# Ancient Christian Literature

## Prof. Marco Rizzi

# Ancient Christian Literature (advanced course: semester 2)

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***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The general part of the course (Semester 1) takes a historical overview of Christian literature throughout the first few centuries. It aims to explore and clarify the topic through comparison with secular literary forms, and with reference to the cultural, political and social context of the ancient world.

During semester 2, the single-subject part of the course aims to illustrate, through the historical-doctrinal analysis of the *Explanatio Symboli* by Ambrose and other coeval Latin texts, the events related to the Christological and ecclesiastical debate in the West that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325.

At the end of Module 1, students will be able to acquire an overview of the historical development of ancient Christian literature, from its origins to the 5th century, its characteristic literary genres and greatest representatives, including through the reading and critical analysis of certain exemplary texts presented in lectures.

At the end of module 2, students will be able to carry out a critical reading of some sources related to the Christological and ecclesiastical debate in the West that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325, especially the *Explanatio Symboli* by Ambrose.

***COURSE CONTENT***

General section (Semester 1, 6 ECTS): Ancient Christian literature. Themes, trends and protagonists. The general part of the course will examine the specific nature of Christian literature in the first few centuries AD from a historical perspective, by studying the following topics: Definition of Ancient Christian Literature. The origins of Ancient Christian Literature. The Bible and the Ancient Christian exegesis. Christianity and ancient philosophy. The origins of the Christian literature in Latin. Christianity and Late Antiquity. The tools for the study of Ancient Christian Literature.

Single-subject course (semester 2, 6 ECTS credits): The Latin Church after the Council of Nicaea: the *Explanatio Symboli* by Ambrose. The single-subject part of the course aims to illustrate, through the historical-doctrinal analysis of the *Explanatio Symboli* by Ambrose and other coeval Latin texts, the events related to the Christological and ecclesiastical debate in the West that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325.

***READING LIST***

For the general section:

C. Moreschini-E. Norelli, *Manuale di Letteratura cristiana antica greca e latina,* Morcelliana, Brescia, 1999 (chaps. 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 28, 29, 30 and 32).

For the single-subject section: Sant’Ambrogio, *Spiegazione del credo*, edited by Gabriele Banterle, in *Opera omnia di sant’Ambrogio*, vol. 17, Città Nuova, Rome 1982.

Students taking the general section only must prepare one of the following texts (in addition to lecture notes and specified chapters of the textbook):

\*C. Gianotto, *I Vangeli apocrifi*, Il mulino, Bologna, 2018.

C. Markschies, *In cammino tra due mondi. Strutture del cristianesimo antico,* Vita e pensiero, Milan, 2003.

\*P. Stefani, *Gesù*, Il mulino, Bologna, 2012.

G.M. Vian, *I libri di Dio. Breve storia dei testi cristiani,* Carocci, Rome, 2020.

M. Dulaey, *I simboli cristiani. Cathechesi e Bibbia (I-VI secolo),* San Paolo, Milan, 2004.

T.F. Mathews, *Scontro di Dei. Una reinterpretazione dell’arte paleocristiana,* Jaca Book, Milan, 2005.

For the final exam of the single-subject course (semester 2), students will have to choose one of the following textbooks:

R. Penna, *Le prime comunità cristiane. Persone, tempi, luoghi, forme, credenze*, Carocci, Rome, 2011.

\*M. Rizzi, *Cesare e Dio. Potere spirituale e potere secolare in Occidente,* Il mulino, Bologna, 2009.

M. Simonetti, *Romani e barbari. Le lettere latine alle origini dell’Europa (secoli V-VIII),* Carocci, Rome, 2018.

H.G. Snyder, *Maestri e testi nel mondo antico. Filosofi, giudei e cristiani*, Paideia, Brescia, 2010.

The students taking the final exam on the 12 ECTS course will not have to read the essay mentioned above. The titles marked with \* are available also in ebook format.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Lectures with the analysis of texts translated by lecturer. Use of the online *Blackboard* platform to supplement lectures.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Oral exam. The oral exam on the general section will require students to demonstrate their knowledge of early Christian literature, the main trends in its historical development and its various genres and writers. They must also be able to contextualise the texts presented in lectures on a historical and literary level. For the single-subject part, students must demonstrate their ability to read the *Explanatio Symboli* by Ambrose, and contextualise it in the doctrinal issue of the Post-Nicene Christological debate in the Latin West. Furthermore, the students taking the exam only on the general or the single-subject part of the course, for a total of 6 ECTS credits (one semester), will be asked to illustrate and discuss the contents of the essay they have chosen to read among the ones specified in the *READING LIST*. The students of the annual course (12 ECTS) will not have to read the essay.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

It is possible to attend the general part only or both parts; Master’s students who have already taken the examination must attend the single-subject part (Semester 2). There are no prerequisites for Semester 1, which is general and introductory in nature.

To enrol in the second semester, students require general knowledge of the development of Christian literature, which may be obtained by attending the course in Semester 1 or by reading the summary available on Blackboard. They also require basic understanding of Latin.

The course will make use of the tools available on the university Blackboard platform, where students will be able to find all the materials that will be analysed and discussed during lectures.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.