

Course description

Title of course:	Dialogue Between Ancient Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology
Course code:	BSB9455
Mode of completion:	practical mark (home-written essay, ca. 6000 chars)
Scheduled time:	Friday, 12:00 – 13:30
Venue:	
Weekly lectures:	2
No. of ECTS:	6
Instructor's name:	István Pásztori-Kupán, MTh, PhD, dr. habil.
Instructor's email address:	pasztorikupan.istvan@kre.hu

Brief description of the course:

The lengthy dialogue and polemics between the ancient Greek philosophy and the emerging Early Christian theology produced not only a lot of interesting arguments in the history of human thinking about existence, transcendence etc., but had also brought about new developments in various areas of social interaction, for example a new understanding of one's own identity, of 'religion' and 'religiousness' etc. Why would a Greek philosopher label his Christian contemporaries as 'simple-minded' and why would other pagan thinkers become Christians, some even asserting that Plato was in fact a Greek Moses? As we pursue the depth of these discussions, we shall find a lot of similarities between the two systems, moreover: the flux of ideas and solutions do not follow only one way. Christian theology is influenced by Greek philosophy and religious thinking and vice versa: starting as early as the first half of the first century. During these seminars we provide an introduction and analysis into some key texts from the earliest periods of this still ongoing and fascinating debate.

Classes during the semester

Class No:	Date:	Theme:
1.	13 Feb. 2026	General introduction. The religious and cultural state of the Mediterranean Area during the 1 st century BC and AD. The first Roman emperors and their religious policies. Jewish religious groups Josephus Flavius, <i>Jewish war</i> Book II, Ch. 8; Josephus Flavius, <i>Jewish History</i> Book XVIII, Ch. 1.
2.	20 Feb. 2026	Paul the Apostle and his ministry. Paul's conversion (Acts 9) and his journeys
3.	27 Feb 2026	Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17) – the first recorded encounter between followers of Jesus and Greek philosophers
4.	6 March 2026	Challenges of the Apostolic Era: Jewish and Non-Jewish Christians Peter and Cornelius, the apostolic council in Jerusalem Acts of the Apostles Chapters 10–11 and 15
5.	13 March 2026	Being Christian in the early centuries Early Christians and Christianity in the Eyes of Non-Christians Hurtado, <i>Destroyer of the gods</i> 15–36
6.	20 March 2026	Correspondence between Pliny the Younger and Emperor Trajan concerning Christians http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/pliny2.html A New Kind of Faith Hurtado, <i>Destroyer</i> , 37–76
7.	27 March 2026	Persecution of Christians and the first Christian Apologies Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology</i> (chapters 1–25) Athenagoras: Plea for the Christians https://ccel.org/ccel/athenagoras/plea_for_christians/anf02.v.i.html

8.	17 April 2026	Emperor Julian the Apostate: his life and times https://www.thecollector.com/roman-emperor-julian-last-pagan/ Theodoret, <i>Church History</i> , Book III, Chs 1–4 and Ch. 20
9.	8 May 2026	Christian theologians and Greek philosophers: peaceful coexistence Libanius of Antioch The correspondence between Libanius of Antioch and Basil of Caesarea http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.ix.cccxxx.html (first letter and more)
10.	15 May 2026	Christian theologians and Greek philosophers: wild clashes The story of Hypatia the philosopher (Socrates Scholasticus, <i>Church History</i> Book VII, Chapter 15)
11.	22 May 2026	A late, but interesting apology: Theodoret's <i>A Cure for Greek Maladies</i> Theodoret, <i>A Cure for Greek Maladies</i> , Book I

Recommended Bibliography

Josephus Flavius' works: *Jewish War*; *Jewish History (Antiquities of the Jews)*; *Josephus' Autobiography*; *Against Apion* <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/>

Paul the Apostle's speech in Athens: Acts 17:14–34

Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016)

Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milkwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016)

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08580c.htm>
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>

Correspondence between Pliny and Trajan concerning Christians
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/pliny2.html>
<http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/latin/pliny.html>
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/pliny.html>
<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>

Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0202.htm>

Athenagoras, *A plea for the Christians*
https://ccel.org/ccel/athenagoras/plea_for_christians/anf02.v.i.html
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0205.htm>

Origen, *Against Celsus* (selections)
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04161.htm>

Seneca, *Of Clemency*
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Of_Clemency/Book_I
<https://fs.blog/2011/10/why-is-the-power-of-tyrants-short-lived/> (selections)

Epictetus, *Enchiridion*
<http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html>

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*
<http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.html>

About Emperor Julian the Apostate:

<https://www.thecollector.com/roman-emperor-julian-last-pagan/>

Theodoret of Cyrus, *A Cure for Greek Maladies I*, in: István Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrus* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 85–108

Theodoret, *Church History* (Book III)

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf203.iv.viii.iii.i.html>

Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/26017.htm>

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.x.xv.html> (on Hypatia)

Correspondence between Basil of Caesarea and Libanius of Antioch

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.ix.cccxxx.html> (first letter, followed by more)