

**Point Loma Nazarene University
Reuben Welch School of Theology & Christian Ministry
Graduate Program in Christian Ministry**

Spring 2026 / Quad 1 / January 12 – March 8, 2026

CMI6046 Church in Mission

Directed Study for Christian Gravesen

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Course Description

A survey of the nature and mission of the Church and the relationship of ecclesiology to other major Christian doctrines.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Define the nature and mission of the Church.
- Demonstrate the relationship between ecclesiology and other crucial Christian doctrines.
- Develop a theology of worship and the sacraments.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the nature and mission of the Church in a particular ministry context.

Required Course Textbooks

Lohfink, Gerhard. *Does God Need the Church?*

Pope-Levinson, *Models of Evangelism*

Stone, Bryan. *Evangelism and Pluralism*

Course Credit Hour Information

In the interest of providing sufficient time to accomplish the stated Course Learning Outcomes, this class meets the PLNU credit hour policy for a three-unit class delivered over nine weeks. It is anticipated that the students will spend a minimum of 37.5 participation hours per credit hour on their coursework. The time expectations for this course are as follows:

Required Reading	64 hours
Weekly Essays	20 hours
Signature Assignment	23 hours
Research Paper	23 hours
	130 hours

Course Schedule and Assignments

Opening Week Intensive Participation, Online Discussions and Participation (25% of grade). Students are expected to respond to each course assignment, to the professor, and to student colleagues at least 2-3 times per week, and to be active in class discussion during intensive period on campus.

Submission of Notes on Each Week's Reading (25%)

Weekly Essays (25% of grade). Students are to complete the weekly 250-500 word essays based on assigned readings.

Ecclesiology and Mission Research Essay (25% of grade). Write a 1500 to 2000 word essay that reflects your understanding of a Wesleyan ecclesiology (if this is your tradition and, if not, an ecclesiology from within your own tradition). This paper should draw significantly from Bryan Stone's *Evangelism and Pluralism*, but should also include four to five other bibliographical references. **Due February 22, 11:59 p.m.**

Signature Assignment (25% of grade). Evaluating your current ministry context, offer a careful case study / proposal for possible changes and implementation for future ministry. This paper shall draw upon Scripture and all of our assigned readings, particularly Priscilla Pope-Levison's *Models of Evangelism*. In this paper highlight one of Pope-Levison's models (or two at the most) that you believe might be most effective in addressing your current church context. This model (or models) should be explored in the light of present strengths and weaknesses of the current ministry, and project possible outcomes of implementing the model (or models). This paper should be a minimum of 1500 to 2000 words in length. **Due March 8, 11:59 p.m.**

Course Schedule: January 12 – March 8, 2026

Week One: Introduction to Old Testament background for Christian ecclesiology (January 12 - 18)

1. Topic 1: Read Lohfink pp. 1-39 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Thursday, January 15, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
 - Early in his book, Lohfink quotes a passage from the Book of Wisdom 13:1-9. (Remember that the Apocrypha is included in the Roman Catholic canon.) Do you detect similarities between this passage, written well before the New Testament, and a passage from one of Paul's letters? If so, what do you make of these similarities, theologically speaking?
 - Lohfink clearly wants to make connections between biblical descriptions of creation and evolutionary theory. How successful (or not) do you think he is in this effort, and why?
 - By reading Lohfink carefully, can you distinguish between what he identifies as the Priestly document and the Yahwist document? Does this distinction bear any effect upon your understanding of the nature of the Bible? Why or why not?
 - Lohfink explores the theme of freedom extensively. What role do you believe the concept of freedom will have in his book? Perhaps more importantly, what role do you believe that freedom has (or should have) in Christian faith and discipleship?
 - What influence do you think that the history of the people Israel, and their worship practices, has (or should have) on Christian ecclesiology?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

2. Topic 2: Read Lohfink pp. 39-74 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Sunday, January 18, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
 - What does Lohfink appear to understand *apocalypticism* to be? What role does it appear to play in his ecclesiology?
 - How does Lohfink understand the doctrine of divine omnipotence? What is your considered response to his understanding? How does this relate to the nature and mission of the church?

- How might the theme of “gathering” that Lohfink explores exercise an effect in a Christian pastor’s understanding of her congregation?
- How might Lohfink’s description of Israel’s exodus out of Egypt affect our ecclesiology?
- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Week Two: Israel as the People of God as it Flows into Jesus’s Ministry (January 19-25)

1. Topic 1: Read Lohfink pp. 74-112 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Thursday, Jan 22, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
 - Lohfink suggests that we think of the Torah as “social project.” To what extent do you believe the Torah can function as the pattern for “social project” for the contemporary church?
 - Lohfink also proposes that “Love is the Christian’s Torah.” Particularly in light of the scripture passages he offers in support of this notion, what is your response? Is “love” really all we need? Why or why not?
 - The German philosopher Georg WF Hegel, citing the French writer Voltaire, declared that “it would have been better if God had given the Jews some definite instruction regarding the immortality of the soul rather than to have taught them how to go to the toilet” (to put it gently). Why does Lohfink quote Hegel here? What is your reaction? In your judgment, does this consideration contribute to a contemporary ecclesiology? Why or why not?
 - Lohfink claims that “it is not difficult to serve the gods of power.” Do you see evidence of this lack of difficulty in today’s society? Do you see evidence of this lack of difficulty in today’s churches?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**
2. Topic 2: Read Lohfink pp. 112-150 and write a 250-500 word essay on one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Sunday, Jan 25, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
 - What might the transition demanded by the traumatic destruction of the Temple to synagogue life teach the Christian church today?

- Lohfink defines divine wrath as “that of a judge who can no longer bear the injustice happening on earth and therefore intervenes to condemn and rescue.” Can you name examples when, in your judgment, divine wrath was expressed in this way? How might one reconcile this idea of divine wrath with what Lohfink has already mentioned (repeatedly) about human freedom?
- Lohfink offers a description of Jesus’s “new family.” Can this notion of family really be actualized in today’s American societies? How might this notion address such revered language as “family values” and “family churches”?
- We have likely all heard of the “already / not yet” tension of the New Testament and Christian faith generally. What is the (fairly radical) twist that Lohfink is injecting into this cliché? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- Lohfink’s extravagant description of Jesus’s feeding of the multitudes: what might this contribute to our understanding of the practice of holy communion? Are there practical ways that a minister might implement some of the spirit of Lohfink’s ideas?
- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Week Three: Jesus and the Twelve Flowing into the Church (January 26- February 1)

1. Topic 1: Read Lohfink pp. 150-201 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Thursday, Jan 29, by 11:59 p.m.**
 - Lohfink refers to what scholars have called Jesus’s “sign-actions” or “symbolic actions.” (You likely know that the gospel of John calls Jesus’s miracles “signs” throughout.) Reflect upon what Lohfink suggests about Jesus’s ministry in this regard and explore possible implications for how we think about, and practice, the Church’s sacraments.
 - “God desires to act in the world only and always through creatures,” Lohfink writes. Do you agree or disagree, and why? Especially if you agree (or at least mostly agree), what implications does this hold for our ecclesiology? What implications does this hold for our doctrine of God?
 - If Jesus’s intention was to establish “a new family” (of God) and thus a new social structure, what implications are there for those who argue for a “Christian nation”?
 - As Lohfink discusses the radically different viewpoints represented among the Twelve, can we think of ways this could be applied to today’s churches where national politics have become so divisive and polarizing? What does Jesus’s table fellowship say to us as contemporary church leaders?

- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**
2. Topic 2: Read Lohfink pp. 203-236 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Sunday, Feb 1, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
- As you read and reflect on Lohfink and New Testament texts, what do you believe to be the relationship between the resurrected body of Jesus and the church as the body of Christ? How neatly can these be distinguished? Does the way we answer such a question have any bearing on our ecclesiology?
 - On page 211 Lohfink accurately translates the Greek text from Galatians 3: “no longer Jew **or** Greek,” “no longer slave **or** free,” “no longer male **and** female.” Can you surmise about why Paul shifted from “or” language in the first two pairs to “and” language for the last category? Is it anything more than just a stylistic shift to avoid monotony, or is there possibly a theological / anthropological / ecclesiological issue at stake here? Why or why not?
 - Is the United States of America the *ekklesia* of God? Why or why not? Does it matter how we answer this question?
 - In your preaching or teaching, do you tend to emphasize “eternal life” after death or the “new bond of togetherness” that Lohfink contrasts with each other? Is the pair mutually exclusive? What is the danger of overemphasizing the first theme? What is the danger of overemphasizing the second theme?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Week 4: The Characteristic Signs of the Church (February 2-8)

1. Topic 1: Read Lohfink pp. 236-273 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Thursday, Feb 5, by 11:59 p.m.**
- What collective memory or memories hold the deepest significance for the congregation in which you serve?
 - Lohfink works through Paul’s wrestlings with questions regarding Israel’s relation to the church in Romans 9-11. He acknowledges that Paul “expected quite concretely” that it would be soon when “the fullness of the Gentiles” would come in, and the world as we know it would undergo radical transformation. Lohfink also indicates that “this has not happened.” What do we make of this,

theologically? And if indeed Paul was mistaken, how do we deal with this in relation to the doctrine of biblical inspiration?

- Lohfink calls Christians to some serious self-examination in regards to the church's history of violent persecution of the synagogue communities, the Jews. In the light of this tragic history, what does our faith have to say about Jews and Judaism today? Assuming the church has a mission to the Jewish people, is that mission any different than it would be to any other group of people? Why or why not?
 - What is your response to Lohfink's reading of 1 Corinthians 11 regarding holy communion? Is any of this new to you? Are there points at which you agree, or disagree? Please explain.
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**
2. Topic 2: Read Lohfink pp. 273-309 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Sunday, Feb 8, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
- Lohfink discusses the *Sh'ma* of Deuteronomy 6, the great commandment given to Israel to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." But can love be commanded? Is love for God (and neighbor) simply something that can be demanded of us? If so, how so?
 - On a similar note, read Romans 13:8-10. How do you interpret this passage within the context of ecclesiological doctrine and understanding? What do you make of Paul's neglect of the *Sh'ma* in this passage, reducing the Torah to the one command to "love your neighbor as yourself"?
 - When Lohfink engages Matthew 5:45-48, what is your response? Is he missing anything? If so, what? Does Jesus's teaching in this passage directly relate to, or address, the contemporary church? Is so, in what way or ways?
 - Do you detect any ecclesiological significance in Paul's challenge to the Roman Christians to "present your **bodies** [plural] as **a living sacrifice**"? How might the rest of that chapter shed light on this challenge?
 - Lohfink offers quite an eloquent plea for the church to do some radical work of renewing its relationship with the Jewish people / synagogue. Do you find his plea compelling or convincing? Why or why not? And if you do, what do you think can be done at the local church level to implement at least some of what he's calling for?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Week 5: The Ethics of Evangelism (February 9-15)

1. Topic 1: Read Lodahl document describing Raymond Brown's understanding of the Johannine community. Submit notes and brief responses or questions. **Due Thursday, Feb 12, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
2. **Topic 2:** Read Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Pluralism*, 1-67 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Sunday, February 15, by 11:59 p.m.**
 - As Stone begins his book with some intriguing material from the great Anglican theologian Rowan Williams, does any of this hold potential to impact the way in which you think about Jesus's arrest, betrayal, and crucifixion?
 - Stone's discussion of "evangelism and empire" raises a crucial question: In today's American church context, to what extent (if any) is it possible to imagine the church as embodying a true alternative to U.S. culture, economics, and politics?
 - As Stone develops what he identifies as an "ethics of evangelism," what do you believe to be the most important point or suggestion that he makes? Why?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Week 6: The Church: *In the World* and *of the World*? (February 16-22)

1. Topic 1: Read Stone, 69-105, and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Wednesday, Feb 18, no later than 11:59 p.m.**
 - What is your thoughtful response to Stone's engagement with the notion of an "ethics of chaplaincy"? What do you think is the ideal relationship between the church and its nation's military? Why do you think this way?
 - Your professor once underwent the process to become a chaplain in the Army Reserves. During two separate visits to the commanding officer of the unit, the professor was informed that chaplains "do *their* job so that the killers can do *their* job." While this may not be everyone's ideal description of the military chaplain's role, is there an extent to which it is true? Why or why not?
 - **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

2. Topic 2: Read Stone 107-140 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the following discussion questions. **Due Saturday, April 21, no later than 11:59 p.m.**

- What would it mean for churches to treat people like consumers? Is this practice avoidable? If so, is it easily avoidable? Why or why not?
- Would the congregation in which you worship and serve be open to the sort of “evangelistic economics” that Stone describes? Why or why not?
- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Ecclesiology and Mission Research Essay. Due no later than Sunday, April 22, 11:59 p.m.

Week 7: Models of Evangelism (Feb 23 – March 1)

1. Topic 1: Read Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Models of Evangelism*, pages 1-48, and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the discussion questions Pope-Levison provides at the end of chapters 1 and 2. **Due Thursday, Feb 26, no later than 11:59 p.m.**

- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

2. Topic 2: Read Pope-Levison 49-89 and offer a brief account of the main ideas or points you encountered. No need for an essay on this; just list bullet points. **Due Sunday, March 1, no later than 11:59 p.m.**

Week 8: More Models of Evangelism (March 2-8)

1. Topic 1: Read Pope-Levison 91-134 and write a 250-500 word essay addressing one or more of the discussion questions Pope-Levison provides at the end of chapters 3 through 6. **Due Tuesday, Mar 3, no later than 11:59 p.m.**

- **Or if there is some other theme, question, or idea that in your reading of these pages presents itself to you, feel free to incorporate into your reflection essay.**

Topic 2: Read Pope-Levison 135-190 and offer a brief account of the main ideas or points you encountered. No need for an essay on this; just list bullet points. **Due Friday, March 6, no later than 11:59 p.m.**

Signature writing assignment, as described in syllabus, **due no later than Sunday, March 8, 11:59 p.m.**