

# Spring 2025 Theology

## Undergraduate Course

### Descriptions

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

#### **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Hastings)**

**M/W/F 8:30-9:20am, 10:40-11:30am**

This course will examine the ways in which experience, faith and culture intersect. Utilizing the searching mode of St. Augustine and the questioning methodology of St. Anselm, we will approach the Catholic Christian faith tradition with an attitude of “faith seeking understanding.” From these viewpoints we will consider what is meant by the notion of God and consider if this notion and faith in general has any relevance for today.

#### **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Caponi)**

**M/W/F 9:35-10:25am & 10:40-11:30am**

For 2,000 years, Christians have thought long and hard about all the truly big questions: Does God exist? Does He speak to us? How does He want us to live? What does it take to be happy? How should we interpret the Bible? Are science and religion in agreement or opposition? Why do bad things happen to good people? What happens after death? Who can be saved? This course examines the fundamentals of Christian belief and practice, with particular emphasis on the “fullness of faith” proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church. Through the exploration of primary texts, central ideas, and the historical development of Catholic theology, students will be challenged to think deeply about the person and mission, the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; the revelation of the Triune God; the nature and interpretation of the Bible; the contours of sacramental worship and prayer, along with the moral life which arises from them; and the relationship between faith and science. Spirited class discussion, the development of a common theological vocabulary, and disciplined reflection upon the relationship of Catholic belief and behavior with the arts and sciences, the issues of the day, and the students’ personal experience, will be key elements in our exploration of the distinctively Catholic answers to the big questions.

#### **THL 1000: Global Religious Experience (Akis)**

**M/W/F 9:35-10:25am & 10:40-11:30am**

The study of religion is the study of a rich and fascinating dimensions of human experience that includes but goes well beyond beliefs and ritual practices. In this dynamic course, students will engage with compelling case studies that illuminate the internal diversity within religious traditions, tracing their evolution across time and space. From ancient civilizations to contemporary societies, we investigate how religions intricately interweave with every facet of human life. With a focus on both Christian and non-

Christian traditions, participants will immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of religious practices, beliefs, and cultural phenomena.

### **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Tumanan)**

**M/W/F 9:35-10:25am**

God, Conflict, and Peacebuilding -This course seeks to critically examine the intricate dynamics through which religious ideologies and theological discourses can both incite violence and simultaneously serve as potent catalysts for peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, it will interrogate the proposition that secularization offers a viable alternative for fostering sustainable peace, a claim frequently asserted in contemporary discourse. By the conclusion of the semester, students will have gained a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of conflicts involving religious elements, as well as the broader sociopolitical and historical contexts that shape these phenomena.

### **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Cacchione)**

**M/W/F 8:30-9:20am & 11:45-12:35pm**

This course seeks primarily to provide students with grounding in the rational foundations of the Catholic faith. After defining “theology” and exploring why and how theology properly rounds out a broad-based university education, the course will analyze the operation of human reason. This will serve to introduce an exposition of “natural theology.” Natural theology seeks to rely solely on human reason to demonstrate God’s existence and to probe God’s divine attributes. Along the way, topics such as the relation of science and religion, the nature and functions of the human soul as the constitutive reality defining human existence, and the way believers can make sense of the existence of evil will enter into this investigation. Natural theology, however, has its limits. To learn more about God than what natural theology can elucidate, one must turn to God’s own self-revelation. The Catholic faith recognizes Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as the fonts of God’s self-revelation. Following a brief examination of critical aspects of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the course will turn to “revealed theology,” with specific attention to the rational examination of the fundamental teachings of Christianity collected in the Nicene Creed. These include Trinitarian theology (the unique Christian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); Christology (with a focus on the person of Jesus Christ and on the salvific action of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection from the dead); Eschatology (with an emphasis on the “four last things” of death, judgment, heaven, and hell); and Ecclesiology (the branch of theology related to how the Church understands its own nature, purpose, and mission in the world).

### **THL 1000: Global Religious Experience (TBD)**

**M/W/F 11:45-12:35pm & 12:50-1:40pm**

### **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Bowers)**

**M/W/F 12:50-1:40pm**

This course introduces undergraduate students in the biblical and historic sources, traditions, practices, and major patristic thinkers that have conceptualize Christianity’s evolvement in history and shaped mankind’s civilization, and trying to give answers to the fundamental human questions that underlie religion and contour human search for existence. During this course important issues will be discussed about the presence and function of religion in the modern society that has shaped our cultural heritage, the problems of religious epistemology, theodicy, the relationship of religious faith to the moral life, the

relationships between religion and culture, and the validity of religious claims in the face of intractable religious diversity. Prof. Robert Louis Wilken in his book *The Spirit of the Christian Thought* says, "The Christian religion is inescapable ritualistic... uncompromisingly moral... and unapologetically intellectual. Like all the major religions of the world, Christianity is more than a set of devotional practices and a moral code: it is also a way of thinking about God, about human beings, about the world's history."

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Olokunboro)**

**M/W/F 11:45-12:30pm & 12:50-1:40pm**

The geometric increase in African Christian population is making the continent the new center of Christianity. It would seem that global Christianity is in the phase of a new "Christendom" facilitated by Africans, in Africa, and as such, making African Christianities a phenomenon of religious and scholarly interest.

The concept, African Christianities, is not neutral. Its specific origin remains debatable among scholars. For some, it emerged around the 3rd-4th century, when Christian scholarship was evolving and facilitated by some North African Church fathers like Tertullian, Cyprian, Lanctantius, Cyprian, and Augustine of Hippo. For others, African Christianities emerged around the 15<sup>th</sup>/16th century and coincided with or facilitated by European exploration and colonialism in Africa. Also, the concept accommodates a narrative that Christianity is culturally neutral. It contests the universality/relevance of those Christian cultural practices that have been practiced for over 1,500 years outside of Africa. It claims that the legitimacy of African Christianities depends on its distinctive/contextual nature and its attention to African cultural realities.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Bolarte)**

**M/W 8:00-9:15am & 1:55-3:10pm**

This foundational course offers students opportunities to describe and interpret the living traditions, beliefs, and practices of the Catholic Church and how they interact in our lives. Students are guided through the theological reflection on the diagnosis of current realities and their theological and philosophical underpinnings, as well as the call for personal action

## **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Pagan)**

**M/W 8:00-9:15am**

*Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer is the law of belief. Required by the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this foundational course examines the relationship between thought and action in the production of Christian theology, with a focus on Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. This course has two areas of focus: methods and historical case studies. The first part of the semester introduces the students to introductory concerns, questions, and principles of methods in Christian theology: historical thought, biblical studies, spirituality, constructive theology, and ethics. In the second part of the semester, students will analyze historical moments in which these methods changed the Church in time and synthesize a position on the significance of theological literacy for understanding our contemporary world. Topics of discussion include (but are not limited to): the world and religions of the Gospels, medieval religious material culture, the formation of Trinitarian and Marian doctrine, sacraments, and the contemporary *Laudato 'Si* movement.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Posillico)**

**M/W 1:55-3:10am and 1:55-3:10pm**

"Attachments—to the characters, to the author, to the world the author gives us—are created in the process of reading. What does it look like to relinquish oneself to these attachments, to recognize oneself in a book—it's characters, or the life of its author—to be returned to oneself as strange and different through the unfamiliar terms of a page? In this course, we will entertain these questions, reading five books of Christian History throughout the semester together twice. In our discussions, we will attend to the ways in which the same texts change in light of the new contexts we bring to them. Of particular focus will be places in the readings in which attachments offered to us are ones with God."

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Yates)**

**M/W 3:20-4:35pm**

"Christian" and "Christianity" are ancient and complex terms (cf. Acts 11:25-27). Questions such as "What does it mean to be a Christian?" will undoubtedly receive various responses depending upon to whom and in what context they are asked.

As an integral part of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this foundational Theology course asks you to consider several important aspects of what it means to be a Christian (in terms of faith, reason, and faith-based action, i.e., ethics), even as it also asks you to consider several important ways in which Christians have influenced and have been influenced by the cultures in which they have lived. Likewise, this course asks you to analyze several important beliefs and practices that Christians have accepted, both as they have developed through the past twenty centuries and as they continue to develop in our day. This course will do these things via a selection of primary texts, contemporary social commentary (via various media), required communal "faith and culture" events (which will take place during class time), and focused discussions, many of which will draw directly upon either select Christian thinkers or select critics of Christianity or both.

Specifically, this course will look closely at some of Christianity's attempts to explain itself to itself as well as to both its cultural (i.e., its intellectual, social, and political) skeptics and its overt enemies. This course will also look at some attempts to construct ways of living which regard (traditional) Christianity as irrelevant, outdated, or (intellectually) exhausted. Along the way, this course will model some of the tools necessary for participating in cultural and intellectual debates that directly or indirectly intersect with Christianity's primary claims and/or values.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Varela Rios)**

**M/W 1:55-3:10pm**

As an integral part of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this foundational course introduces students to the rich living tradition of Christianity: the sources, traditions, practices, and major thinkers that have shaped Christianity's response to the fundamental human questions that underlie all religions and shape the human search for meaning. With a particular focus on Roman Catholicism, students engage Christianity as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have developed over time in local and global cultural and religious contexts and that, loyal to the living God to which they point, are ready to be transformed again. Students also engage Christian truth-claims, themes, values, and witness as resources for analyzing and critically evaluating contemporary cultural challenges. In this course, students are equipped to appreciate the ongoing quest of

Christian faith seeking understanding as it enters into conversation with all human knowledge and experience, including other faith traditions.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Kassa)**

**M/W 3:20-4:35pm**

This Foundation course, a cornerstone of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, introduces students to the dynamic tradition of Christianity, which is deeply intertwined with our cultural and historical narratives. It explores the foundational sources (scripture and tradition), practices, lived experiences, and influential thinkers who have shaped Christian responses to fundamental existential questions that motivate religious inquiry and the human quest for meaning. While emphasizing Roman Catholicism, the course engages with Christianity as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have evolved across temporal, global, and religious contexts, making it a relevant and engaging subject for all students.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Grimes)**

**T/TH 11:30-12:45pm**

## **THL 1000: Global Religious Experience (Schrader Polzcer)**

**M/W 3:20-4:35pm**

This course is an introduction to global religions (including Christianity), which will survey these religions' commonalities, differences, and cultural expressions. Students will gain familiarity with "lived religion" in Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Native American, and indigenous African traditions. Students will also learn how to recognize the complexity and diversity of global religious practices and beliefs, as well as to understand people whose values and senses of the sacred differ from their own. By the end of the course, students will be able to critically read, analyze, and interpret diverse texts and material cultures from various religious traditions, present and past.

## **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Faggioli)**

**M/W 1:55-3:10pm**

As an integral part of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this foundational course introduces you to the rich living tradition of Christianity. This course is a theology course with a particular focus on Catholicism, through the exploration of classic texts (Bible, theology, and Church teaching) and modern scholarship. We will examine key ideas of the Jewish Scriptures, the practice of critical reflection on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the contours of Christian faith and morality, and the relationship between the Church and the world. In the course we engage Christianity as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have developed over time in local and global cultural and religious contexts.

The focus on Catholicism is not understood in a confessional and identitarian way, but in relationship with other Christian traditions and other faith traditions and in a multicultural and multi-religious world. This course will ask students to engage truth-claims, themes, values, and witness as resources for analyzing and critically evaluating contemporary cultural challenges in light of knowledge and personal experience.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Schwartz)**

**T/TH 10:00-11:15am**

The animating question of the Faith, Reason, and Culture foundation course is "What do I believe?" In this section of the course, we will critically investigate not only the objects of our belief (the "what") but also, and more fundamentally, the idea of "belief" itself. What *is* belief? What role does belief play in religion? How does belief relate to action (or, in customary Christian language, how does faith relate to works)? To ways and identities of belonging (e.g., community, culture, race)? To embodiment? How does our specific cultural context shape our understandings of these relationships? As it turns out, these questions are (at

least) as old as Christianity itself, with surprisingly diverse answers found already in the Bible. Grounded in the Catholic and Augustinian identities of Villanova, we will consider these questions in three stages. First, we will *identify* our assumptions about belief. What do we actually think about this in the first place? Second, we will *contextualize* our assumptions about belief. How do ideas that we perhaps think of as stable and timeless in fact reflect historical contingency? Third, we will *challenge* our assumptions about belief. What other possible views are presented by different religions, cultures, and philosophies? How do concrete problems raise or demand these alternatives? By investigating these questions, we will gain the tools to think differently and more productively about belief within a Catholic and Augustinian framework.

## **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Murdoch)**

**T/TH 8:30-9:45am and 10:00-11:15am**

This introductory course in Catholic theology is designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the foundational elements of Christian faith. Through an exploration of key theological concepts and doctrines, students will develop theological literacy, enabling them to engage thoughtfully with the rich intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church. The course will cover the following essential topics: Revelation and reason, the proofs for the existence of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, creation and the human person, natural law and grace, Christology, the Church, and the "last things" (eschatology).

## **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Loya)**

**T/TH 2:30-3:45pm & 4:00-5:15pm**

The word "catholic" derives from the Greek term commonly translated as "universal" in the geographical sense; but in original usage it also carries the closely related meanings of "all-embracing" and "integral fullness." This course employs the Anselmian conceptualization of "Theology" as "faith seeking understanding" in a disciplined manner ordered towards the following:

Understanding the fullness and integrity central convictions Catholic conceptualization of God, human existence and the world, plus the discernment of the relevance of Catholic theology for one's own life, values and worldview.

Identifying and critically discussing key persons, themes, and events in the foundational Bible texts and Catholicism through history, the origins of Christianity within Judaism included.

Providing an informed account of the development and meaning of central Catholic beliefs and ritualized worship forms.

Understanding Catholicism's ecumenical relationships and engagements with the other two Christian Traditions - Eastern Orthodoxy and Reformation Protestantism.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Smith)**

**T/TH 1:00-2:15pm**

## **THL 1000: Global Religious Studies (San Chirico)**

**T/TH 10:00-11:15am**

This course is an introduction to the scholarly study of religion and theology. It is offered as part of the Department's "Global Religious Experience" track, which endeavors to offer broad-based religious literacy to Villanova students, in addition to placing them in a prime position to understand and appreciate a variety of religious traditions as they interact in our globalized context.

In the study of religion, we are not concerned with discovering the “right” beliefs or “true” religion but with understanding how human beings have engaged religious traditions—practices and beliefs—to construct identity and make meaning in their lives. Through your close engagement with the course materials and thoughtful participation in weekly discussions, you will become acquainted with some of the foundational tools that scholars employ to understand the complex realities of “lived religion” in contemporary America. You will also be exposed to some of the rich diversity of modern forms of religious expression, including various forms of Christianity. Whether you are an atheist, an agnostic, or a believer (or somewhere in between you are most welcome).

We begin by addressing some “big picture” questions (What is religion? How do scholars study it?), followed by a multidimensional exploration of the religious dimensions of human experience, organized in seven themes: spirituality, embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgment, and narrative. Throughout the semester, Christianity will be put in conversation with other religious traditions. Though our approach will be scholarly and critical, I expect that over the course of semester we will encounter ideas and perspectives that may challenge or deepen aspects of your own inherited or adopted traditions and illumine your experience of religious and cultural life in the 21st century.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Robinson)**

**T/TH 2:30-3:45pm**

This section of THL 1000 is part of the *Faith, Reason, and Culture* track. It is distinctive in that we will follow the theme of *love* in order to explore how our understandings of love impact our relationship to faith, our ways of knowing, and the ongoing creation of culture and the human experience. Love informs how we create and interact with material culture, experience relationships, and interpret suffering. Life and culture could not exist without love as its well-spring, but what is love and what does it mean that love is the origin, critic, and redeemer of culture? What does it mean that Jesus Christ proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)? How does the Christian understanding of love help us to understand faith in love as a particular *way of life, way of knowing, and of living*? In order to engage with these questions, you will be invited to reflect on your own definitions of love, where those understandings have come from, and how those understandings have informed the development and enactment of your values and commitments. Since none of us live outside of our particular cultural contexts, you will be invited to investigate and consider how the presence of lived religion/spiritualities are revealed through various structures and processes in different spheres of U.S. culture. You will analyze how economic, political, technological, religious, and forms of artistic culture (e.g., music, film, and visual art) function as value-laden formational structures and processes that give rise to certain relational dynamics and ethical values, while obfuscating others. Along the way, you will explore the complex and consequential lasting effects of these relational dynamics on the lives and well-being of individuals, families, communities, nations, the global community, and all of creation.

## **THL 1000: Global Religious Studies (Knauss)**

**T/TH 2:30-3:45pm**

As an integral part of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this Foundation course involves students of every religion, culture, and worldview in examining the Augustinian vision of “understanding what we believe” (On Free Choice of the Will 1.4). Students investigate Christian and non-Christian religious practices, beliefs, and traditions that have developed over time in diverse cultural and religious contexts as they explore faith, reason, and culture in their many, textured relationships.

The course may examine Catholicism theologically, historically, and culturally (Catholic Studies track); explore Christian theological traditions in their cultural contexts (Faith, Reason, and Culture track); or survey religiosity in general and global religions, including Christianity, in particular as well as their commonalities, differences, and cultural expressions (Global Religious Experience track).

With these foci, the course introduces students to the sources and major thinkers that have shaped responses to the fundamental human questions that underlie all religions and shape the human search for meaning. Students engage religious truth claims, themes, values, and witness as resources for analyzing and critically evaluating contemporary cultural challenges.

This section is situated in the Global Religious Experience track. We will encounter and analyze the religious experiences of people and cultures across the globe as they are expressed in films, and use these films as starting points for a broader discussion of the respective religious traditions, their historical developments, contemporary forms, and interactions with other traditions. The course will be seminar-style, and careful preparation of films and readings before class is expected to ensure substantial discussions during the class sessions.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Delio)**

**T/TH 4:00-5:15pm**

This course builds on the root meaning of “catholicity” as wholeness and explores key religious themes, writings, values, and practices in relationship to the Catholic Christian tradition. Emphasis will be on Christianity as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have developed over time in local, global and religious contexts. We will begin with the emergence of Christianity in the ancient world and the significance of the incarnation as the radical presence of God. By examining the foundations of faith and the development of Christianity as an historical religion, we will explore how Catholicism is oriented toward the future fullness of life and what its role may be in a world of religious pluralism and secularism. In particular, we will examine God’s dynamic role in a world of scientific and technological change and engage in conversation around contemporary concerns, such as global warming, racism, poverty and the challenges of social media. The writings of Pope Francis, especially *Laudato Si’* will help guide our discussions. The course essentially aims to challenge and inspire the God-question which is at the heart of human life.

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Thomas)**

**T/TH 4:00-5:15pm**

This course will examine the relationship between faith, reason, and culture in Christianity. This course will be centered on the four topics of scripture, tradition, sacraments, and Christian life. Students will gain an understanding of role of scripture in Christianity, diverse approaches to scripture, as well as scholarly approaches to the historical and literary issues regarding scripture. Students will gain a cursory understanding of the major doctrines and the historical contexts in which they were formulated. They will also learn the major milestones in the history of Christianity with a special goal to understand Christian diversity in our present context. Students will also gain an understanding of the major Christian practices. Finally, students will examine various approaches to ethical questions with a special focus on Catholic Social Teaching.



## Upper-Level Undergraduate Course Offerings

### **THL 2490: THM: Apocryphal Gospels (Schrader Polczer)**

**M/W 3:20-4:35pm**

This course engages in detailed critical study of ancient non-canonical Christian Gospels. Texts surveyed include the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of Judas*, the *Protevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Egerton Gospel*, the *Epistle of the Apostles*, the *Hymn of the Pearl*, and the *Apocryphon of John*. These texts will be analyzed regarding their relationship to other early Christian texts, their view of Jesus, and their place in early Christianity. Questions of authority, canon, canonical bias, and concepts of heresy and orthodoxy will also be addressed.

### **THL 2490: THM: Empire in Biblical History (Schwartz)**

**T/TH 1:00-2:15pm**

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.

### **THL 3200: THM: Understanding Jesus (Murdoch)**

**T/TH 1:00-2:15pm**

This course is designed to present an introduction to the branch of theology that is typically called “Christology.” It focuses on the question of who Christ is and what difference his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection makes for human beings. The readings for this course will include the classic texts found in Holy Scripture and in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas as well as a contemporary text that considers the historical Jesus. Central to this course is deep reflection on the Church’s understanding of Christ vis a vis alternate cultural voices concerning Christ.

### **THL 3250: The Problem of Evil (Inati)**

**T/TH 11:30-12:45pm**

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.

## **THL 3450: THM: Pastoral Care of the Sick (Brunk)**

**T/TH 4:00-5:15pm**

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.

## **THL 3790: THM: Latinx Theology (Varela Rios)**

**M/W 8:00-9:15am**

‘Latine’ encompasses a wide variety of ways of being and living that transcends time, identity, and geography. For one, latine is not only tied to gender dynamics but also to the tragic history of U.S. colonialism/empire—what latine means quickly becomes deeply contestable in their intersection. Adding ‘Theology’ complicates the questions further, since theology is also a contextualized concept due to its varying focuses, locations, and provisional nature. In fact, both terms have deep histories which tend to obscure their purpose and intended audience, even more when combined as an academic area of study. Latine theologians, in the academy and otherwise, negotiate this complexity in distinct yet similarly productive ways. This course will explore some examples of Latines and allies doing theology *latinamente* in academic settings (that is, in institutions of higher education) and beyond (for instance, in the Church and in other cultural spheres). Some of these authors are more systematic, others more constructive, yet others interdisciplinary. The variety will reveal the multiple ways of distilling theologies that ‘Latine’ engages and reveals. No prior knowledge on the subject is needed. All course materials will be in English. This in-person course is divided in three stages: theoretical/historical background (Weeks 1-3), theological concepts (Weeks 4-10), and applied theology (Weeks 11-16). As for instructional method, we will read closely or watch and discuss as a group one or two written pieces or other media each week, assessing Latine sources, theories, and methods on foundational theological concepts (such as God, Jesus, and ethics) and specific Latine concerns (such as the preferential option for the poor, *lo cotidiano*, immigration, and *mestizaje*). While increasing our familiarity with Latine academic theologies and what the stakes are for Latine lives in the U.S., we will also improve our scholarly skills through essays and shared activities (such as presentations) around course content.

All readings will be available online and/or on reserve through Falvey Library – **none of the required texts need to be bought**. Assessments are daily participation, weekly short essays, a presentation, a midterm, and a final exam.

## **THL 4480: Intro to Biomedical Ethics (Wilmot)**

**M/W 3:20-4:35pm**

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.

## **THL 4490: Christian Peacebuilding (Fleischer)**

**M/W 8:00-9:15am**

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: THM: Black Theology & Black Power (Lucky)**

**M/W 4:45-6:00pm**

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).

## **THL 4490: THM: Stewardship and the Bible (Griffin)**

**T/TH 10:00-11:15am**

In the opening chapters of *On Christian Teaching* (1.1-5), 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" (1.4). "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 environment issues around sustainability, such as the human root of the ecological crisis, actors in global environmental governance, and environmental governance ideas.

## **THL 4490: THM: Solidarity & Peace Building in Central and Eastern Europe (Beyer)**

**T/TH 1:00-2:15pm**

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.

## **THL 4550: THM: The Contemplative Tradition (Laird)**

**T/TH 11:30-12:45pm**

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. The course is both (1) theoretical and (2) practical.

(1) On the theoretical level there will be an interdisciplinary sampling of texts. We will read ancient Christian authors (4th-14th centuries) who talk about the search for God by first dealing with the sources of anxiety within--what we will come to call the world of "mind-tripping." But in order to highlight the contemporary relevance of this ancient wisdom, we shall also look at contemporary authors on such topics as depression, eating disorders, toxic shame, among others. The purpose of the reading, writing, lecture and discussion is to cultivate and value an integrated sense of what is involved in that deep spiritual flourishing of what St. Paul might term our life "hidden with Christ is God (Col 3: 3)."

(2) There is also a practical component. The first 13-15 minutes of each class meeting will be devoted to contemplative practice itself, so that the student not only gains a theoretical understanding of the ancient Christian practice of contemplation / meditation, but also knows how to practice it in daily life. Moreover, each student is expected to devote at least 10 minutes each day outside of class to the practice of contemplation.

## **THL 4900: THM: Sports and Spirituality (Hastings)**

**T/TH 8:30-9:45am**

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, guest speakers to help us explore these themes and topics.

## **4990: THM: Wisdom of Sufism (Akis)**

**M/W/F 12:50-1:40pm**

This course is an introduction to the spiritual and mystical teachings of Sufism, a mystical school of Islam that focuses on developing a direct personal relationship with God. The course will explore the fundamental beliefs, practices, and traditions of Sufism, and how they can be applied to personal spiritual development. Students will study the historical development of Islam and Sufism, the basic tenets of Sufi theology, the role of the Sufi master or sheikh, and the importance of spiritual practices such as prayer, Sama (Ceremony of Whirling dervishes), meditation, and dhikr (remembrance of God). The course will also cover key Sufi concepts such as love, peace, unity, and surrender, and how they are expressed through Sufi poetry and music. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to engage in personal spiritual reflection and practice, using Sufi teachings as a guide. They will also be introduced to Anatolian Sufi orders and their teachings, as well as the ways in which Sufism has been adapted to different cultural and religious contexts. The course will be taught through a combination of lectures, readings, discussions, and videos of religious ceremonies, and will require regular reading and reflection outside of class. Students will be evaluated through a combination of written assignments, group presentations, and class participation. No prior knowledge of Sufism or Islam is required for this course.

## **THL 4990: THM: Contemplate, Create, Repeat (Mell)**

**Monday 6:15-8:55pm**

The course includes content & process elements that give attention to individual and group spirituality. Successful completion of course requires 1) attendance at every class meeting, whether in-person or online; 2) attendance at planned field trip(s) that will be arranged with day/time agreement from all class participants; and, 3) excellent quality completion of all course-required assignments, including one pre-class paper that is due via Email attachment sent to the instructor by 12:00 noon on Monday, the first day of class. NOTE: The pre-course paper does not require advanced reading or research. Students will receive important pre-course information via VU email approximately one week before the first class meeting.

## **THL 4990: THM: Spirituality of Friendship (Jackson)**

**T/TH 2:30-3:45pm**

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.

## **THL 4990: THM: Spiritual Lives of Children (Lang Hearlson)**

**T/TH 2:30-3:45pm**

What is it like to be a child, and how can we support children's spiritual lives and well-being? This course explores the spiritual and religious lives of children, with a focus on Christian/Catholic contexts. Drawing on biblical, historical, theological, and social science sources, this course focuses on the way children and youth have been understood over time, as well as their own lived experience of spirituality. The course is designed to help students reflect on their own spiritual experience while helping them learn from, advocate for, and support children and young people.

## **THL 4990: THM: The Contemplative Path (Spitaler)**

**Tuesday 6:15-8:55pm**

This course engages participants in a journey of introspection, self-awareness, and self-compassion as a means to wholistically interact with the external world and to develop on your journey to living on purpose. While the course introduces to various contemplative practices within a predominantly Christian framework, we also will explore contemplative practices from diverse wisdom traditions to develop our contemplative capacity. The curriculum includes traditional practices such as centering/mindfulness, prayer, lectio divina, and visio divina, alongside newer art-based methods. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to explore and present to the class a contemplative practice from their own tradition, context, or an original creative approach.

## **THL 5000: THM: Orientalism and Religion (Akis)**

**M/W/F 11:345-12:35pm**

The concept of Orientalism, as articulated by the influential literary scholar Edward Said in his seminal work "Orientalism" (1978), encapsulates a Western framework for exerting dominance, restructuring, and asserting authority over the Orient. Said defines it as "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." Grounded in a meticulous examination of Said's foundational text, this course critically engages with the manifold ways in which Orientalism has profoundly influenced perceptions of religion in the Middle East. From interrogating the nexus between Orientalism and religion to scrutinizing critiques of Said's thesis, this course endeavors to illuminate overlooked dimensions of inquiry within his discourse. Moreover, we will explore the contemporary Western conceptions of Orientalism and how they continue to shape attitudes towards the Middle East and its religious traditions. To unravel misconceptions perpetuated by Orientalist frameworks, we will employ a diverse range of mediums, including Western movies, art, and music. By analyzing portrayals of the Middle East in popular culture, we aim to deconstruct stereotypes and challenge preconceived notions, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the region and its religious dynamics.

## **THL 5000: THM: Body and Religion (Knauss)**

**T/TH 1:00-2:15pm**

Folding hands in prayer, preparing special foods for festivals, or observing rules of bodily purity as part of one's spiritual practice – bodies are an important element in religious traditions, carrying different meanings and functions. This course will explore the diverse roles of bodies in religion, how cultural influences have shaped the various and changing understandings of embodiment in different religious and spiritual traditions, and how religions have impacted cultural attitudes towards bodies. We will consider the ways in which human and divine bodies are represented in creation myths and art, and the ways in which bodies are fundamental to religious rituals, such as those related to food or healing, and thus – in their earthy materiality – for the relationship with the transcendent. We will also analyze how bodies are regulated and disciplined through the norms and practices that have developed in religious traditions, especially those related to gender and sexuality. But religions do not only limit bodily experiences, they also include moments of honoring the body, for example in the rituals and theologies around death and the afterlife, or liberating it from its attachments.

We will encounter the practices, beliefs, and traditions of a range of different cultures and religions, from Christianity to Daoism and Native American traditions as well as others, both past and present. In order to gain a better understanding of the various roles and meanings that bodies take on in religious traditions and how these have interacted with other cultural influences on embodiment, we will draw on sociology, gender studies, philosophy, history and art history, in addition to theology and religious studies, in an interdisciplinary discussion.

## **THL 5003: THM: Hispanics in the US Catholic Church (Bolarte)**

**T/TH 8:30-945am**

This course examines a theology that takes as its starting point the everyday, communal, and liberating experience of faith of the Hispanic people of God in the United States. Hispanic theology has prided itself on basing its reflection close to the pastoral reality of the church. Through theological reflection, the

students explore the integration of culture and faith. The course incorporates the role of church documents that provide direction for effective ministry among culturally diverse communities.

### **THL 5003 THM: Liberation Theology (Purcaro)**

**T/TH 8:30-9:45am**

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 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.

### **THL 5003: THM: Pope Francis’ Vision of the Church (Lydon)**

**T/TH 8:30-9:45am**

Pope Francis has left a mark on the pastoral and ecclesiological vision of the Church in its service to humanity. This course will explore seven main themes in the pope’s writings:

1. A poor Church for the poor
2. The Church and the Cry of the Earth
3. A Synodal Church of Dialogue
4. A Missionary Church
5. A Church of Inculturation
6. A Church of Mercy
7. A Church of Prayer and Action

Understanding his theological perspective, born in the crucible of Church life and the difficult days of political upheaval in Argentina in the 1980s, and then his special role in the Conference of Latin American bishops, we find the foundations upon which these seven themes are interconnected and become the basis for a rich ecclesiology that guides to Church today and that represents a new paradigm of the relation of the Church to the world.

### **THL 5003: THM: Thomas Merton as a Spiritual Guide (Hastings)**

**T/TH 11:30-12:45pm**

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.

### **THL 5003: THM: Contemporary US Catholics (O’Donnell)**

**M/W/F 11:45am-12:25pm**



## **THL 5004: So Long Been Dreaming (Washington-Leapheart)**

**M/W 4:45-6:00pm**

## **THL 5005: THM: African Political Theology (Olokunboro)**

**M/W/F 8:30-9:20am & 10:40-11:30am**

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.

## **THL 5005: THM: Gender, Sexuality, and Islam Mystics (Makas)**

**M/W/F 10:40-11:30am**

Is transcending gender necessary for true mystical experience? Many mystics and scholars of religion argue that mystical experience is *universal*, meaning it is the same for everyone. If this is true, then it seems that going beyond gender is necessary. However, mystics frequently transgress or uphold traditional gender boundaries and discuss gender explicitly when describing their mystical experiences. Moreover, despite some mystics claiming that the soul leaves the body during a mystical experience, many others imply that their knowledge is *embodied* (the concept that one's physical body contributes to how one knows something). Given these tensions, it is vital to examine the significance of gender in Islamic mysticism.

After an overview of Islam and Islamic mysticism generally, the course will focus on the lives and works of Muslim saints and mystical philosophers. Special focus will be given to women, queer, and gender non-conforming saints. We will also address the ways in which mystical experiences conform to or subvert heteronormative masculinity and the gendered power dynamics of sainthood. With this understanding in place, the final section of the class will interrogate the philosophical and theological assumptions of a universal mystical experience or a specifically gendered one.

## **THL 5005: THM: The Bible as Literature; The Bible as Literature (Anolik)**

**Wednesday 6:15-8:55pm**

The Bible represents many things to its many readers: moral guidance, history, science, spirituality, religion, ritual. The Bible is also a great work of literature, presenting powerful and complex figures, and unfolding narratives filled with love and hate, despair and exaltation. In this course we will explore the Bible as a literary text, embarking upon the approach outlined in Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, and applying the approach to selected biblical readings. Additionally, we will consider literary texts that situate themselves within the canon of biblical literature, texts that retell some of the most profound stories in the Bible. We will begin with the biblical stories of the first human family: Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel, and then read Mark Twain's whimsical *Diaries of Adam and Eve*, which develops the questions of gender roles raised by Gen 1-3. The theme of family tensions – and of social tensions – between the young and the old reappears in the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, and in the retelling by the Israeli poet Yehudah Amichai: "The Real Hero." Turning to the book of Exodus, we will read a number of responses to the story of the Hebrews' escape from Egypt: the Gospel song, "Go Down Moses" and Laura Range's poem, "Horse and Rider." Before leaving the Hebrew Bible, we will read the complicated story of David the king and Jonathan the prince, considering a queer-theory approach to this story. Turning to the Christian Bible we will read the story of Susannah (Apocrypha; Catholic Bible – Daniel 13), a surprisingly contemporary tale about gender and power. Next, we will consider literary approaches to the story of Jesus as presented in the Gospels: T.S. Eliot's poem, "Journey of the Magi"; A.S. Byatt's short story "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary." We will also consider the complications and challenges of Jesus's parables, following the argument of Levine's *Short Stories by Jesus*. Most biblical readings will be accompanied by the writings of scholars, most notably Robert Alter, Richard Friedman, and Harold Bloom. As we read the literary and scholarly responses to the Bible, we will consider how they rework, challenge and illuminate the literature of the original biblical narratives.

## **THL 5150: Islam: History, Thought, and Culture (Inati)**

**T/TH 10:00-11:15am**

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. Fulfills requirement for Africana Studies, major and minor in Arab/Islamic Studies, and Core Theology.

## **THL 5400: THM: Questions in Science and Religion (Caponi)**

**M/W/F 8:30-9:20am**

This course begins with an introduction to key dimensions of the study of religion and science: the nature of revelation and Biblical interpretation, the relationship between faith and reason, the historical development of science; materialism and teleology in the philosophy and practice of

science.

With this foundation, we proceed to examine the following questions:

- cosmology: Was the Big Bang really the beginning? Does the universe show signs of design? Where is the universe headed, physically and metaphysically? Is the cosmos “set up” to bring forth human beings?
- humanity: Is there such a thing as a soul? Can evolution explain everything about human nature? Can matter “understand”? Is the human mind just a computer? What does the human mind have that computers lack? Do humans possess free will? What can quantum theory contribute to these questions?
- ethics: Can science alone serve as a basis for ethics, or is belief in God indispensable to moral reflection and action?
- miracles: What makes something a miracle? Are ancient accounts, such as the miracles of Jesus Christ, historically reliable? Are modern accounts – central to the process of canonization in Roman Catholicism – in any way verifiable within a scientific approach to the world? Do the “laws of nature” prove that miracles are impossible? Is there an irreconcilable opposition between the stories a Villanovan hears in the campus church and the methods and results a student imbibes in Mendel, Driscoll, and Drosdick halls?

## **THL 6000: THM: Power Dynamics in the New Testament (Cacchione)**

**M/W/F 9:35-10:25**

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.

## **THL 6000: THM: Sound, Music and Spirituality (Grainger)**

**T/TH 8:30-9:45am**

From the calming drone of a Tibetan singing bowl to the pulsing rhythm of a hand drum to a streamed track of harp, birdsong, and crickets, Americans increasingly find themselves in spaces — schools, stores, and office buildings — awash with the sounds of the “spiritual.” In medical centers and alternative healing clinics, sound therapy has become a popular form of treatment. Public schools use bells to train students in habits of mindfulness, while private companies are turning to “spiritual consultants” who employ sound to promote a culture of wellness among employees. While many Americans have trouble defining spirituality, most would say they know it when they hear it.

What makes certain kinds of music sound “religious” or “spiritual” to our ears? How do we distinguish “sacred” sounds from non-religious (“secular”) sounds? How have particular soundways come to mark “authentic” expressions of specific religious, racial, or cultural traditions (“Black” and “white,” “eastern” and “western,” modern and premodern)? And how have developments in modern technology — including recording, instrumentation (i.e., synthesizers), and consumption (from vinyl records to digital streaming) shaped these developments?

This course proceeds from the claim that scholarly approaches to the study of spirituality continue to emphasize the eye before the ear, even though sound (a category inclusive but not reducible to “music”) may be considered a more principal mode by which Americans identify and encounter the “spiritual” in their everyday lives.

The course opens with a consideration of theoretical and methodological approaches to spirituality and “sound studies.” For the remainder of our sessions, we will explore case studies that engage a variety of religious traditions and musical genres. A recurrent theme will be the joint sense of sound as a tool or technology for accessing “spirit” and as a direct manifestation of spirit itself.

This is a course in the religious and cultural production of sound. Our approach will be interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from history, theology, religious studies, and the social sciences. No prior background in the study of music or musicology is required. Just bring your ears.