

CHRISTIAN HERITAGE CLASS WINTER-SPRING 2026

Feb. 22 **A COMMUNION OF SAINTS: MARTYRS AND ASCETICS--AND THE TITULAR CHURCHES OF ROME.** Persecution of Christians, which had been small and infrequent and a “local scapegoat kind of thing” in the early years when Christianity was a tiny faction, became more common and widespread as Christians were a “useful, frequently enthusiastic, scapegoats for misfortunes that befell the state.” The Roman state was generally tolerant of religious faiths. The failure to participate and sacrifice was seen as a betrayal of the state, that put it at risk of divine disfavor. **Pagans did not appreciate the Christian perspective that God did not work for their protection in this world but rather delivered them from its pain to the place he had prepared for them, presided over by Christ.** The “theatricality” of the martyrs' deaths—witnessed in public spaces by huge masses—impressed the masses, and Christianity was explained to the educated by others. (It was like Socrates reversed: he dying refusing to explain his beliefs or non-beliefs, while the Christians died as witnesses to their belief.)

March 1. **THE LENTEN LABYRINTH** “**ALL THE WAY TO GOD IS GOD**” said Catherine of Siena. Although it had a pagan **origin**, Christians denied the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem welcomed the labyrinth as a symbol. Its single path to the center was a perfect illustration of the single path to salvation.

March 8. NO CLASS

March 15. **ST. HELENA AND THE QUEST FOR THE TRUE CROSS.** In the Chapel of Sacred Relics of the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome is a fragment of a board of walnut wood incised with the letters ERSVNIRAZAN, which written left to right would spell *Nazarinus re[x]*—“Nazarene (i.e., of Nazareth) King”.

The wood [of the Cross] might have been lost from sight: no one made an effort to preserve it, mainly under the influence of fear, but also because at that time they were concerned with other, more pressing matters. But at a later stage they looked for it and, to all probability, the three crosses were in one place. Therefore they had to take precautions so that the one which belonged to the Lord would not remain unidentifiable – first because it was the middle one, but second, it would be obvious to everyone because of the Titulus, since the crosses of the thieves had no superscription. –St. John Chrysostom c. 398

No class March 22 and March 29 or April 5

April 12. **THE UNIFIED CATHOLIC CHURCH under Constantine** Constantine’s professed toleration for all faiths, for which he had fought his last great war against Licinius, foundered on the diversity of Christian doctrine and practices. In the name of unity he now persecuted those whose beliefs were now far closer to his own than those held by worshippers of Sol Invictus [etc.]...While those who had not yet found the Christian god should be led in that direction by moderation, those who had done so but rejected correct authority (“schismatics”) or correct belief (“heretics”) were to be pressured equally, and punished if they failed to relent... Punishments were far harsher than those meted out to pagans, who were as yet children and not threats to the unity of the true faith. Through Constantine’s measures to strip away temples’ property, and his son’s (Constantius II) to shut their gates, [the pagan temples] had deteriorated badly, but relations between Christian and pagans were not bloody...The fact is surprising, for whatever, may be said against its persecutors earlier, the Christian Church even quite undisturbed was *not a good neighbor*...

April 19. **IMPOSING TRINITARIAN ORTHODOXY: EMPEROR THEODOSIUS AND THE EDICT OF CONSTANTINOPLE 381.** THE STATE IMPOSES A BELIEF ON THE CHURCH. Through the intervention of the state, Theodosius brought to a premature end a debate [about the Trinity] that was still vital and full of possibilities. The Church was forced, by the sheer weight of imperial power to acquiesce in a doctrine that had not come to fruition and that, if debate had been allowed to continue, might never have. No one can say whether the Greek tradition of free thought would have continued...or how intellectual life would have evolved without Theodosius' intervention...

April 26. **THE CITY OF GOD IS NOT THE CITY OF ROME** The [sack of Rome](#) by the [Visigoths](#) in 410 left Romans in a deep state of shock, and many Romans saw it as punishment for abandoning [traditional Roman religion](#) for [Christianity](#). In response to these accusations, and in order to console Christians, Augustine wrote *The City of God*, arguing for the truth of Christianity over competing religions and philosophies and maintaining that Christianity is not only **not** responsible for the Sack of Rome, but also was responsible for the success of Rome. He attempted to console Christians, writing that, even if the earthly rule of the Empire was imperiled, it was the City of God that would ultimately triumph. Augustine's eyes were fixed on [Heaven](#), a theme of many Christian works of [Late Antiquity](#), and despite Christianity's designation as the [official religion of the Empire](#), Augustine declared its message to be spiritual rather than political.