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Course Syllabus

CHU 395, CHRISTIAN TRADITION(S)

COURSE SYLLABUS, SPRING 2016

Tuesdays; 2:30 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.; LBRT 205A

Mark H. Mann, PhD

and Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES: After taking this course, students will be able to:

- 1 Explain the intellectual integrity, rich diversity, and coherence of the Christian tradition in its historical development.
- 2 Explain the characteristic features of Wesleyan theology and the ways in which it embodies the central affirmations of the Christian tradition.
- 3 Appreciate an ongoing, lifelong commitment to and participation in the Christian tradition and congregational life.

FURTHER EXPLANATION OF COURSE OBJECTIVES & WHY THIS COURSE MATTERS

You have chosen to attend a university that is self-consciously and unapologetically Christian and which, as stated in the PLNU Core Values, seeks to foster an “intentionally Christian community” that is faithful to its “Nazarene heritage and a Wesleyan theological perspective.” This course is intended to fulfill this aspect of the PLNU mission by introducing you both to the larger, more generally Christian tradition as well as the specifically Nazarene/Wesleyan heritage of PLNU.

If you are a Christian, this course provides an opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation for your own faith tradition. You will be given a rough sketch of the history of world Christianity and an introduction to

many of the key teachings and practices of the historic Church, and therefore find opportunities for your own faith as a Christian to be challenged, deepened, and enriched in numerous ways.

If you are not a Christian, or have serious questions about Christianity, this course will provide an opportunity for you to have many of your questions answered, or, at the very least, will give you a better understanding of the largest religious movement in the world (with over two billion adherents) and one of the most significant social forces in the world today. My hope also is that you will walk away from this course with a deeper appreciation for Christian faith and life and perhaps even find yourself called to become a vital and active participant in and contributor to this tradition.

Any religious or faith tradition is a *living* tradition, comprised of the collective beliefs, practices, and personal commitments of all the faithful across time and space. Therefore, to engage deeply with the Christian tradition, you will be expected to do so at all three levels—intellectual, practical, and personal. So, first, we will look at the core beliefs held by all Christians as well as the distinct beliefs of different Christian groups/denominations. Second, we will learn about and experience various Christian practices, some of which may seem strange to you because they are not part of your own community, but are widely practiced throughout the Christian church. And, finally, this class will become personal not only through the practices you will engage in, but also through the adoption of a patron/matron ‘saint’ who will serve as a kind of entry point and guide for much of your work (both intellectually and spiritually) throughout the semester. Understood broadly, saints are those persons whom the Church has affirmed as the best examples of what it means to *be* Christian and therefore most effectively illuminate what the Christian tradition aspires to be and, therefore, perhaps, what Christianity most essentially *is*. But there is also great diversity among the saints—indeed, there is disagreement among different Christians concerning what constitutes a saint, and therefore the lives of saints also provide a window into the profound diversity of the Christian tradition. (See below, under *Course Assignments*, to understand how your saint will shape and guide your work during the semester.)

INTERACTION WITH PROFESSOR/OFFICE HOURS: There are various ways that you might interact with me:

- I will participate in most online group and class discussions;
- You may email me (mchriste@pointloma.edu or through CANVAS);
- You may meet with me in my office (Wesleyan Center, 2nd Smee) by arrangement;
- I will conduct weekly online office hours on Thursdays in the afternoon (1-5pm)
- You can also try dropping by on Mondays or Thursdays.

- **COURSE READINGS**

Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd Edition.

William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction*.

You should purchase both of these books because you will be required to read most of each for the class. They are available at the PLNU bookstore or at various online stores. Additional required and optional readings will be made available through the course CANVAS site.

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS

Introductions: Since this is a hybrid class, our work together in groups will be of great importance, as is getting to know each other right away. The following need to be included in your personal introduction:

1. Where you are from or consider home;
2. What you are studying at PLNU;
3. What church(es) you grew up in (if any) and whether your experience was generally positive or negative;
4. A factoid about yourself that you think your classmates will find interesting.

After posting your introduction, you are required to respond to a minimum of **three** other students' introductions.


Course Readings and Group Discussions: Each week you will have assigned readings and will be responsible to answer a prompt related to the readings for that week. The class will be split into several discussion groups, so you will also need to read the responses of those in your groups, especially as most weeks you will be required to make some kind of presentation to the class on your discussion. Typically you will be required both to provide a reflection and respond to at least two other posts of classmates. **Initial posts are due on Mondays and responses are due by 2:30 on Tuesdays and are worth 20 points each.**

Religious/Spiritual Autobiography: Write a brief essay that outlines your church background and experience, including what church(es) you grew up in (if any), what you learned about the relationship of your church to the overall history of Christianity, how this background has shaped your relationship to God, and the theological convictions you have developed as a member of your church(es). This paper should be 300-400 words in length. It will be graded for clarity of writing, grammar, spelling, etc. Just to be clear, I am not looking for any particular answers. Each of your religious and spiritual stories will be unique. The point is that you openly and honestly reflect on your own journey so that you develop a greater sense of awareness about your own understanding of what it means to be Christian and can begin to locate yourself within or in relation to the various streams of the larger Christian movement. If you have no church background, plan to meet with me in person so that we can talk about how you might approach this assignment.

This assignment will be completed within the small groups that will also function as discussion groups throughout the semester. So, a secondary purpose of this assignment is that others (including me!) get to know you better as we forge open and honest dialogue as a class community. Each of you will be responsible to provide a hospitable response to every other member of your group. (Hospitality is a willingness to be kind, humble, and generous to each other even when there is disagreement—even sharp disagreement.)

Please note: If for some reason you feel uncomfortable sharing your own story with others, please talk to me personally. My hope is that everyone will be able to share something significant about themselves with the rest of their group while also being able to maintain a sense of safe boundaries. The basic point is for group members to get to know others in their group as there will be a lot of other activities throughout the semester that will require connected and cohesive groups.

Adopt a Saint: As noted in the course introduction, students will adopt Christian saints who will serve as an entry point for some of our work together as a class. There are four graded assignments related to the saint adoption:

1. **Saint Selection:** Each student will find a partner with whom to adopt a saint, with each team reporting their saint selection on the appointed discussion board no later than **4 pm on Friday, Jan. 22**. There is only one saint per team, and it's first come first served, so if you wait too long you might not get the saint you want. The professor will provide a [pre-approved list of saints](#) , and students might request a non-list saint by contacting the professor directly.
2. **Saint Biography:** All students must find ONE partner from the class with whom they will produce a wiki-like biography (600-800 words) about a patron/matron saints of their choosing. Each biography must include:
 - The story of the saint's life, including background, key events in the saint's life, etc.;
 - A summary of the saint's chief ideas/beliefs;
 - An outline of the saint's most significant contributions to the Christian tradition, and
 - An assessment of why the individual should (or should not!) be considered a saint.

Students may also include additional items of interest related to the saint, such as pictures, drawings, key writings of the saints, etc. In gathering information about their saints, students may draw upon online resources, but they **must** also draw upon **at least two** scholarly texts, such as a book-length biography. All sources should be listed in a bibliography. **Due: Friday, Feb. 5 by 4 pm.** (100 points)

3. **Saint Letters:** Students must write a total of **TWO** letters *from the perspective of their saints*. Each of these letters should be **200-300** words in length and will be graded both for quality of writing and quality of engagement with the saint's perspective. Students should be as imaginative and creative as possible.
4. **Essay 1: Letter to Home Church:** In this paper you will articulate what your saint would have to say about/to **your church** (either your home church or the church you attend here as a student or, if you do not attend a church, it can focus on PLNU chapel services). Your letter should address questions like: What would the saint like or not like about your church's worship services, the life of the congregation, the church's commitment to missions, justice, art, etc. **Due Date: Friday, Feb. 19 by 4 pm.**
5. **Essay 2: Letter to Your Generation from your Saint:** This will focus on what young persons (either Christians or nonChristians) need to hear today in order for them to approach their lives effectively as members of the Christian tradition: what they should believe, how it is important for them to act, the kinds of commitments they should make (whether they should marry, have children, what kind of job

and hobbies they should have), the kind of attitudes they should have about life and other people, etc. **Due Date: Friday, Mar. 4 at 4 pm.**

Christian Practice Reflections: Most weeks during the semester, you will be required to participate in some form of historic Christian practice, including attending two churches for worship, participating in a small group, fasting, *lectio divina* (contemplative reading of scripture), quiet reflection and meditation, etc. You will be required to provide a reflection on each of these experiences, typically in discussion with your group. Each week the instructions will be slightly different, but all of these are **due on Fridays by 4 pm and are worth 50 points.**

Final Exam: The **final exam** will be a ‘take-home’ exam distributed the last of class and **due by NOON on the last day of exam week (May 6).** (Final: 100 points)

Assignment	Possible Points
Introductions	20
Weekly Readings and Discussions (14x20 points each)	280
Christian Practice Reflections (8x50 each)	400
Religious Autobiography	100
Adopt a Saint	10
Saint Biography	100
Saint Letters (2x50 each)	100
Church Visits (2x50 each)	100
Final Exam	100
Total	1210

POINTS TO GRADE: The points-to-grade correlation is as follows:

A = 1210-1116

A- = 1115-1080

B+ = 1079-1044

B = 1043-996

B- = 995-960

C+ = 959-924

C = 923-876

C- = 875-840

D+ = 839-804

D = 803-756

D- = 755-720

F = below 720

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 **fourteen weeks**. It is anticipated that students will spend a minimum of 37.5 participation hours per credit hour on their course work. The overall time expectations for this course are shown below and weekly expectations are found in the introduction to each week.

Assignment	Hours
Weekly Readings and Discussions	40
Practice Reflections	32
Religious Autobiography	2
Saint Biography	6
Saint Letters	3
Church Visits and Reflections	10
In Class Time	21
Total	114

EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENTS

Options for extra credit may become available as the semester progresses, and I will let you know when this is the case.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

I maintain a strict and inflexible attendance policy for this class. If you arrive late you will be listed as tardy. More than fifteen minutes late for a class is counted as an absence. Two tardies will count as an absence.

PLNU maintains a fairly tough stance concerning attendance: "any student whose number of absences in a class, for any reason, exceeds the equivalent of one and one half weeks of class may be de-enrolled from the class with a failing grade." This means two classes, four tardies or any combination thereof. Be forewarned!

INCOMPLETES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments are to be submitted/turned in as indicated under each assignment in the modules. Late assignments are not accepted unless already approved by the professor, so if there are any issues you know about that may prevent you from completing an assignment in a timely manner, be sure to discuss it

with me well before the due date! My recommendation is that you plan **NOT** to wait until the last minute to turn in assignments.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The PLNU catalog states, “Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one’s own when in reality they are the results of another person’s creativity and effort. Such acts include plagiarism, copying of class assignments, and copying or other fraudulent behavior on examinations.” Instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to administrators and will result in a zero on the assignment and potential failure and/or de-enrollment from the course. The safest way to avoid plagiarism is ALWAYS to give credit to your sources, and if you have any questions about when you need to give a source credit, err on the side of doing so. I am also more than happy to give you further instruction on how and when it is appropriate to cite a source.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The PLNU School of Theology and Christian Ministry is committed to the equality of women and men. Recognizing that people have often used language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women, the department urges students, faculty and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussions and especially in their writings.

SPECIAL NEEDS

At PLNU students requesting academic accommodations must file documentation with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), located in the Bond Academic Center. Once the student files documentation, the Disability Resource Center will contact the student’s instructors and provide written recommendations for reasonable and appropriate accommodations to meet the individual learning needs of the student. This policy assists the University in its commitment to full compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act of 1990, and ADA Amendments Act of 2008, all of which prohibit discrimination against students with disabilities and guarantees all qualified students equal access to and benefits of PLNU programs and activities.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

PLNU encourages the use of technology for learning, communication, and collaboration. In this course, we will rely on E-class for accessing course materials, submitting assignments, and collaborating in discussion boards and blogs. You’ll want to make sure you are comfortable with these tools, so take advantage of our computer Lab Techs to answer questions and help you with any technology issues. You may also call the Help Desk at x2222.

You are welcome to bring your laptop, iPad, and/or cell phone to class—but please make sure you use them appropriately and responsibly. If a tech tool becomes a distraction or disruption while class is in session, I will ask you to put it away or invite you no longer to bring it to class.

FERPA

The university may disclose education records to college officials with legitimate educational interests. A college official is a person employed by the university; a member of the Board of Trustees; or an

individual serving on a committee, such as disciplinary or grievance committees. PLNU also includes among college officials a student appointed to an official committee or assisting another official in performing tasks. A college official has a legitimate educational interest if the information aids the official in fulfilling professional functions.

Essentially, this means that if a parent or family member calls me and asks about how you are doing in class, I am legally not allowed to discuss your work with them. The best ways of including your parents in the general progress of your academic life is to grant them access to the portal and to talk to them regularly. For a full presentation of the University's policy on FERPA consult the catalog: <http://catalog.pointloma.edu/>.

COURSE TIMELINE: See [MODULES](#)

Date	Details
Fri Jan 15, 2016	Passing the Peace: Introductions
Mon Jan 18, 2016	Week 1 Readings and Discussion
Fri Jan 22, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Adopt a Saint Religious/Spiritual Autobiography
Mon Jan 25, 2016	Extra Credit Opportunity Week 2 Reading and Discussion
Mon Feb 1, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Fasting Week 3 Readings and Discussion
Fri Feb 5, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Saint Biography/Wiki
Mon Feb 8, 2016	Week 4 Readings and Discussion
Fri Feb 12, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Personal Creeds
Mon Feb 15, 2016	Week 5 Readings and Discussion
Fri Feb 19, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Saint Letter to Church
Mon Feb 22, 2016	Week 6 Readings and Discussion
Fri Feb 26, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Praying the Rosary
Mon Feb 29, 2016	Week 7 Readings and Discussion
Fri Mar 4, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Church Visit #1

Date	Details
Mon Mar 14, 2016	Week 8 Readings and Discussion
Fri Mar 18, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Saint Letter to Millennials
Mon Mar 21, 2016	Week 9 Readings and Discussion
Fri Mar 25, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Scripture/Lectio Divina
Mon Mar 28, 2016	Week 10 Readings and Discussion
Fri Apr 1, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Creation and Art
Mon Apr 4, 2016	Week 11 Readings and Discussion
Fri Apr 8, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Wesleyan Class Meeting
Mon Apr 11, 2016	Week 12 Readings and Discussion
Fri Apr 15, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Works of Mercy
Mon Apr 18, 2016	Week 13 Readings and Discussion
Fri Apr 22, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Sabbath
Mon Apr 25, 2016	Week 14 Readings and Discussion
Fri Apr 29, 2016	Christian Practice Reflection: Church Visit #2
Fri May 6, 2016	Final Exam