

# Spring 2024 Theology Graduate Course Descriptions

*\*Please check the Master Schedule for course day/times*

## MASTER'S LEVEL SEMINARS:

### **THL 8001: Foundations in Bible (Spitaler)**

The course introduces students to research skills that will allow them to participate in the discourse of biblical studies. It is designed to deepen the student's overall understanding of the biblical literature ("biblical literacy"), including the background literature of early Israel, biblical and post-biblical Judaism, and early Christianity. To this end, study in this course provides an orientation to

- biblical studies as a discipline;
- the contexts (literary, cultural, social, political, historical, archaeological, comparative, etc.) of Jewish and Christian canonical scriptures;
- the methods of modern critical study of the bible with a particular focus on those that isolate cultural data;
- the living tradition of the reception of biblical themes/texts;
- and faith/culture and heart/mind dialogues as they advance biblical theology.

Whereas the course focuses on the world(s) in which the biblical corpus was produced, the basis for course work will be select primary texts that are especially suited for demonstrating the benefits of methodologically responsible exegesis for a proper understanding of the biblical tradition. Some of the topics covered in this class are: the nature of the discipline of biblical studies, nature of biblical revelation, inspiration of scripture, authority of scripture, biblical theology, canon development, reception history, basic questions and methodologies in biblical studies, principles of interpretation, interdisciplinarity, and cross-cultural approaches.

*Area: Biblical Interpretation*

### **THL 8004: Foundations in Christian Ethics (Lloyd)**

The course introduces students to basic issues and debates in the academic study of Christian ethics. By engaging with contemporary trends and scholarly works as well as classic texts, students will explore a variety of approaches and issues to Christian ethics. Ranging from issues such as the climate crisis to histories of racism, from parenthood to poverty, the course samples leading scholarship being written on Christian ethics today.

*Area: Christian Ethics*

## **THL 8101: Vanishing God of the Bible (Walsh)**

Biblical theology employs ideas from all portions of the canon to address contemporary religious issues. This course in biblical theology examines the problem of knowing an invisible God. With the Modern Age, the apparent absence or indifference of God is accepted on a large scale, with secularism and atheism competing with faith. Religion has been variously understood to be an opiate, (Marx), a defense mechanism or crutch (Freud), or a disguise of weakness (Nietzsche). More recent “New Atheisms” blame faith for the violence in the world. Faith in God is no longer a given but is a choice among others in the modern context. Yet, in biblical times and for much of Western history, people did believe in God’s invisible presence and drew strength from their beliefs. Invisibility did not mean absence: it allowed for presence and mystery and the supernatural. One thesis of the course is that the bias of scientific empiricism has discarded these spiritual aspects as mere superstition. Yet, the biblical people did not see God any more than we moderns do. Instead, they made room for the holy invisible and learned to relate to him.

God appears in a variety of manifestations in the Bible, in theophanies that make divine presence real, but unseen. When he is finally seen in the person of his Son, Jesus in the New Testament, still it is for a brief span of a few years. The rest of the New Testament is then also speaking of a presence that is not seen. It is the goal of the course to discover what the Bible can teach modernity about discerning the holy as part of reality, of seeing life as more than what is empirically evident. It honors the challenges of atheism and returns to the Book with those challenges in mind. It is therefore a course where students can feel free to ask honest, hard questions about faith and doubt without fear.

*Area: Biblical Interpretation*

## **THL 8105: Ancient Christianity and the Gospel of John (Yates)**

Although written using relatively straightforward vocabulary and syntax, the Gospel of John is arguably the most theologically complex of the four canonical Gospels. (Should that claim seem dubious, you are encouraged to re-read John 1:1-18 and/or to re-consider the profundity of John’s Christology.) It is also true that, despite being the last of the four Gospels to be completed, the Gospel of John also has one of the most—if not the most—complex reception histories of any of the books of the New Testament.

This course will offer an introduction to the earliest reception history of the Gospel of John. It will focus on the period from the text’s production in ca. 100 CE through the lifetimes of Augustine of Hippo and Cyril of Alexandria, church leaders who died in 430 and 444 CE respectively. Along the way, we will also study particular aspects of the role played by *John* in the thinking and theology of (some) Gnostics, Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, the Council of Nicaea, and John Chrysostom. Prior to delving into the text’s reception, this course will also include a review of John’s canonical form, (some of) its textual distinctives, and an overview of Johannine theology. This course’s overarching goals will be (1) to provide (some of) the tools and methods necessary for deeper explorations of the reception history of any biblical book; and (2) to enable the making of basic comparisons between the methods and theological conclusions of, on the one hand, modern and post-modern readers of John and, and, on the other, some of the most lauded exegetes of the ancient Christian world.

*Area: Biblical Interpretation*

## **THL 8290: Postcolonial/Decolonial Theories & Theology (Joseph)**

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner famously stated that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the first time that the Catholic Church became conscious of itself as a world church. What does it mean, however, for this global consciousness to coincide with the movements for independence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America? This course will explore coloniality and its aftermath through the lens of both postcolonial and decolonial theory as it emerged on different continents. It will also investigate why biblical studies was the first of the theological disciplines to adopt postcolonial theory in its study of empire in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Finally, this course will explore how theologians place the complexities of coloniality in dialogue with systematic loci like theology, Christology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology/ministry, and soteriology/eschatology.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology, Religion*

## **THL 8350: THM: Catholic Social Thought (Beyer)**

This course explores the historical origins and development of modern Catholic social thought, with particular attention to Catholic social teaching in the late 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, we read many of the major social encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII through Pope Francis. We also engage the work of past and contemporary scholars and writers who helped create the Catholic social tradition, address social issues within this framework, and/or wish to expand and improve it to construct a more just social order.

*Area: Christian Ethics, MMT*

## **THL 8390: Christian Environmental Ethics (Graham)**

This is a course in Christian environmental ethics, focusing on contemporary Christian environmental ethics. Part of this course examines the foundational theological elements of Christian environmental ethics through the work of seminal thinkers and/or religious leaders. Another part of this course examines practical environmental issues such as food and agriculture, biodiversity, global warming, children and pollution, automobile use, etc.

Course requirements: regular attendance; regular class participation; a mid-term and final exam; and at least two substantive in-class presentations.

*Area: Christian Ethics*

## **THL 8445: US Catholicism: Historical and Contemporary Issues (Faggioli)**

This course will examine the role of the Catholic Church in the political history of the United States. After a brief introduction on the diversity of roots in American Catholicism, the course will focus on the history of this community from the minority, immigrant Church of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Catholic Church in the USA as the single, largest Church in the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The social and political views of Catholics in their relationship with the Protestant majority will be the primary focus, with special attention to the issues of democracy, freedom, and race. In the semester during the 2024 presidential campaign and election and with close attention to current developments, students will acquire knowledge on the development of the role of Catholicism in the changing social

landscape of United States, with a particular emphasis on the social and political engagement of Catholics in the USA in the period between the Civil War, the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century “culture wars”, and today.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

### **THL 8530: Spirituality of Caregivers (Collura)**

What are the spiritual depths, motivations, needs, and vulnerabilities that are touched in us when we engage in relationships of care? Where do we locate our personal boundaries between self-giving and self-care? Do we know how to attend to our personal shadow side in living out a public role as a professional caregiver? Are we aware of the communal, political, and ecological contexts of our caregiving? In exploring such questions as these, this course will introduce students to theological resources that can contribute to their own spirituality of care. Readings will focus on classic and contemporary Christian theological texts, methods, and models as well as multi-disciplinary scholarship and practices. This is a discussion-based course characterized by inquiry-based learning pedagogies and opportunities for personal reflection.

*Area: Christian Spirituality, MMT*

### **THL 8701: Theological Pedagogy (Hanchin)**

This seminar initiates the Heart of Teaching for PhD students. It is designed to help students identify theological and philosophical sources for teaching theology and religious studies; analyze educational approaches; imagine and communicate their approaches to teaching; and practice skills in planning lessons and designing syllabi. The seminar emphasizes Villanova’s Christian mission and Augustinian charism in conversation with contemporary learning theory and seeks to build a mutually supportive learning community. MTs students in the Education Track and MA students in Religious/Theological Education Concentration are also required to take THL 8701.

*Area: Heart of Teaching*

### **THL 8703: Teaching Practicum (Hanchin)**

This Teaching Practicum represents the supervised teaching experience in The Heart of Teaching program. In the Heart of Teaching sequence, it follows (1) Theological Pedagogy, in which students develop a teaching philosophy, and (2) the Teaching Apprenticeship in which students assist a professor in their teaching duties. During Teaching Practicum, students teach their own THL 1000 section with the support and encouragement of the Heart of Teaching faculty and a cohort of other supervised instructors.

*Area: Heart of Teaching*

### **THL 8710: Educating for Mission (Hanchin)**

Historically, Catholic institutions such as schools and hospitals face an identity and leadership crisis in our time. The distinct mission of these institutions was previously assumed by a critical mass of ordained and vowed religious. In Catholic higher education, the emergence of lay leadership demands a new vision and strategies commensurate with the challenges of our time. The commodification of education, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the crisis of conversation indelibly inform the context of higher education today. This course examines animating philosophies, pedagogies, and leadership practices that enable Christian education to flourish in our time. By recognizing the student’s

ministerial praxis as a *locus theologicus*, this course privileges the method of practical theology. While the investigation focuses on Catholic higher education, the implications for educational leadership in other mission-based contexts, including secondary education, parish ministry, and healthcare, will also be considered.

*Area: MMT*

## **THL 8802: Lay Ecclesial Ministry (Edwards)**

Lay ecclesial ministry is not something new within the Christian church; it was evident from the very beginnings of Christianity. Jesus sent his followers to announce that the Reign of God is at hand. In order to understand the contemporary manifestation of “lay ecclesial ministry” within the Christian church, it is necessary to note the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of Christian ministry.

Particular attention will be given to the context and impact of the US Catholic Bishop’s document “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord” as a groundbreaking statement of the role of laity in the Catholic Church. This impact includes the rise of national lay ministry associations and the creation of certification standards for lay ministers. The final section of the course will focus on discerning what collaborative ministry might look like today among lay, ordained, and episcopal ministers, with special focus on Pope Francis’ recent efforts at fostering a synodal church.

*Area: MMT*

## **THL 8882: Ministry Field Education Supervision (Calderone)**

Supervision, theological reflection, and evaluation are necessary components of an effective pastoral program. Although theological reflection can help the development of pastoral skills, its primary purpose is to interpret pastoral experience or activity in light of Scripture, tradition, personal faith, and pastoral practices. Reflection of this kind should become a lifelong habit in ministry.

Theological reflection is a conscious reflection on life experience in ministry, accomplished in the light of one’s faith and theological tradition, and respectful of the thoughts and emotions evoked by the event both in the minister in those to whom they minister. The purpose of the reflection/supervision experience is to assist the student minister in integrating and interiorizing these elements of the experience of ministry.

*Area: MMT*

## **THL 8884: Ministry Field Education Supervision (Mell)**

Field Education is a central piece of the learning experience in the MMT program. It offers an opportunity for students to deepen their discernment about God’s call toward a vocation of professional ministry and prepares students for ministerial roles in Christian and other faith or secular communities. The Ministry Field Education Supervision course ensures that students engage in Field Education placements that provide formational experience, honing their ministerial skills and their awareness of their place and service within ministerial relationships and presence. It offers a space for the development of and reflection on the skills needed for their ministry. Students reflect on the role and meaning of ministry and how their learning in Field Education relates to the rest of their academic studies, personal and communal development, spiritual growth, and vocation.

*Area: MMT*

## **THL 8940: Integrative Portfolio (Jackson)**

### **DOCTORAL LEVEL SEMINARS:**

#### **THL 8260: The Trinity in an Entangled World (Delio)**

One of the most significant discoveries of modern science is the deep interconnectedness of life. The physical world is deeply relational and reflects a relational God. The Trinity is a fundamental doctrine of God's self-communicative love. What does it mean to say that God is Trinity? Why is Trinity fundamental to a Christian understanding of God? How can a renewed understanding of the Trinity contribute to the vitalization of life in a world of science and technology? This course will examine the Trinity from its patristic and medieval roots into contemporary reformulations of Trinitarian thought to examine the depth and breadth of trinitarian life. Attention will be given to the renewal of the Trinity in the twentieth century in the works of Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann and Raimon Panikkar. Drawing on recent scientific and philosophical work in "quantum entanglement," this will offer a three-fold contribution to contemporary theological and religious discourse by deepening the understanding of the Trinity in light of process reality and consciousness. First, it calls attention to the convergence of recent theology around the idea of "relationality." Second, it introduces quantum entanglement as a new metaphor for trinitarian life. Third, it offers an alternative to kenotic accounts of God's suffering presence in the world by examining the notion of pleromization. Finally, the Trinity in evolution opens up discussion on the idea of quaternity and the significance of Christian life as emerging trinitarian life.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

#### **THL 9400: Augustine & Augustinianism(s) (Hughes)**

Together we will explore major questions such as: What is Augustine's theological vision? What does it mean to be an heir of Augustine's legacy, to be "Augustinian"? Why is this legacy so fiercely debated? Why is the whole notion of "Augustinianism" difficult to define? What is the ongoing contribution of Augustinianism in the present moment?

The first concern in our course will be to deepen our knowledge of Augustine's life and thought, paying particular attention to teachings and dimensions of thought (sin, grace, predestination/election, creation) that have made him the single most influential post-biblical theologian in the history of Western Christianity.

The second concern in our course will sample the ways in which the figure and the teaching of Augustine has been invoked, embraced, vilified in the centuries after his death. How (and by whom) is the figure of Augustine passed on? How does (and what parts of) his work survive? What do people read of Augustine's works? We will turn to select primary sources from Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and Early Modernity, and the Modern and Postmodern era. We will at least begin to speculate about the possible futures of "Augustinianism".

*Core curriculum*

## **THL 9415: Modern Christianity in History (San Chirico)**

This course explores major themes and events in the history of Christianity/ies from the age of European expansion in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is now widely accepted that the geographical locus of Christianity has shifted to the global South and East, but it is less understood how that shift occurred. So in this course we track the cross-cultural expansion of Christianity in the “modern period”; we trace the genealogy of “modern” and “modernity” as we explore its contours, including how these very concepts were formed in relation; and we examine instantiations of Christianity throughout the globe by reading selective portions of primary and critical secondary source material.

Good theological work, whether academic theological work in systematics, spirituality, ethics, or Bible, or practical work in ministry, teaching, and service, must be historically conscious. To be “historically conscious” is to know, at least in some measure, “whence we come and whither we are going.” Christianity does not materialize out of a vacuum, and presentist forms of Christianity (“me and the Bible,” or “do justice now,” or whatever the variety) tend to smuggle in conscious or unconscious historical assumptions that can narrow our vision and limit our capacity for humility and self-criticism. Studying various forms of World Christianity/ies and their development, even if we prioritize the West in some measure, promises to parochialize the forms of the faith we take for granted while exposing new vantages of exploration and possibility. Historical consciousness is never simply about the past; it is always about truthfulness, humility, and identity—past, present, and future. Topics for exploration include mission, colonialism, inculturation, reform movements and the Reformation(s), ecclesial pluralism, religion and violence, Christianity in the Enlightenment, the challenge of modern atheism, and the “crisis of modernity.”

The format of the course will be seminar discussion, with introductory lectures used only as necessary to frame the discussion. Students will become familiar with major turning points in the modern history of Christianity and gain facility in discerning and discussing the key issues at stake, with an eye to the present situation of the Church and the world.

**Note: this course is also open for Master’s students**

*Area: History, Core curriculum*

## **THL 9500: Moral, Agency, and Freedom (McDonald Kennedy)**

This course engages theological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives that explore human freedom and moral agency. Reviewing postconciliar debates regarding the relationship between individual freedom and social sin, differing accounts of the conscience and conscience formation, and disagreements about the role of the Church in supporting moral agents, this course will examine how foundational and contemporary thinkers in the Catholic tradition have grappled with the complexities of human freedom and finitude. The course will engage recent scholarship that connects questions of moral agency to trauma theory, disability studies, critical realist sociology, and moral psychology to explore internal and external constraints—including internalized cultural biases and structural barriers related to ongoing social inequalities—that threaten human freedom and human flourishing.

*Area: Christian Ethics*

## **THL 9500: The Polemical Kierkegaard: Technology, Politics, and the Church (Barnett)**

Søren Kierkegaard is well known for a number of reasons, whether his concept of the "spheres of existence," his opposition to the "systems" of modern philosophy, his spiritual treatments of the theme of *imitatio Christi*, or even his tragic relationship with fiancée Regine Olsen. With such a wealth of interesting subjects, it is no wonder that Kierkegaard's "attack upon Christendom" often gets overlooked. This course, however, will view Kierkegaard's polemics as an essential part of his intellectual production. Three overarching topics will be examined: (i) Kierkegaard's critique of technology and of the media, (ii) Kierkegaard's opposition to the state, and (iii) Kierkegaard's criticism of the church's collusion with politics. Readings will come from lesser-known, but still essential, works such as *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Moment* (1855), and the posthumously published treatises "The Single Individual" and "Armed Neutrality."

*Area: Christian Spirituality*

## **THL 9510: THM: Prayed Theology of Eastern Church (Laird)**

For more centuries than one would like to admit theology has suffered from a tendency to splinter. With respect to theology and spirituality, for example, we see the one being done along one side of the corridor and the other sprinkled along the other side of the corridor where it quietly does its separate thing. Such a distinction was simply not operative in the first 1400 or so years of Christianity and especially not in the Eastern Church. For example, the great Origen sees the unity of scriptural exegesis and spiritual maturation. St. Gregory of Nazianzen points out to a group of neo-Arian thugs, that their theology is so misguided because they do not have silent minds. This seminar will focus on intrinsic, formative unity of spirituality and theology, the "prayed theology" of the Eastern Church. To this end we shall focus on, among others, Origen of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius of Pontus, as well as select theologians gathered together in the *Philokalia*.

*Area: Christian Spirituality*

## **THL 9610: Comparative Theology of Salvation (Wong)**

This doctoral seminar considers salvation in comparative perspective, contrasting a range of Christian soteriological accounts with possible analogues in Muslim, Daoist, Hindu and Buddhist thought. On the one hand, the course will immerse students in Christian soteriology. Students will read signature examples of Christian accounts of justification, atonement, predestination, theosis, sacramental participation, universal reconciliation, socio-spiritual liberation, and more. At the same time, the course will consider alternative salvific visions in non-Christian traditions, such as Muslim ideals of deliverance and divine success, Daoist optimism about immortality and divinization, Buddhist invitations to awakening and compassionate bliss, and Hindu calls for liberative release and action. In addition to selected article-length sources, key course texts will include the anthologies Holcomb, S. (Ed), *Christian Theologies of Salvation* (2017), Cornille, C. (Ed) *Atonement and Comparative Theology* (2021), and book-length arguments like Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom* (2010), Ilia Delio *Making All Things New* (2015), and Samuel, J, *Untouchable Bodies, Resistance and Liberation: A Comparative Theology of Divine Possessions* (2021).

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*



**THL 9900: Dissertation Writing (Knauss)**

**THL 9910: Synthesis Portfolio (Knauss)**

**THL 9911: Evaluation Portfolio (Knauss)**

**THL 9920: Proposal Colloquium (Knauss)**

**THL 9930: Dissertation Colloquium (Knauss)**