

SEX, CELIBACY, AND THE PROBLEM OF PURITY:
Asceticism and the Human Body in Late Antiquity
REL 31, CLST 11, WGST 43.2, Spring 2013

2A Hour (Tuesday and Thursday, 2:00-3:50 pm)
x-hour: Wednesday, 4:15-5:05

This course examines a crucial period in the history of Christianity—Late Antiquity. Between the years 300 and 500, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, established standards of doctrine and ecclesiastical organization, and developed the attitudes towards the body, sexuality, and gender that informed Christian teaching for centuries to come. In this class we will ask: why did virginity become such an important aspect of Christian religiosity? What effect did Roman concepts of gender and sexuality have on Christian understanding of the relationship between men and women? What did martyrs, gladiators and monks have in common?

I. Instructor

Professor Christopher MacEvitt
Office: 301 Thornton Hall
Blitz: macevitt@dartmouth.edu
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1-2:30 pm, and by appointment
Classroom: 219 Wilson Hall

II. Books (available at Wheelock Books)

Carolinne White (tr.), *Lives of Roman Christian Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

III. Requirements

1. *Participation*: This class is a seminar and therefore requires the full attention and participation of everyone in the class. This means that every day you must come to class having read the assigned texts in an active and engaged manner, having thought critically about the readings, determined the significant themes, connected them to other texts read for class or to previous discussions in class, and are prepared to actively discuss them with the rest of the class. Part of your participation grade will be based on your role as “discussion leader,” a role which you will share with other students at least twice in the course of the term. Participation represents **20%** of your final grade.

2. *2 Critical Essays:* These essays will be based on one of the primary sources assigned for class and should be about 2000 words (about 7 pages, depending on what font size you use). A primary source is a text that is as close as possible to the subject, person, or period being studied, in contrast to a secondary source, which is a modern piece of scholarship analyzing the past, usually through the use of primary sources. Each paper will be worth **20%** of your final grade.
3. *2 Exams:* There will be two in-class exams, which will be short IDs and essay questions. The second exam will not be cumulative; it will only cover the second half of the course. Each exam is worth **20%** of your final grade.

Grading

Participation:	20%
First Paper:	20%
Second Paper:	20%
First Exam:	20%
Second Exam:	20%

IV. Other Matters

1. *Religious Observances:* I realize that some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please come speak with me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.
2. *Disabilities:* Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may consult the Student Accessibility Services office to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.
3. *Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is a serious issue that can get you suspended or even expelled from the school. The main issue is intellectual property: just like a novel, a piece of music, or an invention, an idea is the unique creation of the mind and can only be used with permission and acknowledgement. When you write papers for this class or any other, you must give a citation where you have derived any ideas that are not your own. This is necessary even if you use words that are different from those of the original author. We will discuss this further in class. If you have any questions or confusion about plagiarism, ask me or consult the college website: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/>.

V. Schedule of Readings and Discussions

The following schedule is provisional; the instructor may change the readings or the order the syllabus to accommodate the changing needs of the class.

Week 1 Introduction

Tuesday March 26: The Mediterranean World

Reading: Peter Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 7-45.

Thursday March 28: Pagans, Christians, and the World

Reading: Plato, *Phaedo*, pp. 27-101;
The Gospel of Mark.

Week 2 Roman Society

Tuesday April 2: Family

Reading: Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, II: 620-646;
Jane Rowlandson, *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt*, #129 (pp. 171-2), #138-39 (pp. 183-90), #212-3 (pp. 274-6);
Jane F. Gardner, *The Roman Household*, #52-59 (pp. 49-55), #75-79 (pp. 65-7), #121-24 (pp. 104-5);
Sarah Pomeroy (tr.), *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife*, pp. 5-13, 59-63;
Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication*, pp. 1-58.
Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, Ch. 1 (pp. 5-32).

Wednesday April 3: Sexuality and Society

Reading: *Priapea: Poems for a Phallic God*, tr. and ed. W. H. Parker, pp. 1-30, 71, 79, 87-91, 120-23, 127, 139, 147, 155;
Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.90, 1.92, 2.51, 3.71, 7.67, 11.87;
Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, pp. 3-14, 96-124, 160-22;
Publius Papinius Statius, "Lament for Glaucias, Melior's Favorite," in *The Silvae of Statius*, tr. Betty Rose Nagle, pp. 65-74.

Week 3 Early Christianity

Tuesday April 9: Gender and the Bible

Reading: *Genesis* 1-9 [the Bible];
The Book of Enoch, tr. R. H. Charles, pp. 4-63;
Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, Ch. 2, pp. 33-64;
Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication*, pp. 160-89, 292-305.

Thursday April 11: Gnosticism

Reading: Karen King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, pp. 25-81;
"Thunder: Perfect Mind," in *The Nag Hammadi Library*,
ed. James Robinson, pp. 295-303;
Daniel Boyarin, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for the Study
of Religion*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, pp. 117-35.

Week 4 Gladiators and Martyrs: Torture and the Human Body

Tuesday April 16: Gladiators

Reading: Augustine *The Confessions*, pp. 100-1;
Livy, *The History of Rome*, pp. 98-99;
"The Acts of Thecla," in Bart Ehrman, *After the New
Testament*, pp. 278-84;
Carlin Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans*, pp. 11-
43.

Thursday April 18: Martyrs

Reading: Tertullian, "To the Martyrs" and "Spectacles," in
Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works, tr.
Rudolph Arbesmann, O.S.A., Sister Emily Joseph Daly,
C.S.J., and Edwin A. Quain, S.J., pp. 13-29, 47-107;
"Martyrdom of Polycarp," pp. 83-102;
"The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Lives of Roman
Christian Women*, pp. 4-17;
David Frankfurter, "Martyrdom and the Purient Gaze,"
Journal of Early Christian Studies 17 (2007): pp. 215-45.

Week 5 Asceticism

Tuesday April 23: What is Asceticism?

Reading: Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or
Affirmative,"
William C. Bushnell, "Psychophysiological and
Comparative Analysis of Ascetico-Meditational Discipline:
Toward a New Theory of Asceticism," in *Asceticism*, eds.
Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, pp. 3-15,
553-75;
Musonius Rufus, tr. Cora E. Lutz, pp. 39-49, 53-59, 77-
101, 113-29.

Thursday April 25: In the Desert

Reading: Benedicta Ward (tr), *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the
Desert Fathers*, --'Anthony the Great,' 'Theodora,' 'Isaac,

Priest of the Cells,' 'Olympius,' 'Serapion,' 'Sarah,'
'Syncletica,' 'Timothy;'
Athanasius of Alexandria, "Life of St. Antony of Egypt" in
Medieval Hagiography, ed. Thomas Head, pp. 7-30;
Abba Isaiah of Scetis, "On the Natural State of the
Intellect," in *Abba Isaiah of Scetis: Ascetic Discourses*, pp.
43-45;
David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, pp.
182-212.

Week 6 Asceticism in Practice

PAPER #1 DUE SUNDAY AT 5 PM

Tuesday April 30: Your Home is Your Monastery

Reading: Gregory of Nyssa, "Life of Macrina" in *Lives of Christian Women*, pp. 19-56;
"Homily: On Virginité," tr. Teresa Shaw, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush, pp. 29-43;
Teresa Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, Ch. 5, pp. 161-219.

Thursday May 2 **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week 7 Asceticism and Rome

Tuesday May 7: Jerome and Eustochium

Reading: "To Eustochium (Letter 22)" in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, pp. 109-48;
Patricia Cox Miller, "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993) 21-45 [available through the library catalog]

Thursday May 9: Friends and Aristocrats

Reading: Jerome, "On the Education of Little Paula (Letter 107)" in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, pp. 149-63;
Gerontius, "Life of Melania the Younger" in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, pp. 179-230;
"Life of Melania the Elder, in *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, pp. 49-56.

Week 8 Pelagianism, Augustine, and Original Sin

Tuesday May 14: Original Sin

Reading: selections from Augustine, *The City of God*;

Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, pp. 98-154;
Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, pp. 387-447.

Thursday May 16: The Holy Family

Reading: Jerome, "Against Helvidius," in *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, pp. 3-43;
"The Proto-Gospel of James," in *Lost Scriptures*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, pp. 63-72;
Dyan Elliott, "Tertullian, the Angelic Life, and the Bride of Christ," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, pp. 16-33.

Week 9 Adam, Eve, Mary, and Marriage

Tuesday May 21: **SECOND EXAM**

Thursday May 23: Marriage in the World

Reading: Augustine, "On the Good of Marriage," in *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, pp. 42-70;
Brent Shaw, "The Family in Late Antiquity: the Experience of Augustine," *Past and Present* 115 (1987): 3-51
(available through library catalog).
Ambrosiaster, "On the Sin of Adam and Eve," trans. David Hunter, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush, pp. 99-115.

Week 10 Asceticism and Sexuality in the Early Medieval Era

Tuesday May 28: Homosexuality and Christianity

Reading: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, pp. 119-66.

Saturday June 1st: **PAPER #2 DUE (5 PM by blitz)**