

PMIN 206: CHURCH HISTORY

Winter, 2026

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COURSE SYLLABUS

A note to interested students: this syllabus is fairly complete, but will stay a ‘work in progress’ until our first evening. The basic requirements, including all assignments, are pretty much here what you’ll find in the final version of the syllabus.

Course description: This required course in the Graduate Program in Pastoral Ministries is an historical survey of Catholic Christianity from its origins to the eve of the Reformation. As such, its aim is to give learners a confident foundation in the history of the Church from its origins to 1500—a foundation that informs broadly but also relies on occasionally closer scrutiny of select topics. The approach is multi-disciplinary, regarding major developments in Catholicism from a variety of perspectives and historical sources.

Learning Objectives: This course has *two learning outcomes*:

LO 1: Theological Foundation

Knowledge of the broad intellectual foundation for ministry in the areas of scripture, systematic and contextual theology, and spirituality; and incorporate theological reflection to enrich their ministerial practices across varying contexts.

Goal 4: Diversity Fluency

Awareness of and critical engagement with how one's own culture influences ministry, and then to engage in ministries that build the community of Christ and are sensitive to and respectful of all cultures and traditions, and individuals who vary by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and dynamics of wealth, poverty, and power.

Course Texts: the main text for the course is David Chidester's *Christianity: A Global History* (HarperOne, 2001, ISBN-10: 0062517708). This text is a broad survey of Christianity and while our emphasis will be on the emergence and development of the Church of the Latin West (Roman Catholicism), it's impossible to understand the latter without considering the broader currents of the Christian tradition and the range of denominational, social, political and economic forces that gave it shape. **All other sources** including two online discussion forums will be uploaded to **Camino (Canvas)** at SCU.

Course Requirements: we accomplish the learning objectives above through various activities in the course.

Presence and participation: The first and most important requirement is **student participation**. This, of course, requires presence; our meetings will take place on **ten Monday evenings** through Winter Quarter from 6p to 9p. Punctual attendance in a graduate course is presumed; any absences, even excused ones, will necessarily result in the loss of some participation credit. Since our course is on Zoom, participation also means cameras turned on.

Discussion facilitation: each student will choose a primary source listed in the syllabus and lead a discussion of the text in class. Some of the texts scheduled for the course are either long enough or complex enough to warrant more than one discussion facilitator.

Written requirements include three short reflection papers (2-3 pages) and one analytical piece of writing – a textual commentary (3-4 pages) on one of the original sources listed in the syllabus. Most students will write on the text they chose for discussion leadership, but any of the sources can serve as the focus of this assignment. This assignment is not a research effort, but rather a close, thoughtful reading of some text (or part of a text). This paper is **due one week after the text** is discussed in class, so please note the date when you make your choice. Most students choose to write on the text they presented for discussion in class, but you're free to choose *any* of the assigned texts. Please consult the 'Guide to Writing a Textual Commentary' in the Administration Module of the course at Camino.

Final Project: this culminating assignment, in place of a final exam, gives the student an opportunity to consider the importance of Church history in their ministry. This is the **pastoral application project** where students choose some historical issue they've

encountered (and are interested in) and match it to some pastoral setting. Guides are available for approaching this final exercise and located at our course page on Camino.

Apportionment of credit:

Participation:	30%
Discussion Facilitation:	10%
Reflections:	30%
Final Project:	30%

Instructor feedback reaches students through written comments on papers and course projects, including presentation of a source and the final project. I'm also happy to meet students during office hours (as indicated above). In anticipation of instructor feedback, students are encouraged to read carefully the 'scoring rubric' located at the end of the syllabus.



SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

MODULE I: THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

Week 1 -- January 6

Approaches to Church History; Christian beginnings: Jewish culture and politics; unity and diversity among the followers of Jesus.

Read: Chidester, Chs 1, 2, 3

Galatians, Ch 2

Acts of the Apostles, Chs 10, 11, 13, 15-17

All readings in this syllabus with an asterisk () are original sources that will serve as bases of class discussion. Readings with a double asterisk (**) are long or rich enough to warrant more than one student facilitator.*

Week 2 – January 13

"*Mare Nostrum*": Christianity, Rome, and the Mediterranean World; Antioch and Alexandria as centers of theology.

Read: Chidester, Chs 4, 5, 6

**Didache*

DL: Kathleen, Kim

**The Nicene Creed (in motion)*

DL: Melchizedek

MODULE II: DOCTRINE AND INSTITUTION

Week 3 – January 20

Perfection in the Desert; Augustine and Latin Theology; Christological controversies

Read: Chidester, Chs 7, 8, 9

“Four Ecumenical Councils”

**Stories of the Desert Fathers* (excerpts)

DL: Ana

***Three Documents on Church and Power*

DL: Sabina, Aaron

Week 4 – January 27

A World in Chaos: the Church in the ‘Dark Ages’; monasteries as lights in the darkness; ‘the love of learning and the desire for God’; the rise of the papacy; widening divisions, East and West; the impact of Islam on Christianity.

Read: Chidester, Chs 10, 11, 12

“Faith and Empire: The Expansion of Christianity and Islam in Medieval Africa”

***The Rule of St. Benedict* (excerpts)

DL: Monica, Dulce, Mai Lan

**The Foundation Charter of Cluny Abbey*

DL: Jessie

Reflection 2 due: 2/2

MODULE III: CHURCH LIFE AND LEARNING

Week 5 – February 3

The 12th Century: crusade and conquest; expansion and change; theology and the first universities; the rise of the friars; doctrinal discord and heresy; Pope Innocent III and the height of the medieval papacy.

Read: Chidester, Chs 14, 15, 16

**Abelard’s Preface to the Sic et Non* (Yes and No)

DL: Andrea

**Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath)

DL: Sujatha

View: Video on the *Dies Irae*

DL: Jordan

Week 6 – February 10

Religious life: monks, friars, and nuns; urban changes and pastoral possibilities: the beguines; heresy and the Church’s response; cathedrals and universities.

Read: Richard Taylor, ‘How to Read a Church?’

**Thomas Aquinas, ‘On Prayer’*

DL: Rosita

**The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic*

DL: Mariae, Tony

Week 7 – February 17

Parishes, church life and pastoral care; the liturgical calendar; religious devotion and popular piety; the role of Mary in the life of the medieval church.

Read: Chidester, Ch 13, 17

**Tales of the Virgin*

DL: Jennifer

***Heresy and Heretics: a Compendium*

DL: Olga

View: 'BBC: How to build a cathedral'

Reflection 3 due: 2/23

MODULE IV: THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE MODERN WORLD

Week 8 – February 24

The late medieval church; the 14th century as an age of adversity; the Avignon papacy and the Great Schism; war, famine, and plague; pastoral care and parish life; 15th-century revivals.

Read: Chidester, Ch 18

**A letter from St. Catherine of Siena*

DL: Pamela

***Parish Visitation Records from the late 14th century*

DL: Avvy

Week 9 – March 3

15th century changes; papal discord, church councils and Conciliarism; the Renaissance papacy; a 'new world' and global missionary ventures

Read: Chidester, Ch 20

**Haec Sancta*

Week 10 – March 10

The Ancient and Medieval Church in Retrospect; the Church on the verge of modernity; general discussion on pastoral application projects for PMIN 206.

Final Project due: 3/17



Important information from the Provost's Office: (Note: this information is official and is meant to be incorporated into every teaching syllabus at the university. But even though it's 'standard procedure,' there is a lot of value here to the student, even

graduate ones. So, I encourage you to take a look at the sections below and see what grabs your attention.)

Academic Integrity

The Academic Integrity pledge is an expression of the University's commitment to fostering an understanding of—and commitment to—a culture of integrity at Santa Clara University. The Academic Integrity pledge, which applies to all students, states:

I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code.

Academic integrity is part of your intellectual, ethical, and professional development. I expect you to uphold the principles of this pledge for all work in this class. I will clarify expectations on academic integrity -- including the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and course sharing sites for all assignments and exams in this course. If you have questions about what is appropriate on any assignment, please let me know before you hand in work. For more resources about ensuring academic integrity in your work, see this [LibGuide on Academic Integrity](#).

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct (Title IX)

Santa Clara University is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free of all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. Please know that as a faculty member, California law and University policy require me to report any information brought to my attention about incidents of sexual harassment or misconduct to the SCU [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#), (408) 551-3043. This includes, but is not limited to, disclosures in writing assignments, class discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

Should you need support, SCU has dedicated staff trained to assist you in navigating campus resources, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and filing a formal complaint with the University or with law enforcement. Please see the [Student Resources](#) page for more information about reporting options and resources.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence and wishes to speak to a confidential resource who is not required to report, please contact one of the following SCU resources for support:

- [SCU Wellness Center](#)
- [CAPS](#)
- Any individual (clergy, counselors) acting in a professional capacity for which confidentiality is mandated by law.

I am happy to help connect you with any of these resources.

Accommodations for Pregnant and Parenting Students

Santa Clara University is committed to creating and maintaining a non-discriminatory learning environment for all students, including students who are pregnant or parenting. Absences due to medical conditions relating to pregnancy and childbirth will be excused for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student's doctor, and students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work. Students needing accommodations can often arrange accommodations by working directly with their instructors, supervisors, or departments. Students needing accommodations can also seek assistance with accommodations from the [Office of Accessible Education](#) (OAE) or from the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#). This [resource page](#) from the Title IX Office provides information regarding support for students and employees who are pregnant or parenting.

Office of Accessible Education

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact the [Office of Accessible Education](#) as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodations with the University. If you have already arranged accommodations through OAE, please be sure to request your accommodations through the OAE portal and discuss them with me during my office hours within the first two weeks of class. To ensure fairness and consistency, individual faculty members are required to receive verification from the Office of Accessible Education before providing accommodations. OAE will work with students and faculty to arrange proctored exams for students whose accommodations include double time for exams and/or assistive technology.

Students with approved accommodations of time and a half should talk with me as soon as possible. The Office of Accessible Education must be contacted in advance (at least two weeks' notice recommended) to schedule proctored examinations or to arrange other accommodations.