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## Global History of Christianity (Spring 2023)

**Course:** [HIST 384 and RELI 384](#). Spring 2023. Department of History and Art History, George Mason University. 3 credits. Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00pm to 1:15pm, in-person only in Horizon Hall 3010.

**Instructor:** [Lincoln Mullen](#) <[lmullen@gmu.edu](mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu)>. Office: Research Hall 484. Office hours: By appointment, generally Tu/Th afternoons. [Book an appointment](#).

### 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

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element of global systems organized around missions, empire, migration, trade, and warfare.

## Learning goals

At the end of this course, you will

1. be familiar with Christianity in a variety of global contexts across time;
2. understand the historic development of Christian beyond the West as well as the later reception of Christianity in non-Western cultures;
3. understand key questions of transmission, reception, and inculturation that affect Christianity's relationship to empire and other global systems;
4. demonstrate specific knowledge of topics in the history of Christianity, such as Christendom, the Reformation, missions, and Pentecostalism; and
5. be able to write clearly and coherently about the history of Christianity.

This course fulfills the Mason Core requirement for [Global Understanding](#), and you will also meet those learning goals in addition to the course-specific learning goals.

## Essential information

This class will include a combination of lecture, discussion, and active learning. Doing the reading is absolutely essential. There will be a reading quiz every class period: if you've done the reading, you can expect to do well on the quizzes. Attend class having read any assigned material and be prepared to discuss or otherwise engage with 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).

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

Thu., Apr. 6: Spre...

Tues., Apr. 11: Sp...

Thu., Apr. 13: Enl...

Tues., Apr. 18: Ch...

Thu., Apr. 20: Chr...

Tues., Apr. 25: Pe...

Thu., Apr. 27: Col...

Tues., May 2: Vati...

Thu., May 4: Con...

Thu., May 11, 10:...

Fine print

I try to come to class early and stay briefly after class for short conversations.

You are likewise welcome to email me at any time: [lmullen@gmu.edu](mailto:lmullen@gmu.edu). You can generally expect a response within 24 hours, though never on a Sunday.

**Required readings.** These books are required. Any edition will do, and the Achebe reading in particular is available in many versions. Some of the required books are available in the GMU libraries through [TextSelect Textbook Reserves](#). 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. Available as an [e-book through the GMU libraries](#).
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin, 1994 (first published 1958). ISBN: 9780385474542.

## Assignments

Grades will be based on the assignments listed below. Please turn in all assignments on Blackboard.

*Reading quizzes (15%).* Every class will include a brief quiz over the assigned readings. These quizzes should be turned in on a sheet of paper. There are no makeup quizzes, but an absence (or at most two) will not hurt you since the final, overall quiz grade will be graded on a curve.

*Short writing assignments (5 × 5% each = 25%).* Five short writing assignments are due in Blackboard before the start of class on the day assigned. The prompts for these writing assignments are on the schedule below. There are nine prompts; you may select any five that you wish to write. These assignments are the basis of class activities that day, so there are no extensions for due date, but your choice of assignment should afford you some flexibility with your schedule.

Each assignment should be at least three and no more than four full double-spaced pages. Use quotations from the primary sources as your main source of evidence.

*Paper on the reception of Christianity in non-Western cultures (15%).* You will write a five- to six-page (double spaced) 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. This paper should advance a thesis statement arguing for your interpretation of how Christianity has been received. The paper should then discuss a series of examples drawn for at least two and likely more non-Western cultures. You may discuss any aspect of the reception of Christianity, including language and translation, theology, cultural practices, economics and migration, and so forth. Use primary source readings, especially Achebe's novel but also other readings throughout the semester, as your evidence. You should also use Sanneh's monograph to provide historical and theoretical context for your argument. Use footnotes to cite any direct quotation, but it is not necessary to use full citations. An abbreviated citation (e.g., "Sanneh, 123" or "Documents on African missionary societies, 344") will suffice. Due on the last day of class.

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

*Class participation (5%).* Regular attendance and participation in class activities is expected as a matter of course.

*Extra credit: musical appreciation (3%).* Music has been a significant part of Christian history. Students can receive extra credit for opening each class session with music. To receive credit, you will play some brief selection of Christian music relevant to the time and place we are studying that day in the five minutes before class starts. Then, at the start of class, you will give the class an overview of no more than three minutes explaining why the musical selection is historically interesting or significant.

Final grades will be calculated using this scale: A = 93–100, A- = 90–92, B+ = 88–89, B = 83–87, B- = 80–82, ... F = 0–59.

## Schedule

### **Tues., Jan. 24: Introduction: The pillar of translation**

- In class: Acts 2.

### **Thu., Jan. 26: From Ancient Israel to Rabbinic Judaism**

- MacCulloch, ch. 47–73.
- In class: Isaiah 7:10–17, 52:13–15, and 53:1–12; Daniel 1:1–21 and 7:1–28.

### **Tues., Jan. 31: Jesus and the New Testament**

- MacCulloch, pp. 82–102.
- Gospel of Mark.

### **Thu., Feb. 2: Christians and Pagans**

- 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?

### **Tues., Feb. 7: Christians and Heretics**

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

### **Thu., Feb. 9: Christianity and Empire**

- MacCulloch, pp. 155–176.

- Sanneh, ch. 1 (“Whither Christianity?”)
- *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*.

## Tues., Feb. 14: 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?

## Thu., Feb. 16: Augustine and the Making of Latin Christianity

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

## Tues., Feb. 21: Expansion to Northwest Europe

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

## Thu., Feb. 23: Syrian and Ethiopian Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 176–188, 240–254, 267–269.
- *Kebra 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?

## Tues., Feb. 28: Islam and Christianity

- MacCulloch, pp. 255–267, 277–285.
- Sanneh, ch. 2 (“The Christian Movement in Islamic Perspective”)

- 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?

## **Thu., Mar. 2: Medieval Christianity and the Middle East**

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

## **Tues., Mar. 7: Asian and African Christianities**

- Sanneh, ch. 3 (“Old World Precedents and New World Directions”)
- 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. How was Christianity was received in Asia and Africa? What were the similarities and differences in its reception in other places?

## **Thu., Mar. 9: Midterm exam**

Please bring a bluebook to the exam.

## **Spring break, Mar. 13 to Mar. 19**

## **Tues., Mar. 21: Byzantine and Russian Christianity**

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

## **Thu., Mar. 23: Ascetics**

- Tom Holland, *Dominion*, ch. 5.
- Athanasius, *Life of Antony*.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina*.
- **Due: Short writing assignment 6:** Why were the lives of ascetics appealing to Christians and non-Christians? In what ways did ascetics challenge society or the church?

## **Tues., Mar. 28: Monastics and friars**

- MacCulloch, pp. 551–564.
- Rule of St. Benedict.
- Rule of St. Francis.

## **Thu., Mar. 30: The Protestant Reformation**

- MacCulloch, pp. 604–637.
- Luther, “Ninety-five Theses” and *Freedom of a Christian*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 7:** 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?

## **Tues., Apr. 4: The Catholic Reformation**

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

## **Thu., Apr. 6: Spread of Christianity in Asia**

- MacCulloch, pp. 689–696, 703–709.
- Sanneh, ch. 8 (“Christian Awakening and the New China”)
- Documents from the Taiping Rebellion.

## **Tues., Apr. 11: Spread of Christianity in Africa**

- MacCulloch, pp. 709–715.
- Sanneh, ch. 6 (“Resurgence and the New Order in West Africa”).
- Documents on ecclesiastical independence in western and

southern Africa.

## Thu., Apr. 13: Enlightenment and Revolutions

- MacCulloch, pp. 769–787, 794–806, 830–838.
- Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 8:** 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?

## Tues., Apr. 18: Christianity in North and South America

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

## Thu., Apr. 20: Christianity and Missions in the Modern Era

- MacCulloch, pp. 866–901.
- Sanneh, ch. 7 ("Civilization and the Limits of Mission").
- Documents on missionary societies in Africa.
- **DUE: Short writing assignment 9:** 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.

## Tues., Apr. 25: Pentecostalism

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

## Thu., Apr. 27: Colonization and Decolonization

- MacCulloch, pp. 951–966.
- Sanneh, ch. 4 (“The Yogi and the Commisar”).
- 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.)

## Tues., May 2: Vatican II

- MacCulloch, pp. 967–990.
- Documents of Vatican II.

## Thu., May 4: 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.

## Thu., May 11, 10:30am–1:15pm: Final exam

Please bring a blue book to the exam.

## Fine print

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

Please submit all assignments in Blackboard, unless I collect them on paper in class.

You are expected to attend each class 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. Participation grades may be reduced due to repeated

absences. If you wish to be excused for an absence, please email me before the absence if possible, or as soon as possible after the absence. I understand that life happens, and I will do my best to work with you.

Computers, phones, and the like are to be used only for course work while class is in session. Please don't distract your neighbors!

Complete all the readings before the start of each class. No unexcused late work will be accepted. No work will be accepted after the last day of class. 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.

If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or some other concern, students should check their email for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes assignments.

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. Using AI-assistance for any paper is also plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will result in, at minimum, the student receiving a grade of 0 on the assignment, and the student will not be given the opportunity to rewrite the paper.

George Mason University has an [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](#) for general policies, as well as the university [statement on diversity](#).

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the [Office of Disability Resources](#). 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](#).)

“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.

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This website is created in [Annandale, Virginia](#). Made with [Hugo](#) ([source code](#)). Here are some [cool things](#).