

Early Christian Worship: Ritual & Space in the Ancient Church

Trinity Term, April 8 – June 15, 2024, Davenant Hall

Module: Christian History, Theology

Instructor: Dr Matthew JJ Hoskin

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Course Description

How and where did ancient Christians worship? Did they really live in the catacombs? Was divine service more like a backyard barbecue or an Eastern Orthodox Divine Liturgy? Myths abound about how early Christians worshiped—or, at the very least, obscurity and ignorance. This course will explore Christian worship of the Triune God in the earliest centuries both in terms of space (what were the “house churches”, what other spaces did they use and how, what about the catacombs?) and in terms of ritual (what went on in these spaces and why?). Students will study the art and archaeology of ancient Christian spaces from the catacombs to Hagia Sophia as well as texts such as the first-century *Didache*, Justin Martyr, the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor’s meditation on the liturgy, and the ancient approach to worship in writers like Tertullian and Gregory of Nyssa.

Course Format

Classes will be seminar style with a mix of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to come to class having already read required texts for that week and ready for discussion.

Readings will be around 50-100 pages per week, sometimes fewer but with images. Classes will meet on [Zoom](#) for two hours weekly and recorded for absent students (not for dissemination outside of class). Additional student and instructor interaction will take place on our [Discord](#) channel, which students will be given access to before the course. [Google Classroom](#) will be used for assignment submissions, grades, and announcements.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will:

- Have read ancient liturgical texts from the first through early fifth centuries and analysed how they relate to actual practice.
- Have studied the evidence for early Christian worship spaces as well as early basilicas.
- Have a grasp of ancient attitudes towards worship.
- Go deep into the theology of worship, symbol, and ritual.
- Have an encounter with Christianity in its ancient context.

Required Texts

Everything for this course is available in the public domain or will be distributed by Dr Hoskin **except for *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus***. Because of the nature of this text and its transmission, we should all use the same translation/edition:

Hippolytus. *On the Apostolic Tradition*. Trans. Alistair Stewart. 2nd ed. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2015.

Dr. Hoskin will sometimes use a book he owns instead of the free online ones. The translations he will use are listed below:

Dr. Hoskin's texts

The Didache, in *The Apostolic Fathers*. 3rd ed. Ed. and trans. Michael Holmes. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *St. Justin Martyr*. Trans. Thoams B. Falls. Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1948. [If you have access to Paul Parvis's edition and translation from Oxford University Press, all the better.]

Tertullian, *On Prayer*, and Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*, in Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen. *On the Lord's Prayer*. Trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2004.

Cyril of Jerusalem. *St Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*. Ed. and trans. Frank Leslie Cross. London: SPCK, 1966.

Egeria's Travels. Trans. John Wilkinson. Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1999.

The Divine Liturgy of our Father Among the Saints John Chrysostom. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Recommended Modern Reading

Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*.

Auditing or Switching Courses

Auditors are not required to attend class live or submit assignments, but may participate in Zoom meetings, Discord, Google Classroom, and access recordings. If the time does not work for you, you can switch to auditing or to another course. See the drop/switch policy on the Course Catalog or [M.Litt. FAQ](#). Students are entitled to a full refund if the chosen time does not work for them. Please email Julia Thiele at j.thiele@davenantinstitute.org with any changes, requests, or questions.

Course Requirements

LATE PENALTY: 5% per day

Attendance and Participation: 20%

- All for-credit students are required to attend the lectures live and engage in the discussion. Failure to engage in discussion will result in a lower grade.

- For-credit students may have one excused absence.

Short Essay: 20% (1500 words; **due Friday of Week 4, May 3**)

- o Consider the texts of the early liturgies, the eucharistic section of the *Didache*, and the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom. What is their implicit theology of worship? What about theology proper (ie. doctrine of God)? Any other theological takeaways? No substantial research beyond primary texts required.

Commentary Study: 20% (1500 words; **due Friday of Week 8, June 7**)

- Write a review/study of one of these two early Byzantine liturgical commentaries.
 - o Maximus the Confessor. *On the Ecclesiastical Mystagogy*. Trans. Jonathan Armstrong. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2019.
 - o Germanus of Constantinople. *On the Divine Liturgy*. Trans. Paul Meyendorff. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984.

Final Essay (40%, 3000-5000 words; **Due June 21**): This is a major research essay that requires both critical thought on the ancient sources, like the short essay, as well as reading more widely in modern scholarship. The topic can be anything to do with any of the primary source texts or lecture topics, so long as it is within the bounds of theology or the history of Christianity. **Please run your topics past Dr Hoskin before the end of Week 7.**

Grading Scale

93:A / 90:A- / 87:B+ / 83:B / 80:B- / 77:C / 73:C / 70:C- / 67:D+ / 63:D / 60:D- / <60:F

Course Schedule

Week	Reading	Lecture Topic	Important Dates
Week 1 b. April 8	1. 1 Corinthians 2. <i>Didache</i> 3. Pliny, Letters 10.96 and 97. 4. Justin, <i>First Apology</i> , chh. 65-67.	From Temple and Synagogue to <i>Ekklesia</i> : Earliest Christian Worship	
Week 2 b. Apr. 15	1. Early Liturgies from ANF vol. 7 2. Hymn: "Phos Hilaron"	Catacombs and the earliest worship spaces	
Week 3 b. Apr. 22	Hippolytus, <i>The Apostolic Tradition</i>	Hippolytus: Teaching, Eucharist, Baptism, Communal Prayer	
Week 4 b. Apr. 29	Tertullian, <i>On Prayer</i> Cyprian, <i>On the Lord's Prayer</i>	The "Liturgy of the Hours" / "Divine Office"	Short Essay due Friday of this week

Week 5 b. May 6	1. Cyril of Jerusalem, <i>Lectures on the Christian Sacraments</i> : Procatechesis, Mystagogical Catecheses I-III. 2. Egeria's Travels	Baptism, Space, and the Liturgy at Jerusalem	
Week 6 b. May 13	1. Cyril of Jerusalem, <i>Lectures...</i> , IV-end. 2. Cyprian, Letter 62	Eucharistic Theology	
Week 7 b. May 20	1. <i>The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didascalia)</i> 2. <i>The Apostolic Constitutions</i>	Liturgy and Church Order in the 4 th century What about bodies?	Major Research Essay topics must be reviewed by this week
Week 8 b. May 27	Ancient Hymns of Ambrose, Ephrem, and Anonymous (to be distributed)	Ancient Hymns	Review due Friday
Week 9 b. June 3	Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom	From Late Antique to "Byzantine"	
Week 10 b. June 10	Latin liturgical texts and studies to be distributed	From Late Antique to "Mediaeval"	
Week of June 17			Final essay due Friday, June 21

Links to Weekly Readings

Week 1: *Didache*: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>

-Pliny, Letters 10.96 and 97: <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>

-Justin, *First Apology*, chh. 65-67:

https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/first_apology/anf01.viii.ii.lxv.html

Week 2: <https://ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/liturgies/anf07>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phos_Hilaron

Week 3: **This is the one required book.**

Week 4: Tertullian, *On Prayer*: <https://ccel.org/ccel/tertullian/prayer/anf03.vi.iv.i.html>

-Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*: <https://ccel.org/ccel/cyprian/treatises/anf05.iv.v.iv.html>

Week 5: Cyril of Jerusalem: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207/npnf207.ii.iv.html>

-Egeria: <https://www.ccel.org/m/mcclure/etheria/etheria.htm>

Week 6: Cyril of Jerusalem: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf207/npnf207.ii.xxvi.html>

-Cyprian, Letter 62: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050662.htm>

Week 7: <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07/anf07.viii.iii.i.html> - This link takes you to the start of the Didascalia, and the Constitutions follow immediately after

Week 8: To be distributed

Week 9: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom>

Week 10: To be distributed