CH 272A (REL 272A): The Early Medieval Church

Fall Semester, 2002
Wednesday, 1:30-3:50 P.M.
Instructor: Keefe (office in 316 Old Divinity; tel. 660-3469)

Description of Seminar

"Africa, the Church of the Martyrs." A haunting, beckoning epitaph seals the tomb of the Christian Church in North Africa. What lies behind the tombstone? Can we resurrect the life and thought of six brief centuries of African men and women in their struggle to follow the God-man of the Christians in an age-old pagan world? Only a skeleton of the Church in Africa survived native hordes and the sweep of Islam by the seventh century, yet it was in and through Africa that Christianity became a universal religion, western as well as eastern.

Out of Africa, not Rome, come the greatest theologians of the early western church: Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine. How was it that Africa give birth to these great minds? What were the controversies over which they struggled, that shaped the western understanding of what the church should be, who its head, who its members, where its holiness, where its authority? The aim of this seminar is to read these authors and others as a means to come to know the Church of North Africa. In order to understand the profound impact of the African experience on the universal church we will ask what characterized the Church of North Africa, and why issues regarding the nature of the church arose more acutely on her soil than on any other. Rather than rely on characterizations of the North African Church and its writers made by modern historians, we will focus on the primary sources.

A wealth of material also lies in archaeological remains, and in this seminar we will look at the evidence of ancient churches, baptisteries, martyria, and cemeteries.

The African Church is in many ways an anomaly. It does not know its own origins. It claims no one of Christ’s apostles as its founder. It was majoredly heretical for most of its existence. Finally, despite its fanatic visionaries, puritans, and martyrs, it succumbed very quickly to invaders’ religions. Such facts raise a wide range of questions about early Christianity in North Africa. In a research paper you will have the chance to explore a topic of your choosing dealing with African church life and thought, such as a Spirit-led church, Apocalypticism, heresy, martyrdom, idolatry, puritanism, Judaizing, holiness, the episcopacy, or baptism.

Requirements

1. The following books are available at Cokesbury. I strongly encourage you to buy the books rather than to rely on library copies, because you will be required to bring the texts to class each week, and we will be examining them very closely in class:


M. A. Tilley, ed. Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa

Recommended: Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (1967).

(There will also be a number of xeroxed articles and chapters handed out to you.)

2. Weekly reading assignment (see the schedule below).

3. Weekly Written Reflection. After completing the reading assignment each week, take a day or two to reflect on what you read. What was the author’s most urgent concern? By what practices or beliefs did he feel the church was most threatened? What surprised you most about the reading? What were the most memorable lines you highlighted? After reflecting, copy out the few words or lines that best captured the author’s message for you, or that best revealed to you the author’s understanding of the church, what she should be in her noblest array. (Sometimes this is brought out in subtle ways: the simple response of a martyr, a piece of sarcasm, a miracle story.)

After copying out the passage (note the page), comment on your choice in no more than one page. We will all read our passages and read or summarize our comment. This will be the basis of our class discussion of the texts. There is no correct or incorrect answer in this reflection exercise. I will collect them and give you credit for them, and then return them to you for your notebooks.

4. Archaeology Report: Each week two people will give a brief (20-30 minute) presentation on some archaeological site or building connected with our reading. It may be to describe an African city, such as ancient Carthage or Hippo, or a specific church, baptistery, or martyrium. I have already chosen the topic for you and prepared a preliminary bibliography to get you started. Find and bring any visual aids you can, such as pictures in books, slides, postcards, tourist guides, maps, and diagrams. (BUT YOU MAY NOT BRING IN ANY INFORMATION OR PICTURES DOWN-LOADED FROM THE WEB.) The purpose of this report is to gain a greater appreciation of the physical world in which Christianity struggled to survive, and to bring us closer to the
reality of that age. Perhaps nothing is quite as jolting as seeing the physical evidence from archaeology—a charred human bone, a broken plaque preserving a few letters of a martyr’s name, the cross-shaped pit of a sunken baptismal font, the stubbles of a many-columned basilica, the indentations of irrigation ditches and the stele of the ubiquitous olive-oil presses amid which Donatist churches sprouted.

What did a Donatist church look like? How extensive were the great basilicas known to Cyprian? What did the amphitheatres look like where Christians were martyred? Where did they celebrate their baptisms? Where did they bury and commemorate their martyrs? What did the land consist of between the Atlas Mountains, the great salt lakes, and the shores of the Mediterranean? What did the people look like, what language did they speak? This report requires you to do independent research in the library, gathering as much information as you can from archaeological journals, excavation reports, antiquarians’ travelogs, encyclopedias, etc.

5. Final Research paper (25-30 pages) including a Class Presentation of it. The paper will be due on the day of your presentation (see Schedule). **MAKE SURE THAT YOU FOLLOW THE ATTACHED "POINTERS FOR WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH PAPER"!** In your paper you may NOT QUOTE SECONDARY SOURCES (MODERN AUTHORS) IN THE MAIN BODY OF YOUR PAPER. You may certainly use secondary sources to gain the necessary background information on your topic, but paraphrase this information, putting it in your own words and giving the modern author credit for it in a footnote. Also, you may NOT USE WEB CITATIONS. If you use the web to gain information, you must find the source from which they got the information, and give the complete book or article citation (name of author, title, publisher, place, date, pages). You may not give out information or pictures down-loaded from the web to the class. The class can go to the web themselves. The web often gives only superficial information. Also, pictures are poor and fuzzy compared to the originals. Rather, find the originals and bring them to class. Take time to browse in the library. Usually one call number will take you to a whole shelf full of books on your topic. Use art and archaeological journals. I will help you with this.

You must give the class a reading assignment one week ahead of your presentation (either the paper itself or a particularly good article or chapter from a book you used in writing your paper. It may be on anything touching on the church in North Africa (Some broad areas from which you might wish to develop a paper proposal include liturgical practice, community life, African women saints, pastoral and missionary work, African church councils, minor African writers, heretical sects, the clergy, relations with Rome and other sees.) You may wish to relate your topic to the practices or distinctive characterizations of your denomination today.
Your final grade will consist of: class participation, weekly written reflection, and oral archaeology report, 50%; final research paper and class presentation of it, 50%.

Weekly Schedule (the reading is due on the date given)

8/28 Introduction

9/4 Tertullian I: Martyrdom

Reading: 1) in Tertullian: The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas (pp. 697-706)
On Patience (pp. 707-717)
Ad Martyras (pp. 693-696)
Scorpiace (pp. 633-648)


Archaeology Report

9/11 Tertullian II: Conversion in the Church

Reading: in Tertullian: On Repentance, pp. 657-666
On Baptism, pp. 669-679
Archaeology Report: Baptisteries of North Africa. How did Africans celebrate their entrance into Christian life? Show slides (see me) of a variety of baptisteries and fonts, and allow us to reflect on their size and shape, location in relation to a church, martyrium, or cemetery, inscriptions and iconography on or near the font. Compare with Tertullian's description of baptism.


Archaeology Report

Tertullian III: Heresy

Reading: in *Tertullian: The Prescription Against Heretics*, pp. 243-265 Against Marcion (only Books I-IV), pp. 271-423

Archaeology Report: Martyr Basilicas, Cemeteries, Tombs (including the tomb of Perpetua and Felicitas in Carthage)

Numidian Village in the Later Roman Empire in Frend, Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries. (These last two articles give a good, brief overview of Christianity in North Africa down to Islam and of the physical characteristics of Numidia.)

Archaeology Report

9/25 Tertullian IV: Theological Issues


10/2 Cyrian I: Life and Letters

Reading: in Cyprian, The Life of Cyprian by his Deacon Pontius, pp. 267-274; The Letters of Cyprian, pp. 275-409 (especially valuable for discussion might be letters 14, 26, 50, 51, 53, 58, 61, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73).

10/9 Cyprian II: Treatises and Council of Carthage of 87 Bishops


Archaeology Report

10/16 FALL BREAK: NO CLASS

10/23 Augustine I: Against the Donatists

Reading: 1) in Augustine: On Baptism, Against the Donatists (Books I-VI and end of Book VII, pp. 411-498, 512-514);
2) Optatus of Mileva, Against Parmenian the Donatist (selections, xeroxed hand-out);
3) Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo, chapters 19, 20, 21.


Archaeology Report

10/30 Donatist Martyr Stories

Reading: M. A. Tilley ed. Donatist Martyr Stories (entire).

Archaeology Report: Hippo Regius. Bibliography: F. Van der Meer, Augustine the Bishop (1961); E. Marec, Hippone-la-Royale: antique Hippo Regius (1954) and Monuments chrétiens d’Hippone (1958); P.

Archaeology Report

11/6 Augustine II: City of God

Reading: 1) City of God, Knowles' Introduction, pp. vii-xxxvii, Books XI-XIV, chp. 27 in Book XVI, Book XVIII, Books XIX-XXII
2) "African Code of 419" (xeroxed hand-out)


Archaeology Report

11/13 CLASS PRESENTATIONS

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11/20 CLASS PRESENTATIONS

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11/27 CLASS PRESENTATIONS


12/4 CLASS PRESENTATIONS (Last day of class)


Pointers on Writing a Good Research Paper

When writing a research paper that is based on your use of a primary source (or several primary sources) from the medieval period, you should observe carefully the following guidelines:

1) A title which is not vague, but pinpoints the exact inquiry or study you are making. For example, bad = "Marriage in the Middle Ages"; but good = "The Idea of Marriage According to the 12th c. Heloise in her Correspondence with Abelard."

2) An introduction or a preface, clearly marked as such, which a) states precisely what you are attempting to do in your paper. This may be put in the form of a question, stated as a problem, posed as a controversial hypothesis, or as a challenge to a previous view; b) describes your primary source(s) of information: why you selected this source; is it our only source? who wrote the source? when? why? to whom? is it biased? is it reliable? was it read in the Middle Ages? how great was its influence? what is the historical context (political, social) in which it was written? c) entices, intrigues the reader (this is usually accomplished by posing an interesting question or problem in very straightforward language, giving, at this point, only the bare minimum of background information necessary for the reader to understand the problem.

3) The body of your paper: may I remind you, quoted from the MLA Handbook, p. 1:

   The research paper, the final product of research, is not a collection of other persons' opinions but a carefully constructed presentation of an idea—or series of ideas—that relies on other sources for clarification or verification. Learned facts and borrowed opinions must be fully documented in the research paper, usually through endnotes or footnotes, but always in such a manner that they support rather than overshadow the paper itself.

   DO NOT DIRECTLY QUOTE SECONDARY SOURCES IN YOUR PAPER! Only primary sources should be directly quoted and only to support your arguments or observations with examples.

   Regarding a good writing style, you may find very helpful the list of objectives on the following page. Also, you might wish to refer to a basic writing manual, such as Strunk and White, Elements of Style.

4) Conclusion: this should a) summarize the evidence you have presented and b) draw a conclusion that answers or corresponds to your opening paragraph.

5) Make sure to re-read your paper for typos, spelling, grammatical errors before submitting it. The neat, careful form in which it is presented indicates to me the effort you have put into the paper as a whole.