will be available on Blackboard or through the GMU libraries.

- MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. Penguin, 2009. ISBN: 9780143118695.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*. Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780195189612.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin, 1994 (first published 1958). ISBN: 9780385474542.

Assignments

Grades will be based on the following assignments. Final grades will be calculated using the typical percentage-based grading scale (A = 93–100, A- = 90–92, B+ = 88–89, B = 83–87, B- = 80–82, ... F = 0–59). Turn in all assignments on Blackboard.

Class participation (10%). In addition to participating in class discussions, specific opportunities for participating in class (in person or online) will be explained prior to class sessions.

Reading quizzes (10%). Any class may (and likely will) include a brief quiz over the assigned readings.

Short writing assignments (5 × 5% each = 25%). Five short writing assignments are due in Blackboard before the start of class on the day assigned (no exceptions). The prompts for these writing assignments are on the schedule below. There are eight prompts; you may select any five that you wish to write.

Paper on the reception of Christianity in non-Western cultures (15%). You will write a five- to six-page paper on how Christianity has been transmitted and received in non-Western cultures, comparing the approaches in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Sanneh's *Disciples of All Nations*, and the numerous primary sources readings that address that topic. Full instructions for this assignment will be provided in advance.

Midterm exam (20%) and final exam (20%). Exams will include essay and identification questions.

Schedule

Tuesday, January 26: Introduction: The pillar of translation

- In class: Acts 2.

Thursday, January 28: From Ancient Israel to Rabbinic Judaism

- MacCulloch, ch. 2.
- Isaiah 7:10–17, 52:13–15, and 53:1–12; Daniel 1:1–21 and 7:1–28.

Tuesday, February 2: Jesus and the New Testament

- MacCulloch, ch. 3.
- Gospel of Mark

Thursday, February 4: Christians and Pagans

- MacCulloch, ch. 1.
- Sanneh, introduction.
- Acts ch. 9, 10, and 15; Galatians ch. 1–2; *Didache*, ch. 1–5, 7, 9–10; Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. 5–6, 9–10, 61, 65–67.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 1:** How do the authors of Acts and Galatians, respectively, describe conflicts between different groups of early Christians? According to this group of readings, what were the most significant rituals and practices among early Christians? Write one (and no more than two) full double-spaced pages on each of these questions. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Tuesday, February 9: Christians and Heretics

- MacCulloch, pp. 121–147.
- Gospel of Thomas.

Thursday, February 11: Christianity and Empire

- MacCulloch, pp. 155–176.
- Sanneh, ch. 1.
- *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*.

Tuesday, February 16: Councils from Nicaea to Chalcedon

- MacCulloch, pp. 189–200, 211–228.
- Creed of Nicaea; Chalcedonian Definition.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 2:** What was the chief question at the Council of Nicaea? How did the Council of Nicaea resolve it? What was the chief question at Chalcedon? How did that church council respond to it? Write two full double-spaced pages. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Thursday, February 18: Augustine and the Making of Latin Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 289–312.
- Augustine, *City of God*, book 14
- Egeria, *Pilgrimage*.

Tuesday, February 23: Expansion to Northwest Europe

- MacCulloch, pp. 200–210, 312–318, 329–345.
- Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*.
- Patrick, *Confession*.

Thursday, February 25: Syrian and Ethiopian Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 176–188, 240–254, 267–269.
- *Kebrä Negast*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 3:** Christianity in Ethiopia developed in parallel to, but distinctly different from, Christianity in Europe. What are the similarities and differences? How do you account for those differences in terms

of the global systems that affected Christian development? Write two full double-spaced pages. Use quotations from primary sources as evidence in your response.

Tuesday, March 2: Islam and Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 255–267, 277–285.
- Sanneh, ch. 2.
- John of Damascus, *Fount of Knowledge*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 4:** How does John of Damascus explain Islam within the terms of Christian theology and practice? What arguments does he use in his apologetic, and how do they differ from the historical account in MacCulloch and Sanneh? Write two full double-spaced pages. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Thursday, March 4: Medieval Christianity and the Middle East

- MacCulloch, pp. 381–89.
- Four accounts of the First Crusade.

Tuesday, March 9: Asian and African Christianities

- Sanneh, ch. 3.
- Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Christian Topography*.
- John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*.
- Chinese Christian sutras.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 5:** We have read a number of accounts of how Christianity was transmitted to, and received by, populations across the Mediterranean basin, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. In two full double-spaced pages, describe the process by which Christianity was received in Asia and Africa? What similarities and differences can be identified to its reception in other places. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Thursday, March 11: Ascetics

- Athanasius, *Life of Antony*.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*.

Tuesday, March 16: Midterm exam

Exam to be given online. Details to be announced.

Thursday, March 18: Byzantine and Russian Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 427–456.
- John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*.

Tuesday, March 23: Monastics and friars

- MacCulloch, ch. 16.
- Rule of St. Benedict.
- Rule of St. Francis.

Thursday, March 25: The Protestant Reformation

- MacCulloch, ch. 17.
- Luther, “Ninety-five Theses” and *Freedom of a Christian*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 6:** What is Luther’s concept of Christian freedom? In what specific ways does Luther emphasize social and moral discipline in an effort to construct a more godly society? Write two double-spaced pages. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Tuesday, March 30: The Catholic Reformation

- MacCulloch, pp. 655–667.
- Documents about Francis Xavier in India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and China.

Thursday, April 1: Spread of Christianity in Asia

- MacCulloch, pp. 689–696, 703–709.
- Sanneh, ch. 6.
- Documents from the Taiping Rebellion.

Tuesday, April 6: Spread of Christianity in Africa

- MacCulloch, pp. 709–715.
- Sanneh, ch. 8.
- Documents on ecclesiastical independence in western and southern Africa.

Thursday, April 8: Enlightenment and Revolutions

- MacCulloch, pp. 769–787, 794–806, 830–838.
- Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 7:** Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *On Religion* attempts to answer Christianity’s “cultured despisers.” Having read Schleiermacher and Paine, how do you think Schleiermacher would respond to Paine? Write two full double-spaced pages. Use quotations from the primary sources as evidence in your response.

Tuesday, April 13: Christianity in North and South America

- MacCulloch, pp. 696–703, 902–915.
- Documents on language and translation in Latin American Christianity.

Thursday, April 15: Christianity and Missions in the Modern Era

- MacCulloch, pp. 866–901.
- Sanneh, ch. 7.
- Documents on missionary societies in Africa.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 8:** Missions Christianity in Africa was closely connected with colonization, and yet African Christians have also become independent of European and American churches. What were the processes by which that independence was gained? Draw on your readings for today, but also from earlier weeks, and you may reference Christianity in Asia as well if you wish. Write two full double-spaced pages.

Tuesday, April 20: Colonization and Decolonization

- MacCulloch, ch. 24.
- Sanneh, ch. 4.
- Complete reading Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. (Whoever has ears to hear: start this book in plenty of time. As you read

note that the section involving missionaries and Christianity in the denouement will obviously be our focus, but that episode depends on the narrative structure of the entire novel.)

Thursday, April 22: Pentecostalism

- Sanneh, ch. 5.
- Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostalism in Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2017): <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.120> (<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.120>).
- Documents on Pentecostalism in Africa and South America.

Tuesday, April 27: Vatican II

- MacCulloch, ch. 25.
- Documents of Vatican II.

Thursday, April 29: Conclusion: Whose religion is Christianity?

- Sanneh, ch. 9.
- **DUE: Paper on the reception of Christianity in non-Western cultures.** This paper will form the basis of our class discussion today.

Tuesday, May 4: Final exam, 10:30am–1:15pm

Exam to be given online. Details to be announced.

Fine print

This syllabus may be updated online as necessary. The online version of this syllabus is the only authoritative version.

Follow the GMU [COVID-19 safety protocols](https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus) (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>) at all times.

You are expected to attend each class (in person or online) and to participate actively (exceptions made only for health reasons, religious holidays, and other university-approved excuses). Whether or not students attend class consistently is the best indicator of how well they will do in the class. If any health concerns come up, you may attend class online rather than in person even if you are registered for an in-person section.

As a courtesy to you to help you with the online or hybrid format of the course, I will share my slides and recordings of our Zoom sessions for the most recent class periods. These are intended to supplement, not replace, attendance in class. By accessing these materials, you agree not to distribute them to anyone outside the course.

Computers, phones, and the like are to be used only for course work while class is in session. Grades may be reduced due to repeated absences. Complete all the readings before the start of each class. No unexcused late work will be accepted, and no late short assignments will be accepted for any reason. No work will be accepted after the last day of class unless specifically assigned. I will discuss grades only in conversation during office hours, not over email.

Class communications will be sent to your GMU email account, which you must check. You should also check the course Slack group regularly, and be logged into it during class if you are not in the classroom in-person.

Unless otherwise specified, you should work on your own for assignments. In general, every source that you use should be acknowledged in a note or bibliography entry. Sources must be adequately paraphrased, meaning (at a minimum) that word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, and the order of ideas must be made your own. Whenever you use others' exact words, you must mark them as such by quotation marks or block quotations with accompanying citations. Plagiarism

consists of presenting the writing, research, or analysis of others as one's own. It applies not only to using the text of another author's work verbatim without quotation marks and accurate citations but also to the taking of specific information, analysis or opinions—even if not in the exact words of the author—and presenting them without citation in one's own paper. Any instance of plagiarism will result in, at minimum, the student receiving a grade of 0 on this paper, and the student will not be given the opportunity to rewrite the paper.

George Mason University has an [Honor Code \(https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/\)](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/), which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

See the George Mason University [catalog \(http://catalog.gmu.edu/\)](http://catalog.gmu.edu/) for general policies, as well as the university [statement on diversity \(http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/\)](http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/).

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the [Office of Disability Resources \(https://ds.gmu.edu/\)](https://ds.gmu.edu/) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the [Registrar's website \(https://registrar.gmu.edu/\)](https://registrar.gmu.edu/).)

“Render therefore to all their dues”: This syllabus is based on versions of this class taught with or by my colleagues John Turner and Mack Holt.