

# ME-750: Overseas Mission Study— History & Mission of the Church in Turkey

*A Mission and Study Trip to Turkey*

7-18 March 2012

Preliminary course description  
Dr. Phil Harrold, [pharrold@tsm.edu](mailto:pharrold@tsm.edu)  
Associate Professor of Church History  
Trinity School for Ministry  
Ambridge, PA

---

Dr. Philip Harrold (TSM) and missionary David Meeks (MAR '07) will lead a study tour on the mission of the Church of the first millennium in its ancient birthplaces found in modern-day Turkey. We will also participate in the life and witness of the Church of the third millennium (the contemporary Church) in its predominantly Muslim context. This course is a hybrid of study tour *and* mission trip. Arrangements can be made with the Registrar to take the course as a general elective in church history; otherwise, it is listed as a Missions and Evangelism (ME) course, with the opportunity for “cross-cultural immersion,” as described in the Academic Bulletin, “Academic Enrichment,” p. 14.

The study component of this excursion will feature a series of visits to major sights of historical significance from the first millennium of Christianity.

I. Possible historical study and reflection highlights include:

*Recovering the lost history of Christianity in southeastern Turkey: a journey to ancient birthplaces, mission-outposts, and tragic killing fields of the Eastern Churches*

- learning the *lost history* of Edessa— in his fascinating story of ancient Christianity east of the Roman Empire, historian Philip Jenkins (in *The Lost History of Christianity*, 2008) describes Edessa as the “birthplace of Syriac Christian writing,” and the pioneering center of Christian scholarship for much of Eastern Christianity in general. Today, however, Edessa and the surrounding region is a capital of the “Quran Belt,” which resents modernization and Western influence. Learn the tragic history of the Church in this troubled region and witness the renewal of its life and witness in visits with local Christian communities.
- then, just outside of Edessa, let’s go *way, way back* to the oldest known site where humans worshipped—to Göbekli Tepe [gøbeκli tepe], a hilltop sanctuary erected on the highest point of an elongated mountain ridge in southeastern Turkey, some 15 kilometres (9.3 mi) northeast of the town of Şanlıurfa (formerly Urfa / Edessa). It is the oldest human-made religious structure yet discovered. The site, currently undergoing excavation, may date as far back as the 9th millennium before Christ (c. 11,000 years ago!).
- Antioch will be a major highlight given its crucial role as a mission outpost in the apostle Paul’s travels to Asia Minor. Antioch is also the probable site of that oldest known manual of discipleship known as the *Didache*. While we tour the churches and visit the local Christian community of modern-day Antioch, we will reflect on an ancient pattern or ‘way’ of discipleship discovered in this early document by scholar Aaron Milavec.

*Renewing our Trinitarian faith in the land of the Cappadocians: a pilgrimage through a land of tremendous scenic beauty but also serene reminders of the spiritual theology of the Eastern Fathers*

- We will visit sights associated with Basil the Great (330-379), who was bishop of Caesarea, Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-395), who was bishop of Nyssa; and a close friend, Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389), who became Patriarch of Constantinople. The Cappadocians were major contributors to the doctrine of the Trinity. They also happened to live in a region of great significance in the missions of the apostle Paul.
- We will highlight the missional implications of their theology, but also their unique form of organized community life, thanks especially to the older sister of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, Makrina, who became a nun and converted the family's estate into a monastic community.

*Revisiting the Great Schism: Just what happened in 1054 at the Church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople and what does it mean for Christian mission, East and West, today?*

- Today's Hagia Sophia, in the spectacular capital city of Istanbul, has witnessed a remarkable history. From the date of its dedication in 360 until 1453, it served primarily as the Greek Patriarchal cathedral of Constantinople. Then came the tragic separation of Eastern and Western churches in 1054, the sackings of Western Christian crusaders in the centuries following, the transformation to a mosque in 1453, and 'secularization' to museum status in 1935.
- Reflecting on this history—especially the Great Schism between East and West—reminds us of what happens when the Church loses sight of its mission. This praxis of difficult memories in the midst of mission renewal in Istanbul's modern-day churches will be invigorating, to say the least!

## II. Course requirements

- A. Required reading: approximately 500 pages of reading will be assigned in advance of the trip from secondary and primary sources. The professor will assess accountability through oral interaction over the course of the trip as well as in the reflection papers (see 'C' below). (20% of final course grade)
- B. Each student will deliver one 10-15 minute oral presentation on the historical background of a particular sight, event, or individual during the course of the trip and on-site. The presentation should include appropriate hand-out materials (outlines, maps, or other resources that support the history lesson). (20% of final course grade)
- C. Each student will write a short reflection paper (3-4 typed, double-spaced pages) from each of the three phases of the trip. Each paper focuses on the missional implications of the historical sight, event, or individual. It should reflect accountability to assigned reading and to additional insights gained from the trip itself. These papers will be submitted within three weeks after the conclusion of the trip. (together the three papers will determine 50% of the final course grade)
- D. Students will keep a journal of their travels. The content of the journals is expected to be wide-ranging, but the historical aspect will be assessed on its overall quality. (10% of final course grade)

## III. Other Important Details

- A. Estimated Costs: Audit \$3500, Credit \$4100.
- B. Trip will depart Wednesday March 7 and return Sunday March 18. A one day orientation in late February and one day debriefing in late March will also be required for residential students.