

# MEDIEVAL EUROPE: HIS 102 – Spring 2026

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Room 302 ~ Monday / Wednesday / Friday ~ 9:30 to 10:20

*Office Hours by appointment.*

## Course Description

The term “Middle Ages” signifies the roughly thousand-year period between the decline of Roman imperial rule in the fifth century and the so-called rebirth of classical culture in the fifteenth century. Lectures and primary source readings address such fascinating topics as the Crusades; the place of Jews in Christian society; the rise of Islam; the development of kingship, empire, and papacy; the relations between Church and State; the birth of universities; monasticism and innovations in religious life; towns and merchants; chivalric romance; the rediscovery of Roman law and the flourishing of canon law; and finally heresy and inquisition.

## Required Text

*Coursepack* = CP

## Evaluation Criteria

### *Reading Questions & Participation* – 35%

Students periodically read, analyze, and then discuss thematic sets of primary sources related to lecture content. Grading criteria and instructions for crafting discussion questions are provided in a separate handout.

### *Identification Tests* – 15%

Students identify three excerpts from the Coursepack, providing for each: the title of the work, author, date, place of composition, a brief summary of the literal meaning of the specific text in question, and the significance of the passage in relation to the larger themes of the course. Each identification should constitute a sizeable paragraph.

### *Primary Source Analysis* – 25%

For this assignment, each student analyzes a text written during the Middle Ages, seeking to gain insights into the culture and society which produced this document. A list of appropriate texts available in English translation is contained in the Coursepack. **Due 4/27.**

### *Midterm* – 10% & *Final Exam* – 15%

For each assessment, students respond to one broad essay question and must discuss material covered in lectures and primary source readings.

DATE	LECTURE TOPIC	ASSIGNMENT DUE
M 1/12	<b>Introduction</b>	
W 1/14	<b>Why the Liberal Arts? Why History?</b>	
F 1/16	<b>Pagan Roman Empire</b>	
M 1/19	<b>Rome Transformed: Christians</b>	
W 1/21	<b>Rome Transfigured: Barbarians</b>	
F 1/23	<b>Transformations of the Roman World</b>	CP #1
M 1/26	<b>France: Eldest Daughter of the Church</b>	
W 1/28	<b>Rise of Islam</b>	
F 1/30	<b>The Carolingians &amp; Charlemagne</b>	
M 2/2	<b>The Franks &amp; Roman Culture</b>	CP #2
W 2/4	<b>Creation of England</b>	
F 2/6	<b>Anglo-Saxon England</b>	CP #3
M 2/9	<b>The Future of England: Norman Conquest</b>	
W 2/11	<b>Life from Death: Flourishing of Monasticism</b>	
F 2/13	<b>Western Monasticism</b>	CP #4
M 2/16	<b>ID Test #1</b>	
F 2/20	<b>The Medieval Church</b>	
M 3/2	<b>The Bishop in his Diocese</b>	CP #5
W 3/4	<b>Warrior Ethos &amp; Feudal Society</b>	
F 3/6	<b>Crusades: Origins &amp; Success</b>	
M 3/9	<b>Feudal Epic &amp; Arthurian Romance</b>	CP #6
W 3/11	<b>Crusades: Setbacks</b>	

F 3/13	<b>Crusades: Stagnation</b>	
M 3/16	<b>Medieval Spain: Convivencia or Reconquista?</b>	
W 3/18	<b>MIDTERM</b>	
F 3/20	<b>Medieval Economy</b>	
M 3/23	<b>The Shape of Society: Rural &amp; Urban</b>	CP #7
W 3/25	<b>New Monks &amp; Friars</b>	
F 3/27	<b>Popular Religion</b>	CP #8
M 4/13	<b>ID Test #2</b>	
W 4/15	<b>Catholic Education &amp; Universities</b>	
F 4/17	<b>The Church Divided: Eastern Schism</b>	
M 4/20	<b>The Church Infected: Heresy</b>	
W 4/22	<b>Heresy &amp; Inquisition</b>	CP #9
F 4/24	<b>Two Perfect Societies: Church &amp; State</b>	
M 4/27	<b>Defenders of the Pope</b>	<b>Primary Source Analysis Due</b>
W 4/29	<b>Empire &amp; Papacy I</b>	CP #10
F 5/1	<b>Two Swords</b>	
M 5/4	<b>Empire &amp; Papacy II</b>	CP #11
W 5/6	<b>Swords Unsheathed</b>	
F 5/8	<b>Empire &amp; Papacy III</b>	CP #12
M 5/11	<b>ID Test #3</b>	

## HIS 102 – Guidance for COURSEPACK QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Periodically throughout the course, we will discuss, as a group, thematic sets of primary source readings, and analysis of the texts contained in the Coursepack is an essential part of HIS 102. These readings provide us with opportunities to look closely at some fascinating historical documents, to develop insights into medieval societies and culture, and to discuss these insights with one another.

You must type up two questions inspired by each set of Coursepack readings, email these to the professor the day before the in-class discussion, and then bring a printed copy of these questions to the in-class meeting. Also make an attempt at answering your own questions – a short paragraph response per question will suffice. The two questions and responses should not exceed one printed page.

These assignments serve as a record of your attendance and participation. If you do not email your questions to the professor the day before the discussion and then submit a hard copy of your questions and responses to the professor at the end of the discussion, you may, unless there is a legitimate documented excuse, be counted absent and get a “zero” on that particular assignment.

When crafting your questions, I recommend that you (1) focus on “difficult” sections in the readings, ones which you didn’t immediately understand; (2) be specific rather than general, and indicate the particular passages which inspired your inquiries; (3) identify themes shared by the various readings for a certain week; and most importantly (4) ask questions which truly interest you!

One goal of these assignments is to facilitate and encourage critical thought and student collaboration. During in-class discussions, the professor will propose preselected questions for general consideration; students will then be encouraged to share their own thoughts, ask follow-on questions, provide additional evidence from the readings, and respond to the insights of their peers.

## Grading Criteria for Coursepack Questions & Discussion

*\*\* Note: the grade assigned to printed questions takes into account oral participation during the respective in-class discussion. \*\**

### Qualities of an “A” effort:

- displays a thorough knowledge of the readings;
- poses questions which provoke discussion;
- responds meaningfully to the questions of other students;
- cites specific passages from the Coursepack.

### Qualities of a “B” effort:

- displays familiarity with the various readings;
- engages in discussion from time to time;
- refers to the Coursepack.

### Qualities of a “C” effort:

- struggles to grasp the literal meaning of the readings;
- poses a question that is not directly tied to the material at hand;
- makes little or no attempt to join productively in discussion;
- manifests uncertainty concerning Coursepack contents.

Finally, as the qualities of “C” effort deteriorate, the grade will pass into the “D” and “F” range.

## Advice on Formal Academic Writing

- 1.) Organize your introduction so that it quickly gives readers a summary or overview of the major argument(s) in your essay. Think of it like a map.
- 2.) Make sure your essay has a focused point: a main claim or arguable assertion. Lay out this assertion at the end of your introductory paragraph. Keep in mind that proving this claim is the goal of your essay.
- 3.) Give at least one solid example to back up every major point of analysis; show your readers why you are right, don't just tell them.
- 4.) When citing an extended passage or quoting a text at length, devote ample analysis to the citation, linking it back in some way to your assertion. As a general rule, your analysis of a cited text should occupy at least as much space in your essay as the quotation itself.
- 5.) Make every sentence count. Each sentence should advance your analysis or strengthen your argument in an important way – if it doesn't, it should be revised or removed. Also, avoid needless repetition.
- 6.) In your final (concluding) paragraph, link your assertion to other related topics beyond the scope of your analysis – this is the place for speculation.
- 7.) Write clearly! There should be no ambiguity about the meaning of your words or sentences. Readers should understand exactly what you're saying at all times.
- 8.) Take the time to write well, which requires editing and proofreading.
- 9.) Be patient with yourself – learning to write well takes time, effort, and practice.

## Appendix:

# Key Texts on the Importance of History and the Liberal Arts

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Cicero, *Orator* c. 34

To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the lives of our ancestors by the records of history?

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St. Bernard, *De consideratione* 5.12

It is clear that the soul is immortal, and that the soul can never live without its memory lest it occur that the soul cease to be. Therefore, so long as the soul exists, its memory also persists. But in what way? ... Things past have passed away, but they are not gone. They are no longer at hand, but they are in the mind. That which has been done cannot be undone. Hence to act occurs in time, but what has been done remains for eternity. It does not pass away with time, although it passes through time. Therefore you will remember for eternity that which you have done.

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Shwartz commentary:

History is eternal. Ordering and organizing our memory of past events is not a bare and lifeless listing of facts and dates; it is a memory which recalls and examines the significance of our lives, both as individuals and as members of larger societies. This memory, which develops in time, nevertheless persists forever since our temporal actions not only determine our eternal destinies, but even remain with us to inspire either joy in heaven or sorrow in hell. St. Bernard, writing to his former pupil Pope Eugene III, develops these insights while situating the papal office within God's larger plan for humanity so that the well-informed pope may fulfill his particular duties in a responsible way. Approached aright, the study of history thus provides essential context for our own lives. The lessons it teaches help us recognize our place in God's providential plan. Should we occupy that place faithfully, we will recall for all eternity the successful fulfillment of our own role in the great pageant of human history, and rejoice.

Peter Lombard, Prologue to the *Sentences* (quoting St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*)

“[There are those] who do not submit their will to reason, nor apply themselves to the study of doctrine. Instead, they strive to make the words of wisdom fit what they have dreamed up; they follow not the reason of truth, but of what pleases them. ... For as long as the truth remains firm and the will to err persists, there is an unceasing battle between the assertion of the truth and the defense of [false] opinion.”

Wishing to cast down the assembly of such people ... and in order to set forth the light of truth ... we have, with God’s aid, put together with much labor and sweat a book ... in which you will find the precedents and teachings of our ancestors. ... And if in some places our voice has rung out a little loudly, it has not transgressed the bounds set by our forefathers.

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Shwartz commentary:

The world is full with a sea of novel and dangerous opinions. This is the reality which St. Hilary of Poitiers confronted nearly two thousand years ago, a reality Peter Lombard encountered in the twelfth century, one we continue to endure in the twenty-first. Seemingly the struggle between truth and error will only cease when time itself expires. In order to avoid being tossed violently from novelty to novelty, from deception to deception, the will must submit to reason, the mind must submit to truth. But where does one find truth laid out rationally in the condemnation of error? Peter Lombard, for his part as author of the great medieval textbook on theology, relied on Tradition, “the precedents and teachings of our ancestors.” At Saint Mary’s College, we too embrace a traditional vision of education, one which relies on the solid insights of the past in order to rebuke the erroneous opinions of our own day. And if our voices zealous for the truth ring out boisterously in the condemnation of falsehood, we always do so within the safe limits laid out by Tradition.

The pilgrim City of Christ the King must bear in mind that among her very enemies are hidden her future citizens; and when confronted with them she must not think it a fruitless task to bear with their hostility until she finds them confessing the faith. In the same way, while the City of God is on pilgrimage in this world, she has in her midst some who are united with her in participation of the sacraments, but who will not join with her in the eternal destiny of the saints. Some of these hypocrites are hidden; some are well known, for they do not hesitate to murmur against God, whose sacramental sign they bear, even in the company of his acknowledged enemies. At one time they join his enemies in filling the theatres, at another they join with us in filling the churches.

But, such as they are, we have less right to despair of the reformation of some of them, when some predestined friends, as yet unknown even to themselves, are concealed among our most open enemies. In truth, those two cities (of the God and of the Devil) are interwoven and intermixed in this era, and await separation at the last judgment. My task, as far as I shall receive divine assistance, will be to say what I think necessary in explanation of the origin, development, and appointed end of those two cities. This I shall do to enhance the glory of the City of God, which will shine more brightly when set in contrast with cities of other allegiance.

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Shwartz commentary:

History is complex, and potentially confusing. Studied correctly, however, history explores the mysterious beauties and beautiful mysteries of God's Providence. Why does evil exist in a world created by the Supreme Good? Why do the wicked seemingly prosper while the just suffer? Why do some sinners repent and save their souls while some who seem righteous fall away? Why are the City of God and the City of the Devil mingled so thoroughly in this life? The study of history, Augustine argues, provides practical answers to these pressing questions, ones posed by the saintly bishop as he witnessed the vast Roman Empire collapse before his eyes, questions which remain just as pertinent in our day.

Luke 10: 38-42

Jesus entered into a certain town, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard his teaching. But Martha was busy about much serving, who stood and said, "Lord, have you no care that my sister has left me alone to serve? Speak to her therefore, that she help me." And the Lord answering, said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her."

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Shwartz commentary:

For medieval scholars, this passage from the Gospel of St. Luke spoke to the difference between the active and contemplative life, the former lived in the world focused on the service of others, the latter spent in intimate contact with our Lord through prayer and sacrifice in a religious house. But we can also apply this classic text to the choice facing young Catholics today as they graduate high school, most of whom are tempted to rush off into a career or into marriage. These are laudable desires, just as Martha's busy-ness was praiseworthy, but there is also the option to spend some time "at the feet of our Lord," as Mary did, and to "choose the best part." Saint Mary's College offers its students direct and prolonged contact with the teachings of our Lord in a serene, contemplative, even joyful environment. No matter what a student does after spending four years of reflective study in our liberal arts program, the foundation laid during this time upon Jesus Christ, the rock of truth, will never be taken away.

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