

Catholicism and the Disciplines / History 10390-30390
Christianity, Commerce, and Consumerism: The Last 1,000 Years

Course Syllabus

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30-11:20
Friday tutorials: 10:30-11:20 or 11:30-12:20

Pasquerilla Center 112

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Office: Flanner 1122
Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:30-4:00
(and by appointment)
Social hour: Mondays, 4-5 (Hagerty
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Teaching Assistants:

Texts:

William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008).

Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Primary sources for the course, available through the library website (Course Reserves).

Course Objectives as History Course and CAD Course:

How did the most capitalist and consumerist societies in the history of the world emerge from a religious culture that was deeply suspicious of commerce, regarded money as dangerous, and condemned avarice as a deadly sin? This is the central question that this class, which is both a history course and a Catholicism and the Disciplines (CAD) course, will seek to answer.

A chronological scope typical of most history courses will not suffice to answer our central question, hence we will cover a much longer time span. By beginning in the Middle Ages c. 1000, before the emergence of a monetized, market economy, we will be able to see the effects of novel human behaviors on medieval Christians, and the ways in which they responded to them within the institutionalized worldview of Latin Christendom. By pursuing the impact of the changes wrought by the Reformation, from the sixteenth century down to the present, we will see how economics eventually came to be institutionalized and regarded by large numbers of Christians, and in the last century by increasing numbers of non-Christians, as a domain of human life separate from religion and ethics. All along the way we will have to consider ideas, beliefs, practices, social relationships, the pursuit of knowledge, and institutions in their complex relationships to human desires, aspirations, and the exercise of power.

This class simultaneously fulfills the two principal learning goals of CAD courses. First, its historical analysis provides the disciplinary basis from which to understand and assess the relationship between Catholic prescriptions and practices—and the gap between them—pertaining to the pursuit, acquisition, use, and distribution of material goods over the past millennium, from a world of barter and gift exchange to today’s online shopping and digitally mediated consumerism. The principal bearers of Catholic tradition in the eleventh century were bishops and Benedictine monks, who inherited teachings and practices of the faith rooted in scripture and the Church Fathers, including teachings and practices related to the course’s subject matter. Hence the readings for the course begin with the radically challenging biblical excerpts from the New Testament on matters pertaining to money, possessions, wealth, avarice, and poverty, as well as with related homilies from St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine. Writings from many other major Catholic authors, including St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas à Kempis, St. Francis de Sales, Pope Leo XIII, and Pope Francis are included in subsequent weeks among the readings for the course. Normative questions about human nature and human flourishing, the difference between needs and wants, virtues and sins and their effects, justice and injustice, and community and the common good, viewed from a Catholic as well as from rival perspectives (Protestant beginning in the sixteenth century, modern philosophical beginning in the seventeenth), are embedded in the course from start to finish: Is it ethically acceptable to seek more than one needs when others lack the basic necessities of life? Is affluence inherently corrupting of Christian life? What is a just distribution of material goods in relationship to genuine human flourishing? Do answers to these questions differ for premodern societies based on subsistence agriculture as distinct from advanced industrial societies based on ever-increasing GDP and consumption? The course’s normative questions in turn presuppose, when viewed in Catholic terms, some of the most fundamental theological notions of the Catholic faith, including creation (which of course includes all material things sought and bought, sold and used), revelation, theological anthropology, sin, judgment by God, and the hope of eternal salvation, all of which are introduced in the first week of the semester and remain in play until the end of the course.

The second learning goal of CAD courses is that students be able to defend positions related to (Catholic) faith and normative questions in light of competing alternatives, as they are challenged to reflect on their own commitments, whether Catholic or not, and to explore the basis for the defensibility of those commitments. The combination of lectures and readings for the course provide students with the basis to do this, e.g. by seeing the ways in which modern Catholic Social Teaching represents the attempt to do for a world unsettled by nineteenth-century industrialization what the mendicants sought to do in coping with a world unsettled by the eleventh- and twelfth-century commercial revolution. That said, this is not a course with easy or obvious answers to the quandaries it raises, the historical analysis it offers, or the theological questions it poses. It is not apparent how we politically protected individual consumers of modern liberal democracies, latter-day heirs of the religiously divided Christians of the Reformation era, who are free to consume as much as we want of whatever we want without regard for anyone else, are supposed to practice the virtues in imitation of Christ

in socially and politically constructive ways that simultaneously avoid the global environmental catastrophe that seemingly looms as a future threat of our collective actions. (How is *that* prospect related to divine providence?!) Students grapple with aspects of such questions especially in relationship to one of the books assigned for the course, Mark Valeri's *Heavenly Merchandize*, which in its analysis of the transformation of New England Puritanism between the early seventeenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries is poised between traditional Christian views and practices about avarice as a deadly sin, and acquisitive "self-interest" as the allegedly natural, benign high road to human happiness and national prosperity underwritten by divine favor. Each student must devise a topic for his or her own final paper that engages faith questions or normative questions in a substantive way, making arguments in relationship to issues raised by Valeri, and drawing in addition on material from the lectures, sources read during the semester, and any additional reading pertinent to his or her specific topic.

The history of the relationship between Christianity and economic realities involves intellectual, cultural, social, and political history as well as religious and economic history. It involves normative and theological questions that are far from merely theoretical or safely abstract; they inevitably touch the concrete lives of every student in the course, just as they touch the life of its professor. The attempt to answer the central question of the course is not only intellectually demanding; it is also ethically and existentially wrenching, as we come to realize we are participants in historically entrenched patterns of acquisitive desires and actions, not all of whose effects have been positive and many of which frankly cannot be squared with the gospels. But the payoff of wrestling with the issues raised by this history and CAD course is potentially great: commensurate with the effort they put into it, students will gain a new sense of how the world in which we are living today came about, their place in it, the unavoidably theological and ethical dimensions of economic life, and the knowledge that whether or not they buy into it personally, no educated Catholics can justifiably think their faith can be separated from what they do with their bodies as consumers.

Course Procedures and Format:

The format of the course is two fifty-minute lectures and one fifty-minute tutorial discussion section each week. There is no textbook for the course; the lectures will constitute the core of the material students are expected to learn and the principal basis on which they will be examined. For this reason, *students are strongly urged to attend every lecture and to take careful notes*. Laptop computers are permitted in class *only for the purpose of taking lecture notes (on Mondays and Wednesdays); any student who abuses this privilege by surfing the Web, chatting on Facebook, etc., will have it taken away. No cell phone use of any kind (including texting) is permitted during lectures or tutorials.*

The tutorials on Fridays will be devoted to a discussion of the assigned readings for each week, all of which are available either through Course Reserves via the Library website, as an assigned text, or online. Except for the books by Hirschman and Cavanaugh, the readings each week are primary sources (in translation in instances where the texts were not originally in English) and are related to the material covered in that

week's lectures. Students are expected to have read the assigned texts carefully before coming to class on Fridays, and to be ready to discuss them with rigor and vigor. In order to facilitate lively discussion, each student is also required to submit to her/his tutorial section's Sakai Forums discussion list a response to the week's readings by midnight on Thursday. This should be considered the equivalent of a 1-2-pp. double-spaced paper and should address some aspect of the primary sources from the week's assigned readings (it can compare two primary sources; relate a primary source to a point made in lecture; analyze a specific passage in a primary source; etc.). Each student is required to read the contributions of the other students in her/his section before class begins on Friday. More information about these Sakai Forums posts will be given in class by Professor Gregory early in the semester.

In addition to the mid-term and final exams, there will be two writing assignments, the first an essay of 6-8 pages (due on October 10), and the second an essay of 10-15 pages (due on November 30). The topics for the first essay will be given in class by Professor Gregory, and will require students to engage carefully with one or more of the primary sources read during the early part of the course in ways that are both sensitive to historical context and engaged with ethical and/or theological issues raised in the texts. As indicated above, the second essay must include substantive treatment of the book by Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize*, which all students are to read on their own during the semester; please note the suggested schedule on the syllabus for reading this book. Each student will develop her/his own particular essay topic in conjunction with Valeri's book, in collaboration with her/his teaching assistant (Alexa McCall or Tomás Valle), again in ways that demonstrate both awareness of historical contexts and engagement with ethical and/or theological issues. More information about both essays and about Valeri's book will be given by Professor Gregory in class.

Grading:

Student grades will be determined on the basis of attendance and participation in the tutorials (20%); the two writing assignments (10%, 20%); the mid-term exam (15%); and the final exam (35%). *Please note: attendance at tutorials is mandatory! Missing a tutorial without clearing the absence in advance (or having it excused afterward in the case of a medical or other emergency) will automatically result in a lower final grade for the course.* The mid-term exam will be on Friday, October 12 and will consist of several identification questions, plus one essay question selected from among at least two choices. The final exam, scheduled for **Wednesday, December 12, from 4:15-6:15 p.m.**, will consist of identification questions and two essay questions selected from among at least four choices. *The University Honor Code applies to this course, including all rules and regulations governing plagiarism and related issues.*

Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings:

The weekly schedule of lectures, tutorials, and readings is as follows. All readings are available through Library Reserves or are one of the required texts, except

for Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which is available through the Vatican website (w2.vatican.va) or elsewhere online.

August 22: Introduction

August 24: Setting the Stage: Latin Christendom c. 1000

No tutorials this first week: lecture instead in Pasquerilla Center 112

August 27: Scripture and the Church Fathers on Economic Concerns

August 29: Eleventh-Century Revolutions in Commerce and the Church

August 31: tutorial

- New Testament passages on wealth, poverty, and greed: Mt 6:19-24, Mt 19:16-30, Mt 25:31-46, Mk 12:41-44, Lk 8:14, Lk 12:13-21, Lk 12:32-34, Lk 16:19-31, Lk 19:1-10, Acts 2:43-47, Acts 4:32-37, Eph 5:3-5, Col 3:5, Phil 2:1-5, 1 Tim 6:7-10, 1 Jn 3:11-18, Jas 1:22-2:7, Jas 2:14-17

- John Chrysostom, "Second Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man" [c. 388/9], in idem, *On Wealth and Poverty*, transl. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), pp. 39-55.

- Augustine, "Sermon 107" [411-420], in idem, *Essential Sermons*, transl. Edmund Hill, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2007), pp. 172-178.

September 3: Christian Reactions to the Commercial Revolution

September 5: Money's Threat to Christian Life

September 7: tutorial

- Peter Damian, "Letter 24" (to Abbot Mainard of Pomposa) [1047-1054], in idem, *Letters 1-30*, transl. Owen J. Blum (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 227-235.

- Bernard of Clairvaux, "The Story of the Eight Beatitudes," in idem, *The Parables and the Sentences*, transl. Michael Casey and Francis R. Swietek, ed. Maureen M. O'Brien (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 2000), pp. 89-100.

- Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles* [c. 1220s], vol. 1, transl. H. Von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, intro. G. G. Coulton (London: Routledge, 1929), 4.57-72, pp. 254-273.

September 10: The Friars, Cities, Commerce, and the Common Good

September 12: Poverty and Wealth in Thirteenth-Century Christendom

September 14: tutorial

- Francis of Assisi, "The Rule of Saint Francis of Assisi" [1223], in *Readings in Medieval History*, 2nd ed., ed. Patrick J. Geary (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1997), pp. 447-450.

- Ugolino di Monte Santa Maria, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi* [early 14th c.] transl. W. Heywood, preface Madeleine L'Engle (New York: Vintage, 1998), chaps. 1-2, 5, pp. 3-7, 14-16.

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, transl. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 2 (New York: Benzinger, 1947), II-II, qq. 32 (on almsgiving), 77 (on

cheating in buying and selling), 78 (on usury), 118 (on avarice), pp. 1317-1327, 1507-1516, 1679-1686.

September 17: The Great Famine and the Black Death

September 19: Ecclesiastical Wealth and Schism in the Fourteenth Century

September 21: tutorial

- Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale" [including the Prologue], in idem, *The Canterbury Tales* [1387-1400], transl. Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), pp. 241-258.

- Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," in idem, *Canterbury Tales*, available on eReserves.

- "The Diary of Gregorio Dati," in *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence: The Diaries of Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati*, transl. Julia Martines, ed. Gene Brucker (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1991), pp. 107-126.

September 24: Taste, Consumption, and Humanism in the Fifteenth Century

September 26: Problems and Piety on the Eve of the Reformation

September 28: tutorial

- Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* [c. 1420], ed. and transl. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage, 1998), Book 2, pp. 47-70.

- Poggio Bracciolini, "On Avarice" [1427], in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), pp. 241-289.

- John Colet, "Colet's Convocation Sermon, 1512," in *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola: Reform in the Church, 1495-1540* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 27-39.

October 1: The Early Reformation and the Peasants' War of 1524-25

October 3: God's Word vs. Greed: Magisterial Reformers and Avarice

October 5: tutorial

- Martin Luther, *Trade and Usury* [1524], in idem, *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp. 245-310.

- Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi* [1551], in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, vol. 19 in *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 1.14, pp. 256-259; 2.49-50, pp. 337-345.

- *To The Assembly of the Common Peasantry* [1525], in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 101-129.

October 8: Confessionalization and "Wars of Religion" in the Reformation Era

October 10: In-class review for mid-term exam

First essay due

October 12: Mid-term exam

No tutorials or required readings this week; recommended to start reading Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize, Introduction and Chapter 1

F A L L B R E A K

Recommended: read Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize, Chapters 2-3

October 22: Beyond Confessionalism? The Dutch Republic and New Worlds

October 24: England's Apprenticeship and the Industrious Revolution

October 26: tutorial

- [Niels Hemmingsen,] *A Godlie Treatise Concerning the lawfull vse of Ritches*, transl. Thomas Rogers, in Philipp Caesar, *A general discourse against the damnable sect of vsurers grounded vppon the worde of God . . .* (London: [John Kingston for] Andrew Maunsell, 1578), chaps. 1-12.

- Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* [1609] (New York: Vintage, 2002), 3.14-16, pp. 120-127.

- Thieleman Jans van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* [1660], transl. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa. and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1990), pp. 8-11.

Recommended: read Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize, Chapter 4

October 29: The Origins of Modern Philosophy and the Transvaluation of Avarice

October 31: Transforming Protestantism and Commerce in Colonial New England

November 2: tutorial

- John Browne, *The Marchants Avizo* [1589], frontmatter and pp. 1-7, 60-68.

- Nicholas Barbon, *A Discourse of Trade* [1690], in *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, ed. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), pp. 66-99.

Recommended: finish Valeri, Heavenly Merchandize, Chapter 5 and Epilogue

November 5: Religious Toleration from the United Provinces to the United States

November 7: Useful Knowledge and the Industrial Revolution

November 9: tutorial

- Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.

- Denis Diderot, "Regrets on Parting with My Old Dressing Gown" [1772], in idem, *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, transl. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 309-317.

November 12: Industrial Capitalism, Nationalism, and Colonialism

November 14: Christian Reactions to and Participation in Industrialization

November 16: tutorial

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [1835], transl. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000), vol. 2, pt. 2, chaps. 8-17, pp. 525-549.

- "Adelheid Popp, Factory Worker" and "Nikolaus Osterroth, Clay Miner," in *The German Worker: Working-Class Autobiographies from the Age of Industrialization*, transl. and ed. Alfred Kelly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 121-134, 160-178.

- Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* [1891], in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 12-39.

November 19: Modern Economic Realities and Catholic Social Teaching

November 21: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

November 23: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

November 26: From Industrial to Consumerist Society

November 28: Christianity and Consumerism in the Contemporary United States

November 30: tutorial

- Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*.

- Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, §§1-16, 101-123, 202-232.

Final essay due

December 3: Conclusion: How We Got to Where We Are

December 5: In-class review for final

No tutorials or readings this week

The final exam will be on **Wednesday, December 12, from 4:15-6:15 p.m.**