

THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT
SPRING 2026

Courses as of 10/07/25 – Please continue to check Master Schedule for latest updates.

THEOLOGY UPPER-LEVEL COURSES

THL 2490 THM: EMPIRE IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

MW 3:20-4:35PM (Ethan Schwartz)

Owing to the cultural influence of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament and the New Testament, many people today imagine ancient Israel, Judah, and Judea as powerful, central political entities. However, the historical reality is that they were minor, often peripheral players on a geopolitical stage dominated by vastly larger empires. Taking this recognition as a starting point, this course introduces biblical history with a focus on the series of great empires that shaped it. By expanding our lens beyond the limited purview of the biblical accounts themselves, we will uncover a gripping, complex international drama in which these empires vied for control of the known world. At the same time, we will gain a new appreciation for how this international drama left a lasting mark on the Bible—including in ways that reverberate in Judaism and Christianity today.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 3250 THM: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

T/TH 11:30-12:45PM (Shams Inati)

One of the most puzzling issues that the human mind encounters is why a God with absolute knowledge, power, and goodness causes or allows so much evil or even any instance of evil. This issue, known as “the problem of evil,” is the central focus of this course and is addressed primarily from the point of view of Muslim and Christian philosophers and theologians. Various formulations of the problem will be presented and various solutions will be drawn from different Islamic and Christian perspectives and periods of thought. Includes videos and possible guest speakers.

Attributes: Arab and Islamic Studies

THL 3790 MARY AND THE SAINTS

T/TH 10:00-11:15AM (Jessica Murdoch)

In this course, we will explore the profound theological and spiritual significance of Mary, the Mother of God, and the saints within the Catholic tradition. Through an in-depth examination of scriptural titles for Mary, we will delve into her many roles which offer a unique perspective on her place in salvation history. The course will investigate several major Marian apparitions, including Our Lady of Fatima, Lourdes, Champion (Wisconsin), Guadalupe, and Kibeho, to understand their messages and impact on the Church. We will engage with contemporary reflections on pilgrimage through Martin Sheen’s movie “The Way,” considering how the themes of journey and spiritual quest are embodied in both Marian devotion and the lives of the saints. Additionally, the course will cover the lives of several saints, including St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Padre Pio, and Blessed Carlo Acutis

among others, offering insights into their contributions to the Church and their enduring influence on Catholic spirituality.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 3790 THE LEGACY OF POPE FRANCIS

T/TH 1:00-2:15PM (Jaisy Joseph)

This course will provide a critical examination of the legacy of Pope Francis, analyzing the major themes of his theology and vision for the Catholic Church throughout his pontificate (2013-2025). We will begin with a biographical study of his life as Jorge Mario Bergoglio, tracing his development as a Jesuit and archbishop in Argentina, which deeply shaped his eventual leadership of the global Church. The course will then turn to Francis's most influential texts and reforms, assessing the direction in which he sought to guide the church. An evaluation of the significance of his vision and reforms will be conducted through engagement with theological scholarship, as well as analyses of contemporary news articles from both Catholic and secular media. Among the many themes explored in this course, special attention will be given to Francis' views on and reforms regarding the climate crisis; the centrality of the poor; synodality; and the inclusion of women in the church. We will conclude the semester with a look forward to how Pope Leo XIV builds on this legacy in this first year of his papacy.

Whether you embrace the Christian tradition, question its relevance, approach in curiosity, or wrestle with faith, all voices are welcomed and find value in this community of learning.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4200 THM: ETHICS OF LIFE AND DEATH

MW 3:20-4:35PM (Emma McDonald Kennedy)

This course explores how Christian ethics contributes to moral discourse on issues of life and death. The course will engage Christian understandings of justice, human dignity, and embodiment and apply them to complex issues at the intersection of life and death. Scrutinizing thorny questions in beginning-of-life contexts, the course will explore religion and ethics in neonatal intensive care units; decision-making around abortion and fetal abnormalities; the use of assisted reproductive technologies; embryo cryopreservation, donation, and adoption; and surrogacy across borders. The course will also consider contemporary challenges related to death and dying in healthcare and bioethics, including global health inequities and death from infectious disease; healthcare disparities and maternal and fetal mortality; medical assistance in dying (MAID); debates in criteria for determining death; disagreements about what constitutes a “good death;” debates about what good care for the dying entails; and controversies in the use of lethal injection in death penalty cases. Engaging resources from environmental ethics and animal ethics, we’ll consider the implications of medical research and treatments for planetary and animal life and death. Finally, the course will put tools from Christian ethics into practice to analyze the implications of emerging artificial intelligence technologies for human society.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4480 INTRODUCTION TO BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

MW 1:55-3:10PM (Brett Wilmot)

The purpose of this course is to develop tools for critical analysis of biomedical ethical issues from a Catholic theological perspective. From the conception of life to the end of life we are faced with new technologies and a stunning array of choices that affect us, our loved ones, and our fellow human beings. We will be focusing on a distinctively Catholic Christian approach to these matters, and we will be considering a range of topics that affect patients, care providers, and the broader society in which Christians and non-Christians seek to live good lives with moral integrity. The vision of the human person and the ideal of human flourishing from a Catholic perspective will provide our framework for exploring these topics. At times, we will contrast a distinctively Catholic approach with secular, philosophical alternatives, but the ultimate aim of this course is to come away with a richer understanding of what is distinctive about a Catholic approach to bioethics. Students will become familiar with theories, principles, terminology, values, and resources that are used in evaluating bioethical questions in a manner that is theologically informed. Unique vocabularies and the historical development of biomedical issues will be examined. Critical analysis of emerging biomedical challenges will be encouraged. Many clinical examples found in the daily practice of medicine will be discussed in class.

Attributes: Core Theology, Health Humanities Medical Arts

THL 4490 THM: CHRISTIAN PEACEBUILDING

T/TH 8:30-9:45AM (Ken Fleischer)

This course will explore, from a theological perspective, the Christian tradition's struggle with the question of war and peace. After a review of the integral role of Catholic social teaching within Christian ethics, our academic journey begins with an examination of the historical development of the two distinct moral choices to the question of state-sanctioned violence – nonviolence or just war. From this platform and with a deliberate focus on peace, we will engage Lisa Sowle Cahill's moral criticism of these two traditional alternatives and evaluate her proposal that "Christian peacebuilding best represents the Christian commitment both to nonviolence and to political responsibility." (*Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding*, ix) Our academic journey culminates in an investigation of Theodora Hawksley's effort of "re-presenting the tradition of Catholic social teaching on peace and making the case that the 'ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18) entrusted to us is a key dimension of our Christian vocation." (*Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching*, 3) Our academic inquiries will begin with a survey of sacred texts, followed by both traditional and contemporary theological reflection.

Attributes: Core Theology, Peace & Justice

THL 4490 THEOLOGY AND BLACK POWER

MW 4:45-6:00PM (Timmy Lucky)

Even as a Christian Nation, The United States engages in a long-standing practice of the production and consumption of "Racist Ideas." In this course, we will explore the implications of "Racist Ideas" historically imbedded within the American legal system and government policies. We will juxtapose those ideas and practices against the backdrop of

American/African American History. We will examine how Christianity and the United States Justice System have been used as a means to justify slavery and the recurring discriminatory practices that are still seen today. As we study together, we will engage the Bible, historical literature, visual art and films to explore key topics from a Theological perspective (to include: racism, antiracism and humanity).

Attributes: Core Theology, Peace & Justice, Diversity 1

THL 4550 THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION

T/TH 11:30-12:45PM (Fr. Martin Laird)

Feelings of loneliness, anger, anxiety, fear, self-loathing, among other afflictive thoughts and feelings, prevent our discovery of what already lies deep within each of us: an expansive inner peace that grounds the indwelling presence of God. The Christian contemplative tradition is concerned with developing those interior skills (the practice of contemplation) that gradually calm the inner noise and confusion in our heads and lead us to the discovery of interior silence, clarity, and the indwelling presence of the mystery we call God.

Christianity has a sophisticated tradition of cultivating interior stillness and peace that leads to the silent depths of the heart. This interior stillness facilitates the deepening of personal identity and ultimately the overcoming of the sense of alienation from God and others.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4990 THM: STEWARDSHIP & THE BIBLE

T/TH 1:00-2:15PM (Dan Griffin)

T/TH 2:30-3:45PM

In the opening chapters of *On Christian Teaching* (I.1-5), Augustine argues that everything that exists can be divided into two groups: things to be used and things to be enjoyed. “To enjoy a thing,” he proposes, “is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake” (I.4). “With satisfaction” is a critical qualification. We desire and pursue many things that do not satisfy. To settle for what fails to satisfy is a form of despair. People struggling against despair desperately search for something to pacify their voracious appetites and end up fleeing from one idol to the next since none can save them. Hence our restless hearts. Augustine insists only one thing we can truly enjoy- one thing we are able to rest in with satisfaction. The true objects of enjoyment then are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Everything and everyone else is to be desired according to its usefulness for enjoying of God. However, many important questions about the use and enjoyment of a thing or person remain open. How are we to use the resources of the earth? Are we meant to dominate the earth or be stewards?

This course will focus on what the Bible teaches us on sustainability in relation to the created world especially the place and role of humans. Another part of this course will examine practical environmental issues around sustainability, such as the human root of

the ecological crisis, actors in global environmental governance, and environmental governance ideas.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4990 THE MYSTICAL TURN

MW 4:45-6:00PM (Byron Wratee)

This course examines the mystical turn in Christian spirituality and theology. It focuses on how mystical experience and theology shapes both personal and social transformation. Through close readings of primary texts and contemporary scholarship, students will explore how mysticism grounds theologies and practices of resistance, healing, and hope. Some key figures include Howard Thurman, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross, among others.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4990 THM: Women, Faith and Friendship

W 6:15-8:55PM (Jennifer Constantine Jackson)

From popular culture to rigorous interdisciplinary scholarship, contemporary life and thought have been truly enriched by retrievals of ancient and medieval understandings of friendship, as well as by revisionings of friendship in our commitments to peace, justice and meaning in our world today. In this course, we will examine friendship as the basis for a profoundly relational spirituality integrating questions of the self, the environment, communities, and the divine. Beginning with a study of its philosophical and theological foundations expanding across pedagogical, moral/ethical, social/civic, creative/aesthetic, and religious/spiritual boundaries, we will consider whether friendship may be understood as a *way of life*, a spirituality that informs every aspect of existence.

Attributes: Core Theology, Peace & Justice, Gender & Womens studies

THL 4990 THM: Sports & Spirituality

T/TH 8:30-9:45AM (Edward Hastings)

This course will explore the many ways sports can help us become more whole persons and link us more closely with God. By reflecting, reading and discussing students will discover the connections between mind, body and spirit that are inherent in sports. The class will use movies, videos, and guest speakers to help us explore these themes and topics.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5003 THM: HISPANICS IN THE US CATHOLIC CHURCH

MW 8:00-9:15AM (Ruth Bolarte)

This course explores a theology rooted in the everyday, communal, and liberating faith experiences of Hispanic communities in the United States. Grounded in pastoral realities, Hispanic theology emphasizes reflection that remains close to the lived experiences of the people of God. Through theological inquiry, students examine the dynamic relationship between culture and faith. The course also engages with key church documents that guide

effective ministry within culturally diverse communities. Collaborative dialogue and group work are essential components of the learning process.

Attributes: Core Theology, Latin American Studies

THL 5003 THM: ANGELS AND DEMONS

MW 3:20-4:35PM (Fr. Francis Caponi)

Until the modern era, the real existence of angels and demons was widely taken for granted. They were regarded neither as symbolic expressions of the human psyche nor as literary devices, but as personal subjects who routinely acted in human history. In our own time, things are not so straightforward. True, angels are invoked at Mass and explored in theology; but they are also featured in movies and on television – often in ways that bear little resemblance to their Biblical and traditional portraits. In the pages of Scripture they rise up, fierce and fearsome, the sound of their wings beating “like the voice of God Almighty speaking” (Ezekiel 10:5). Yet, in religious art, they appear as tame, baby-faced cherubs. Demons, too, are found in revelation, where they are rebuked, silenced, and exorcized by Jesus Christ and his disciples; but in literature and entertainment, they have morphed into brooding, misunderstood misfits and humorous, likeable rogues.

With an emphasis on Scripture, the Magisterium of the Church, and the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, this course will follow the historical unfolding of Christian thought on angels and demons: their places in creation, their roles in salvation history, and their unique nature as purely spiritual intellects. Among our key questions are: What influence have other cultures had on Jewish and Christian thinking? What connections are there between angelology and demonology and Catholic reflection on grace, sin, revelation, the sacraments, and the final things? Can modern people raised with the scientific method, philosophical materialism, and a historical-critical approach to Scripture believe in angels and demons?

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5003 THM: LIBERATION THEOLOGY

T/TH 8:30-9:45AM (Fr. Art Purcaro)

This course will introduce students to Latin American Liberation Theology, one of the most profound contemporary theological movements in the Church. Liberation Theology emerged out of the concrete struggle in Peru to overcome poverty, oppression and repression. We will examine the biblical and ecclesial roots of liberation theology, its “unconventional” theological methodology, the powerful insights of Gustavo Gutierrez and some other of its theologians and religious leaders, its relationship with Augustinian spirituality and charism, its impact, the price paid for prophetic witness, the controversy that surrounds it, and its ongoing challenge to theology today, to the Church and its institutions, and to a global society plagued by growing inequality.

Attributes: Core Theology, Peace & Justice

THL 5003 THM: THOMAS MERTON AS A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

T/TH 11:30-12:45PM (Edward Hastings)

Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk and also a leader in the spiritual revival of the Christian, Catholic church. This seminar will consider his significant contributions and teachings in the rich history of spirituality. It will also help participants reflect upon what Merton considered key ingredients of a meaningful, purposeful life.

Some of the topics we will focus upon will be prayer, contemplation, silence, suffering, self-knowledge, vulnerability, wonder and social justice. Through the guidance and writings of Merton we will allow him to guide us in our spiritual journey. If allowed, his story will act as a map and move us toward deeper transformation. Meditation, journaling, reflection, focusing/attention and “nature bathing” will help us to travel well along this way.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5004 THM: PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK

T/TH 4:00-5:15PM (Tim Brunk)

In its mission statement, Villanova University commits itself to “concern for the common good” and a “vigorous and respectful pursuit of truth and wisdom in every area of humanity.” The mission statement further emphasizes the importance of “service experiences” and “compassion for the suffering.” The Department of Theology and Religious Studies in turn commits itself to the pursuit of “a distinctively Augustinian way of knowing and loving God and neighbor that is holistic, integrative, and transformational.” “Pastoral Care of the Sick” is a course being offered in response to these ideals. The course will begin with a treatment of the theological understanding of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, including reading of primary texts on pastoral care from the Roman Catholic Church. The course will continue with a pastoral-theological exploration of the entire range of care provided to the ill and dying. The course will conclude with an examination of the spirituality of caregivers, specifically Christian nurses and other Christian medical professionals. The course thus seeks not only to ground students in the Catholic pastoral / theological tradition of care for those who are ill but also seeks in a special way to prepare pre-med and nursing students at Villanova for the gifts and challenges that await them in their chosen careers.

Materials for this course will include readings and at least one video. The course may also feature guest speakers such as chaplains at area hospitals.

Attributes: Core Theology, Health Humanities Medical Arts, Peace & Justice

THL 5004 THM: THEOLOGY AT THE BOUNDARIES: CAMP AND OTHER NONSENSE

T/TH 6:15-8:55PM (Brandon Ambrosino)

Look over there in Mary Lou’s front yard, just next to the hydrangeas. See that pink flamingo? Camp sees it, too. Only camp knows it’s not a flamingo, but a “flamingo” — the quotation marks signaling that there’s something more going on in that front yard than we originally assumed. As Susan Sontag, patron saint of this course, put it, to camp is to throw the world in quotation marks: “flamingos,” “tiffany lamps,” “theology,” “the cross of Jesus.” When we throw a bit of the world in quotation marks, we refuse to take it ... what’s the word? Oh yes, straight. To approach things in this lighthearted way is, in Sontag’s words, to dethrone the serious, to believe that the serious can and does fail. Which is exactly what Jesus was up to. He had no patience for earthly tyrants, demonic structures, or plain-old

townspeople who took themselves too seriously. What he hoped for was that God's zany, topsy-turvy, no-way-this-is-really-happening kingdom would come — like, right now. In this class, we will follow the lead of Jesus and laugh at The Serious. Not to dismiss it but to dethrone it. With the foolish wisdom of various camp and Jesus traditions as our guide, we will journey to sites of seriousness and pray for the grace to laugh. Our goal will be to take the serious seriously, but to not let it take us.

Camp theology is an exercise in constructive theology: it is experimental, flirty, playful, and unafraid of failure. These are the characteristics that will epitomize the theology we construct together throughout the semester. Camp has sometimes been compared to a dinner party filled with fabulous guests who know how to command a room. A good part of our work together, then, will be getting to know the figures on the guest list. Expect a good amount of reading, a little bit of writing, and far too much nonsense for an upper-level theology course.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5005 THM: ANIMALS and RELIGION

T/TH 2:30-3:45PM (Stefanie Knauss)

What do other-than-human animals have to do with religion? How do religious ideas about animals affect the lives of real animals? What roles do animals play in religious traditions and practices? Are animals spiritual? How can we deepen our understanding of both animals and religion by thinking about them together?

This course will consider examples from various religious traditions around the world, both past and present, of how animals have figured in their theologies, how they are integrated into their practices, and how their worldviews and ethics have shaped and impacted animal life, whether through the domestication, sacrifice, domination, commemoration or contemplation of animals. We will also engage with creative imaginations of animal lives in film and other media, and with research from biology, philosophy and psychology to think about whether animals have emotions, use language, or can be considered persons. We will see that possible answers to these questions affect aspects of religion and shape our relationships to other animals.

The course will include an experiential dimension through the observation of and encounter with animals. In the process of learning more about the scientific and religious study of animals, we will also consider our own relationships with other-than-human animals, how we treat them, and what we can learn from them.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5005 RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

MWF 9:35-10:25AM (Yasmin Akis)

Understanding the modern Middle East requires an appreciation of its diverse religious traditions and the central role religion has played in shaping the region from antiquity to today. This course examines religion as both a historical and contemporary force in Middle Eastern societies, beginning with pre-Islamic traditions such as Zoroastrianism, and moving through the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Students will analyze how religion has influenced conquests, kingdom-building, and empire formation, while also functioning as a cultural and social force that transcends faith boundaries. The course emphasizes religion as a key marker of identity and a factor in inter-communal contact and conflict, exploring themes such as Sunni–Shia divisions, the role of non-Muslim minorities, the rise of Sufi traditions in Anatolia, and the impact of religious practices on daily life. Contemporary issues—including secularism in Turkey, religious politics in Iran, and the challenges faced by Christian and other minority communities—are also considered.

By engaging with sacred texts, historical scholarship, media sources, and case studies, students will develop a nuanced perspective on the complexities of Middle Eastern religious life. Assignments, discussions, and presentations will encourage critical reflection on themes such as Orientalism, stereotypes, and the intersection of religion with ethnicity, politics, and culture.

Attributes: Core Theology, Diversity 1, Diversity 3

THL 5005 WISDOM OF SUFISM

MWF 10:40-11:30AM (Yasmin Akis)

This course offers an introduction to the spiritual and mystical dimensions of Sufism, the Islamic tradition that emphasizes cultivating a direct, personal relationship with God.

Students will explore the foundational beliefs, practices, and traditions of Sufism, with attention to their relevance for personal spiritual development.

Topics include the historical development of Islam and Sufism, central tenets of Sufi theology, the role of the Sufi master (sheikh), and the significance of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), meditation, and *Sama* (the Whirling Dervishes ceremony). The course will also examine key Sufi concepts—love, peace, unity, and surrender—as expressed through poetry, music, and ritual practice. Special emphasis will be placed on Anatolian Sufi orders and their teachings, as well as the adaptation of Sufism across diverse cultural and religious contexts.

Through lectures, readings, discussions, and video presentations of ceremonies, students will be invited to engage in critical study alongside personal reflection. Assignments include written reflections, group presentations, and active class participation. No prior knowledge of Islam or Sufism is required.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5005 AFRICAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

MWF 11:45-12:35PM (Fr. Fidelis Olokunboro)

MWF 12:50-1:40PM

There has been a sustained intellectual discourse on the political agency of Christianity, the politics of Christianity, and the theology of political power in Africa. The intellectual consciousness about these distinct areas of intersection of politics and theology in African public space has informed the three major trajectories of Political Theology in Africa. These areas of intersection either lend themselves toward a tension between political theory and theology or an overlap or cooperation between both. This course is interested in those trajectories, their methods, and their outcomes.

To properly delineate these trajectories, the various forms of intersection between politics and theology, to arrive at/reclaim the true meaning of political theology in Africa against its ambivalent description, this course will tease out the landscape of African Political Theology. By so doing, it will explore areas such as 'secular political theology in Africa,' which focuses on non-theological works that engage the partisanship and political power acquisitive tactics of Christianity in Africa. This course will also examine the scheme of 'divinized politics in Africa,' which deals with the 'theology' of political power, particularly the use of Christian framework to authenticate political power's leviathan disposition and absoluteness of political power. It will also examine the intersection of politics and theology that deals with the social transformative force of Christianity in Africa. This area of intersection, which has three strata is the primary focus of this course. In discussing this area, with its guiding question: "how is the massively Christian continent of Africa, in many ways, a distressed continent?" this course will engage theological works that deal with the difference Christianity should make or makes in the African political landscape. In other words, it will subject the various socio-political stressors in Africa, for example, violence and poverty, and the stories behind them to the critical lens of theology that speaks about God. It will engage theologically the cause of African continent being a mixture of the joy of the gospel, Christian flourishing, and the acute presence of violence and human deprivation.

Attributes: *Africana Studies, Core Theology, Diversity 3*

THL 5005 MAHAYANNA BUDDHISM

MWF 12:50-1:40PM (Stephanie Wong)

This course introduces students to the study of Mahayana Buddhist movements, their development, practices, and doctrines. To begin with, it will foreground the legacy of Orientalism in the study of Asian religions, flagging how categories like "religion," "philosophy," "practice," and "meditation" have shaped the reception of Buddhism in the West and discussing contemporary efforts to de-Orientalize Buddhism. At the same time, it will introduce students to major schools like Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, Pure Land, and Chan/Zen, inviting students to see how these have been lived across regions including India, China, Korea, Japan and Tibet and how they still continue to change today.

Attributes: *Core Theology*

THL 5005 THM: RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS CULTURES

MW 8:00-9:15AM (Fr. Joe Loya)

It is said that a nation is best understood in knowing the geography of the land it inhabits, the history it has experienced and the religion it has embraced (see Nicholas Zernov, *The Russians and Their Church*, Ed. III, pp. 3-4). During the past few decades, the Russian Orthodox Church has sought to heighten its profile and influence, domestically and abroad. ROC faithful and all Russian religionists have come to know themselves as subjected to the same issues and tensions that challenge believers everywhere: they, too, have been preoccupied by the central question of how to live a life of faith in the midst of ever-changing political and social conditions; of how to be at one and the same time loyal citizens and dedicated members of their religious communities; of where to draw the line

between church and state. This course is intended to provide the student with an introduction to the history, mind, spirit and life of Russian Orthodoxy as it has equipped its adherents to thrive in this modern, complex and pluralistic world of ours. Not neglected are studies of other official “traditional” religions of Russia: Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Of importance is the current war in Ukraine: class material will treat historical and religious dimensions of this terrible war.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5150 ISLAM: HISTORY, THOUGHT, AND CULTURE

T/TH 10:00-11:15AM (Shams Inati)

T/TH 2:30-3:45PM

This course examines the nature, history, and development of Islam, including beliefs, rituals, sects, intellectual movements, and political powers, as well as economic conditions and social structures that distinguished, especially in early Islam the poor and slaves who turned to the religion from the aristocrats who strongly opposed it and persecuted the former groups. The commonly misinterpreted Islamic concepts of war and peace will be clarified and the cultural roles, such as those of women will also be touched upon where appropriate. Videos, virtual visits to mosques, and discussions of current events related to the Arab/Islamic world are included.

Attributes: Arab and Islamic Studies, Africana Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies.

Attributes: Core Theology, Arab and Islamic Studies

THL 5400 THM: RELIGION, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN BECOMING

T/TH 4:00-5:15PM (Ilia Delio)

This course explores how science, religion, and technology can collaborate to foster a new religious vision at an elevated level of consciousness. As the age of individualism wanes, computer technology places us on the cusp of human evolution. A new type of person is emerging, accompanied by a new religious consciousness that resonates with trends in transhumanism and posthumanism. Transhumanists envision a future featuring “a seamless skin of electronic mind”—a betterment of humanity toward the superhuman that, in many ways, mirrors the spiritual quest for perfection and union with God. This raises critical questions: Is artificial intelligence evoking a new form of religion, or is it replacing traditional religion altogether? How can technology and religion relate constructively for the good of the earth? In our information age, where technology and human life interact seamlessly, what are we becoming through our technologies? Is our technological evolution beneficial or detrimental to planetary well-being? Where is God in our drive for technological perfection? We will examine the impact of information technology on human personhood through an evolutionary lens, exploring how social media, robotics, and artificial intelligence reshape our understanding of what it means to be human. Our discussions will center on three fundamental questions: What is the human person? What do we hope for as AI develops? What will be religion's role in an AI world?

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5590 SOLIDARITY AND PEACE BUILDING IN CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE

MW 4:45-6:00PM (Gerald Beyer)

Throughout the twentieth century, “Eastern European” connoted “second class” or “uncivilized territory,” as historian Timothy Garton Ash has written. This course will focus attention on two countries in the region that have suffered tremendously in the twentieth century, Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will explore Poland under Communism, the rise of *Solidarność*, its demise after 1989, Poland’s transformation to capitalism and democracy and its recent illiberal turn. We will also examine the case of the Bosnian war and why ethnic and religious groups, especially Bosnian Muslims, were demonized and targeted during the war. We will discuss the ongoing challenges to building peace and solidarity in this historically marginalized and misunderstood part of Europe, “the Balkans,” highlighting the vital contribution of women to the peacebuilding process and considering what forms of solidarity from other nations might be beneficial. During the spring 2025 semester, we will also consider the ongoing war in Ukraine, examining its causes, ethical evaluations of the war and prospects for peace.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5820 SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS

T/TH 10:00-11:15AM (Brett Grainger)

This course explores what it means to identify as “spiritual but not religious” in modern America. Defining “spirituality” is a bit like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. A diffuse and hazy term in popular usage, it has been summoned to capture a range of ideas, feelings, desires, and practices that seem to have little in common: mountain climbing, crystal therapy, meditation, Reiki, yoga, astral projection, vegetarianism, and telepathy, to name but a few. So what does it mean when people call themselves “spiritual,” and why are many so eager to distinguish “spirituality” from “religion”?

We will begin by surveying some of the important historical movements that gradually brought about a fundamental reconfiguration in American religion over the last two centuries—a reconfiguration prominently marked by exalting interior experience, embodied forms of practice, and altered states of consciousness over inherited forms of identity, institutional formation, and abstract doctrine.

Taking an approach that is empathetic *and* critical, we will explore both the sources of spirituality’s appeal and some of its most trenchant critiques. Among the questions we will ask: What is spirituality and what distinguishes it from religion? How does spirituality relate to science and to “secular” forms of identity? How has institutional religion responded to modern spiritual trends? Is spirituality’s amalgamative drive—its ceaseless borrowing across religious traditions—ever separable from the politics of empire and neoliberalism? Are spirituality’s therapeutic regimens salvageable from a culture of narcissism and an economy of unsustainable consumption? Is spirituality the future or the end of American religion?

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5999 MODERN HINDUISMS

T/TH 1:00-2:15PM (Kerry San Chirico)

This course examines the variously connected and variegated religious tradition/s now known as Hinduism as they collided with Western modernity beginning in late 18th century, resulting in continuity but also profound innovation. It seeks to examine how what were increasingly being called “Hindu traditions” were changed in the encounter with Western science, technology, philosophy, religion, and especially colonial power while continually querying, “What is Hinduism?” Through the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, and while learning about Hindu tradition/s even as we interrogate the terms Hindu and Hinduism themselves, we will explore the manifold expressions of contemporary Hindu practices and beliefs *and* the various academic discourses arising out of the encounter and their impact on shaping what we now designate “modern Hinduism/s.” Along the way we will study colonialism and post-colonialism, the genealogy of “world religions,” the Hindu pantheon, Hindu theology and philosophy, ritual life, *bhakti* (devotion), class and caste hierarchies, gender and sexuality, inter-religious encounters, religious hybridity, Hindu nationalism, and diasporic Hinduism.

The content of this course demands that we step out of our own religio-cultural frameworks to consider different ways of being in the world. This has a twofold effect. On the one hand, it allows us the opportunity for sympathetic and critical engagement with ideas, concepts, practices, and perspectives that might be far removed from our own religio-cultural traditions; on the other hand, it provides us with the rare opportunity to turn back and reflect upon our own religio-cultural traditions from a perspective of comparison unto understanding.

Attributes: Core Theology, Diversity 3

THL 6000 THM: POWER DYNAMICS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

MWF 8:30-9:45AM (John Cacchione)

Composed within the century after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the literature of the New Testament constitutes a collection of documents authored by, and addressed to, people typically outside the social, political, military, economic, and religious power structures of their day—members of an upstart offshoot of Judaism, itself a small religion marginalized in the Roman world due to its non-syncretistic monotheism and its adherents’ apparent social aloofness and self-segregation. As such, New Testament-era Christians truly constituted a marginalized minority within a marginalized minority, rendering the widespread dissemination and the survival of their literature a historical marvel which affords a precious glimpse into how, and to what extent, this marginalized minority might reflect—or seek to subvert—reigning religious, cultural, and political power dynamics in their societies. Historically informed attention to the power dynamics within the societies of these New Testament-era Christians can foster in today’s believers deeper appreciation for the radically novel nature of the Christian message and early Christians’ commitment to it. For precisely this purpose, the course, after exploring some orienting introductory material, will address two broad areas.

First, a survey of the historical experience of Palestinian Jews from the time of the Maccabean Revolt through the end of the New Testament era will illuminate applicable structures of political and religious power and influence which contextualized the activity of Jesus of Nazareth and conditioned the religious environment of Jesus’ disciples after

Jesus' execution. Secondly, an examination of the impact of overarching superstructures of Hellenistic culture and imperial Roman political governance on the thought and teaching of Jesus and Jesus' disciples will inform analysis of various Christian reactions to Roman governance in New Testament literature, which was generally written for and by Christians in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), and Greece. This analysis will also incorporate relevant insights from postcolonial theory while eschewing uncritical and anachronistic application of all aspects of postcolonial theory to first-century contexts. Assigned readings from secondary sources will introduce these various topics, and regular and frequent consideration in class of relevant biblical passages (primarily from the New Testament) will illustrate and animate them. Supplementing typical Christian awareness of profoundly holy and exemplary New Testament protagonists with a fuller recognition of their unenviable worldly status in their own day will enrich contemporary believers' understanding of the theological messages of the New Testament and potentially prompt further assessment of how to apply those messages meaningfully in our own time with its own social and cultural challenges and struggles.

Attributes: Core Theology, Diversity 3