THEO 346-01 Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity

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Theology 346: Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity
Xavier University
Fall Semester 2015
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Course description:

Hellenism, Judaism, and Christianity: From Alexander the Great to the death of Hypatia

The objective of the first part of this course will be to examine the major ‘moments’ in the intellectual encounter between Hellenism and Judaism in the period from Alexander through the end of the first century CE. After surveying the historical and intellectual backgrounds of the encounter, we will examine some Hellenistic views of Judaism on the one hand, and some of the more characteristic Jewish responses to Hellenism on the other.

In the second part of the course, we shall turn to Greco-Roman responses to Christianity, and the attempt by Christians to seek an identity for themselves as the ‘third race’ (= triton genos), coming to claim for themselves the dual heritage of Judaism and Hellenism. We shall then consider Julian’s rejection of the idea of a ‘third race’, and his attempt to restore Judaism and Hellenism to their pristine purity. Finally, we shall consider the triumph of Christianity in the age of Theodosius and the end of Greco-Roman paganism.

Course objectives:

1. Learn the historical and intellectual background of Hellenism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Early Christianity
2. Gain exposure to and experience with the relevant primary sources

Course books and readings:

2. R.L. Wilken, The Christians as the Romans Saw Them (1984, etc.)
3. Selected readings for the course available on canvas
4. All class handouts (Please keep handouts in an organized fashion.)
Class preparation

Reading assignments should be completed **before** coming to class the day they are assigned. This facilitates understanding of lecture, active engagement with the material, participation in class discussion, and consequently, exam preparation.

The assignments include secondary readings, all of which are either in Ferguson, as modules on canvas, or in Wilken (2nd part of the course), and much shorter source readings, which are either on canvas or will be provided as handouts. Many of the source readings we will go over in class.

Formal requirements and grading

There will be 2 exams, a midterm and a final, and each counts for 50% of the final grade. Exams will be based on readings and classroom lecture. They will consist of a few short essays (on topics that will be pre-distributed), and a few short answer questions. The topics of the essays will follow the course outline.

Excessive absences may affect your final grade adversely.

Reference works


E. Schürer, G. Vermes et al., *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, I-III.2 (1973-87)


Unit-by-Unit Course Outline

Introduction (Aug. 25)


Movie: Agora (the story of Hypatia, philosopher and astronomer)

Unit 1 (Sept. 3): The Hellenistic and Roman Historical Background (332 BC – AD 14)

Ferguson, Backgrounds, pp. 5-30

Unit 2 (Sept. 8): The Jewish Historical Background (332 BC – AD 135)

Ferguson, Backgrounds, pp. 396-430

Unit 3 (Sept. 10, 15, 17): Greek and Hellenistic Philosophy


Ferguson, Backgrounds, pp. 319-38, 354-80

Unit 4 (Sept. 22, 24): Hebrew Bible, Greek and Latin Bible

S.J.D. Cohen, From the Maccabees to the Mishnah (1987), pp. 174-95

J.C. VanderKam, An Introduction to Early Judaism (2001), pp. 53-8

Unit 5 (Sept. 29, Oct. 1): Greek Views of Judaism

L.H. Feldman and M. Reinhold, Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans (1996), pp. 6-10
Strabo, Geography (handout)

**Unit 6 (Oct. 6): The Jewish Sects from the Greek Point of View**

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.11-25
Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 485-90, 513-32

**Unit 7 (Oct. 13, 15): Cosmic Religion and Philo**

Cicero, *Dream of Scipio*
Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 478-85

**Unit 8 (Oct. 20, 22): The Christians in the Roman Empire**

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 31-40, 601-8

**Midterm on Units 1-7 (Oct. 27)**

**Unit 9 (Oct. 29, Nov. 3): The First Christian Apologists**

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 608-20
Stevenson, *New Eusebius*, pp. 58-62
Unit 10 (Nov. 5): Gnosticism

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 300-12

Unit 11 (Nov. 10, 12): Galen and Celsus

Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, pp. 68-93, 94-125

Unit 12 (Nov. 17, 19): The Challenge of Porphyry

Porphyry, *Against the Christians* (handout)

Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, pp. 391-4
Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, pp. 126-63

Unit 13 (Dec. 1): The Vision of Eusebius

Eusebius, *Eccl. History* 1.2.17-27; *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.1-2, 5

F.M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (1983), pp. 8-14

Unit 14 (Dec. 3, 8): Julian the Apostate

Julian, *Against the Galileans* (handout)

Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, pp. 164-96

Unit 15 (Dec. 10): The End of Paganism

Augustine, *Retractationes* (handout)
Symmachus, *Relationes* (handout)