

Ancient and Emerging Practices

Professor: Eric C. Smith (ecsmith@iliff.edu)

This course examines ancient Christian practices like baptism, membership rituals, pilgrimage, care for the sick and dying, virginity and widowhood, funerals, meals, singing of hymns, reading of scripture, asceticism, monasticism, and generosity as examples of Christian embodiment, materiality, and communal life. It then asks how those practices are instantiated into contemporary Christian communities, and whether ancient practices can inform contemporary or emerging Christian communities.

Course Goals:

- To become familiar with a variety of early church practices
- To understand and use non-textual methods of historiography
- To use textual and non-textual methods of historiography to illuminate practical, embodied, or spatial matters
- To understand the historical roots of Christian practices, and to allow those roots to feed contemporary communities

Course Outcomes:

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Describe a variety of early church practices and the *sitz im leben* that gave rise to them
- Understand and articulate the ways ancient practices inform contemporary ones
- (For MDiv students or others pursuing parish ministry) Re-imagine ancient practices for contemporary communities
- (For MTS, MA, PhD, and other students pursuing more focused academic paths) Undertake original research into practices or aspects of practices not covered in the course

Course Requirements:

Weekly Posts and Responses:

Two weekly posts and two responses to the posts of others will be required of every student. These will be based in and responsive to the weekly readings, and will invite students to engage with particular arguments in the texts, historical questions presented by the authors, etc. Sometimes the posts will be primarily historical in nature, and focus on the practices themselves: what we know about them, how they might have been performed in antiquity, what meanings they might have carried, etc. At other times, these posts might provide students the opportunity to comment upon how these practices have or have not been brought into the contemporary world, and how they might be reinvigorated or reclaimed by present-day communities. These weekly posts (and required responses to the posts) constitute the baseline conversation of the course. These posts are worth 40% of the final grade.

Talking Circles During Gathering Days:

By the time of the Gathering Days meetings, students should have identified an ancient practice (and, depending on your choice for the final project, also its emerging counterpart,) that they want to study further. An initial abstract (350 words) should be posted in the appropriate forum on Canvas for others to review and comment upon. Then, during Gathering Days, we will have opportunity for people working on similar topics to gather in small groups (“talking circles”) to share knowledge and insight, as well as resources, toward the final project. 10% of the final grade will come from the abstract and the student’s participation in the talking circles.

Final Project:

Building on the talking circle at Gathering Days, each student will complete a final project focusing on a single practice. These projects can take one of two forms, depending on the interests of the student:

1. The project will examine a practice not covered in the course (or a particular aspect or instantiation of a practice that *was* covered in the course), offering an in-depth analysis of some particular question or concern. Examples of this kind of paper might be an inquiry into the precise method of baptism in North African churches, or an examination of the way meal practices in Christian communities in China differed from those in the Mediterranean world. This project will take the form of a 15-18 page academic paper.
2. The project will examine a practice (either covered in the course or not), offering an overview of the practice in antiquity, an overview of the practice in contemporary Christian communities (if it exists). This portion of the project should take the form of a paper of approximately 8-10 pages. Then, students should produce suggestions for further development and

reclamation of the practice for contemporary Christian communities, and the student should include sample liturgies, spatial models, or other tools for modern implementation. This portion of the project should be the equivalent of 6-8 pages of academic writing, but can be divided however the student prefers, so long as the work covers all of the requirements.

The final project will be worth 35% of the final grade.

Final Project Presentation:

Each student will produce a 2-3 minute video, uploaded/posted to Canvas, in which they present the results of their final project. This could include some background information about the practice, some description of the sample tools for emerging implementation, or some combination of the two. While the video does not need to be professionally produced, it should be compelling, interesting, and original. 15% of the final grade.

Policies and Services:

Incompletes: Incompletes are offered only in exceptional circumstances. See the Masters Student Handbook on my.iliff for specific policies and procedures.

Pass/Fail: Masters students wishing to take the class pass/fail should discuss this with the instructor by the *second class session*.

Academic Integrity and Community Covenant: All students are expected to abide by Iliff's statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook. All participants in this class are expected to be familiar with Iliff's Community Covenant.

Accommodations: Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs. Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations. The advising center can be contacted at advising@iliff.edu or by phone at 303-765-1146.

Writing Lab: Grammar and organization are important for all written assignments. Additional help is available from the Iliff Writing Lab, which is available for students of any level who need help beginning an assignment, organizing thoughts, or reviewing a final draft.

Inclusive Language: It is expected that all course participants will use inclusive language in speaking and writing, and will use terms that do not create barriers to classroom community.

Books for the Course

Required

- González, Catherine Gunsalus. *Resources in the Ancient Church for Today's Worship/Lecciones del culto antiguo para la iglesia de hoy*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.
- Harvey, Susan Ashbrook and David G. Hunter. *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
 - This resource is available for free online from the Iliff library. See the tutorial document on Canvas for instructions on how to access it.
- McGowan, Andrew B. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Moss, Candida. *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented A Story of Martyrdom*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013.
- Tickle, Phyllis. *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012.
- Burns, J. Patout and Robin M. Jensen. *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Godsey, Heather, and Lara Blackwood Pickrel. *Oh God Oh God Oh God: Young Adults Speak Out About Sexuality and Christian Spirituality*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2010.

Recommended for students interested in pursuing further graduate study

- Ferguson, Everett. *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Vásquez, Manuel A. *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to the course

Readings: González chapters 1 and 2; Tickle Preface and Part 1 (chapters 1-4)

Recommended for students interested in pursuing further graduate study: Vásquez chapters 4, 5, 8, 9

Week 2: Baptism, Initiation, and Membership

Readings: Maxwell E. Johnson article on Christian Initiation in OHECS; McGowan chapter 5; González chapter 3; Jensen and Burns chapter Baptismal Architecture; Jensen and Burns chapter on The Ritual of Baptism; Tickle chapter 22

Recommended: Ferguson selections (This is a 950-page book, and so there is no way you could read the entire thing. But, if you are interested in further graduate study of this subject, this book is far and away the most comprehensive resource available, and choosing any 50-100pp of it would be useful).

Week 3: Martyrdom

Readings: Susan Ashbrook Harvey article on Martyr Passions and Hagiography in OHECS; Richard M. Price article on Martyrdom and the Cult of the Saints in OHECS; Moss chapters 3-8; Eriksen blog post (<https://www.ravenfoundation.org/phyllis-tickle-rene-girard-age-spirit/>)

Week 4: Virginity and Widowhood

Readings: Matthew Kuefler article on Desire and the Body in the Patristic Period in OHECS; Jensen and Burns chapter on Marriage, Virginity, and Widowhood; Godsey selected chapters (TBA)

Week 5 (Gathering Days): Pilgrimage and the Cult of the Saints

Readings: Georgia Frank article on Pilgrimage in OHECS; Brown, entire Walking the Camino (film, in class)

Week 6: Funerals and Mourning

Readings: PDF of Kathleen Corley chapters 4 and 5; Jensen and Burns chapters on Architectural Evidence Pertaining to the Cult of the Saints and Architectural Evidence for Christian Burial; PDF chapter from Nicola Denzey?

Week 7: Meal Practices

Readings: Daniel Sheerin article on Eucharistic Liturgy in OHECS; McGowan chapter 2; Dunbabin chapter?; González chapter 4; Jensen and Burns chapter on The Celebration of Word and Eucharist; Tickle chapters 5-7; PDF of Smith?

Week 8: Singing of Hymns and Reading of Scripture

Readings: Michael J. Roberts, John A. McGuckin, and Sebastian P. Brock articles on Poetry and Hymnography in OHECS; McGowan chapters 3 and 4; González chapters 5-6; Jensen and Burns chapter on The Celebration of Word and Eucharist (re-skim)

Week 9: Asceticism, Monasticism, Mysticism

Readings: Rebecca Krawiec article on Asceticism in OHECS; J. William Harmless article on Monasticism in OHECS; Tippet interview with Claiborne

Week 10: Toward the Future

Tickle parts 3 and 4 (chapters 13-22), Afterword