

REL 365 | The History of the Orthodox Church Spring 2025

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Course Description and Approach

This course will be a journey introducing the student to the Orthodox Church, the largest of the Eastern Christian Churches. It will explore the history, faith, liturgy and spirituality of the Orthodox Church. The exploration will be based on lectures, readings, audio-visual presentations, discussion, and personal experience. Special emphasis will be given on primary sources since tradition is greatly valued by the Orthodox Church. My main goal is to make students share my enthusiasm for the history and meaning of the Orthodox Church. I wish to explore -along with my students- Orthodoxy in its historical and modern contexts and invite students to explore how Orthodoxy is lived and practised in Greece. Students will be expected to submit their own reflection notes throughout the course (so as to develop written skills and simultaneously exercise critical thinking), evaluate, orally, many primary sources, gather and interpret research material, reflect critically on religious phenomena during what would hopefully be a passionate class discussion, work independently and collaboratively, taking into account current scholarship, worship and praxis.

Goals and Objectives

1. To familiarize with the rich history, heritage and tradition of the Orthodox Church, in particular, and with the Christian East, in general.
2. To explore the Orthodox Church in its natural setting.
3. To discover the common spiritual foundation and background of Christianity in East and West.
4. To exhibit awareness of your own experience of religious tradition and commitment as well as differences in perspective and opinion.
5. To dispel popular myths and challenge misconceptions about Christianity.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Identify the landmarks of the history of the Orthodox Church.
2. Appreciate critically the influence of Orthodox Christianity in shaping human experience.
3. Understand the place of the Orthodox Church in the world.
4. To compare/contrast the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church with one's own faith tradition.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation. The success of the course depends on your conscious and active participation.
2. Completion of Assigned Readings and Projects. Readings must be completed in advance to facilitate participation and discussion.
3. Course-long project: 3 reflection notes on our class on-site visits (1 page long).
4. Two short Papers (4 to 5 double space 12 times roman pages):
 - a. Observe an Orthodox Divine Liturgy.
 - b. Interview Project.

****Guidelines on the two papers to follow****

Evaluation and Grading

Attendance and Participation: 10%

2 Papers: 25% each

Course-long project: 10%

Tests: 15%

Final: 15%

Grades are intended to give you a sense of the quality of a particular piece of work: roughly speaking, a B means that you have done a good job with the writing, the ideas, and the organization of the work; a C conveys that the work lacks some important qualities and has some problems, while an A means that the work is exemplary in some key ways: the writing is particularly clear, the ideas thoroughly treated, the organization of the presentation well considered and effective.

Class Participation: Your attendance and in class writing and analysis – is vitally important to your success in this course.

Use of Laptops In-class or on-site use of laptops and other devices is not permitted. Handouts with all the topics raised will be distributed instead every time we meet.

Attendance Students are expected to report for classes promptly. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site as essential. If you have to miss a class, please inform the Director of Student Affairs.

Policy on Original Work Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the V.P. for Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

You will have the opportunity to complete an **evaluation** form for my teaching methods at the end of the course. Should you experience any difficulties before this, please let me know. I promise I will do my best to help you during your studies in Athens. By all means do contact me, if you think I could be of any help.

Required Text

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London et al, 1997.

Class Schedule

SESSION 1= January 27

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity. Statistics.

Who are the Orthodox? Why is tradition and early Christian times so important for Orthodox Christianity?

No required reading.

SESSION 2= January 29

The Formation of Scripture.

What is the Christian Canon? How and why was it formed? What are the apocryphal gospels? Why does the Orthodox Church resent them so much? Should we stay away from them?

No required reading.

SESSION 3= February 3

The Early Church. The "Triumph" of Christianity. Persecution and Martyrdom.

What is martyrdom and why is it so important for the Orthodox Church?

Readings:

1. Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, p. 38-59.
2. Despina Iosif, "Christian Aloofness and Participation"
3. Knut Schaferdiek, "Christian Mission and Expansion"

SESSION 4= February 5

The Byzantine Empire. Constantine.

Was emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity sincere? Why is the issue still thorny?

Reading:

Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire*, p. 1-14.

SESSION 5= February 10

The Great Schism

Why isn't the Church one? Will it ever reunite?

Readings:

1. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 3: Byzantium II: The Great Schism).
2. "Common Declaration by Pope Benedict XVI and Patriarch Bartholomew I." Thursday, November 30, 2006

SESSION 6= February 12

TEST (all the material we have covered so far. Critical thinking required most)

SESSION 7= February 17

Open Discussion

SESSION 8= February 24

The desert Fathers. Monasticism and Asceticism. The Jesus Prayer.

What is monasticism? What is asceticism? Why does the Orthodox Church find them so admirable?

Reading:

Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, p. 60-77.

SESSION 9= February 26

Moni Dafniou Visit What makes this monastery unique?

No required reading.

SESSION 10= March 5

Orthodox Christian Monastic Communities.

Which are the most important Orthodox monastic centers?

Reading:

Douglas Burton-Christie, "Towards a Desert Hermeneutic"

SESSION 11= March 10

The Orthodox Body. Christian Orthodox Views on Women.

How are women seen in Orthodoxy? How is the body to be treated?

Readings:

1. The Diary of Perpetua.
2. The Life of Pelagia.
3. D. Iosif, 'Shut up woman!'

SESSION 12= March 12

Food. Fasting. Prayer. Feasts.

What is prayer? What is fasting? How is prayer connected to fasting? How is food to be approached? Why is fasting prescribed? Which feasts are connected to prayer and fasting?

Reading:

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 15: Orthodox Worship III: Feasts, Fasts, and Private Prayer)

SESSION 13= March 17

TEST (all the material we have covered so far. Critical thinking required most)

SESSION 14= March 24

The Exercise of Power in the Orthodox Church. Offices. Synods.

How is the Orthodox Church run? Who exercises power? Which are the Orthodox offices? What is a Synod?

Reading:

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 2: Byzantium I: The Church of the Seven Councils).

SESSION 15= March 26

Early Christian Activity at Night.

Why is it one of the reasons Christianity prevailed?

No required reading

SESSION 16= March 31

Sacraments. Services. Hymnography.

Which are the Orthodox Sacraments? Services? How is piety expressed inside a church?

Reading:

Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 13: Orthodox Worship I: The Earthly Heaven and chapter 14: Orthodox Worship II: The Sacraments)

SESSION 17= April 2

Byzantine Museum Visit. Were early Christians influenced by pagan art? And to what extent? Are there any icons on display influenced by the apocryphal tradition? Does the museum house typical Orthodox art?

SUBMIT 1ST PAPER

Reading:

George Galavaris, "The Icon in the Life of the Church"

SESSION 18= April 7

Church Visit: we will attend service at Ag. Spyridon Church in Pangrati. How prevalent are saints inside an Orthodox Christian church? Can you locate the chi-ro symbol? Can you locate the ex votos? Can you locate any depictions of pillar saints?

No required reading.

SESSION 19= April 9

Art-Icons-Architecture and Agia Sophia.

Which are the typical characteristics of Christian Orthodox Art?

Which is the most important Orthodox church and why? Can you predict its future use?

Reading:

George Galavaris, "The Icon in the Life of the Church"

SUBMIT REFLECTION NOTE

SESSION 20= April 23

Church Visit Athens Metropolis and Athens Little Metropolis. Chance to visit Athens Cathedral.

No required reading.

SUBMIT REFLECTION NOTE

SESSION 21= April 28

Moni Kaisariani visit. What makes this monastery unique?

No required reading.

SUBMIT REFLECTION NOTE

SESSION 22= April 30

The Orthodox Church Today. Orthodoxy and Current Issues. And Open Discussion Session.

Are there any controversial issues that trouble the Orthodox Church today?

Readings:

1. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 9: The Twentieth Century III).
2. Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Toward Global Community".
3. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (chapter 16: The Reunion of Christians).
4. Yannoulatos, " Globalization and Religious Experience"

SESSION 23= May 5

Showing of a Religious Movie and Discussion.

Why is this movie so distasteful for pious Orthodox Christians worldwide?

SUBMIT INTERVIEW

No required reading.

SESSION 24= May 7

Showing of Students' Visual Material. Review and Questions.

Students will be expected to show any relevant visual material as a fun way to revise before the final exam.

No required reading.

Guidelines for Papers/Projects

Observe an Orthodox Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy (Mass) is central to the life of the Orthodox Christian. The purpose of this paper is to expose you to its celebration and to record your reactions to it. I know that you do not understand the language, that you are not familiar with the Byzantine rite and ritual. I want you to observe! Look at the building, describe it and try to see how it functions; observe the service and try to discern its structure, describe its characteristics (what sticks out for you), note what you like and what you do not like and why; look at the people and how they act in the church. When and where did you visit? Reflect on how this service compares to a Mass/Service in your own faith tradition?

Keep in mind that unless you are an Orthodox Christian, you may not receive communion. You may, however, receive the antidoron at the end of the service

Interview Project

97% of Greeks identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. What does that mean? How serious are they about their faith? How much does faith influence their daily lives and the decisions they make? In this project you will explore these questions by interviewing a Greek male or female. Be polite, introduce yourself and explain what you are doing (what is the purpose of this interview). 9 out of 10 will agree to give you the interview. The majority of young people speak English. Do not be shy – approach them. If they allow you to record, it is great; if not, keep notes and IMMEDIATELY after the interview put everything down.

In part one of the project, you need to present the interviewee (age, sex, occupation – anonymity is protected) and a transcript of the dialogue that took place. In part two you will write your reaction/commentary to what was said in the interview. Here are some questions you could ask. Do not limit yourself to these questions.

1. Faith-wise, how do you identify yourself?
2. Is faith part of your identity?
3. Does faith play a role in your life?
4. What is your relationship with the official Church?
5. Do you go to church? How often? If not, why not? What would make you go?
6. Which of the various practices of the Church do you follow (fasting, philanthropy, etc.) and to what extent? Are there any you consciously refuse to practice?
7. Do you have icons in your home? What is their role (just pieces of art, or prayer items)?
8. Do you believe in miracles?
9. What do you like about the Orthodox Church, what do you not like about it, what would you like to see changed?
10. Do you stay updated on activities of the Orthodox Church?
11. Do you discuss issues related to faith and the Church with your friends and family?
12. Is there a language issue in the Church?
13. If you could be with the Patriarch for 10 minutes what would you tell him?