

Fall 2025 Theology Graduate Course Descriptions

**Please check the Master Schedule to confirm course day/times*

MASTER'S LEVEL SEMINARS:

THL 8000: Foundations in Systematic and Constructive Theology (Knauss)

Regular class: Monday, 2:00-4:20pm CRN 29202

Mon, August 25: class cancelled

Additional Friday afternoon sessions:

Fri, Aug 29, noon -5pm

Fri, Nov 21, noon-5pm

This course will introduce you to the “foundations” of Christian systematic and constructive theology, its historical development and contemporary shape, important thinkers and approaches, the sources of systematic/constructive theology, methods to engage them, and central concepts. Beginning with an orientation to theology more broadly, and systematic, constructive and foundational theologies as particular disciplines within theology, we will reflect on what it means to do theology in mutual interaction with cultural contexts and their questions in the Augustinian tradition. As you encounter important thinkers and their theological practices, both historical and contemporary, you will develop a working understanding of the language, methods, central ideas and enduring questions of Christian systematic and constructive theology, with an emphasis on the Roman Catholic perspective. Through our readings and discussions, you will engage diverse theological perspectives across historical periods and cultural contexts, examine the relation between theological reflections and cultural practices, enter into interdisciplinary conversations, and critically and constructively evaluate the tasks and challenges of Christian theological reflection today. The course format is seminar-style, with emphasis on discussion and shared learning in our classroom community. This requires you to be conscientious about preparing the reading material assigned for each class so that you are able to participate in our discussions.

Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology

THL 8001: Foundations in Bible (Schwartz)

Thursday 4:30-6:50pm CRN 29203

This course is an introduction to both major parts of the Christian Bible (i.e., the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament and the New Testament) as they are studied within the academic field of biblical studies. Key topics include the structure of the overall biblical narratives, the diversity of genres reflected in the Bible, the interaction between the Bible and its ancient cultural contexts, and the relationship between traditional and critical approaches to the Bible. Students who complete this course will gain the foundational knowledge in the Bible that is necessary for more advanced electives in biblical studies.

Area: Bible

THL 8003: Foundations in Spirituality (Barnett)

Wednesday 7:00-9:20pm CRN 29204

This course can be thought of as two courses in one. For the first several weeks, it will serve as an introduction to methodological issues in the study of “lived religion” or, in popular parlance, spirituality. Each of these class meetings will center on a particular question, supplemented by important and timely scholarly readings. Next, it will survey a number of major figures in the history of Christian Spirituality, considering their strengths as well as their limitations. All told, then, this course will establish an interchange between foundational academic issues in spirituality and foundational contributors to the field — a combination of method and encounter.

Area: Spirituality

THL 8004: Foundation in Ethics (Beyer)

Monday 11:30-1:50pm CRN 29205

This course introduces students to important themes, thinkers, and issues within the discipline of Christian ethics. Part of our energy will be devoted to studying canonical sources, which have been mainstays in Christian ethical deliberation. Yet the discipline of Christian ethics is also remarkably broad and diverse, so another focus will be to show students the different kinds of moral deliberation along with the different kinds of communities out of which they have emerged. Finally, as ethics is concerned about evaluating behavior, another part of this course engages seminal contemporary issues that will also prove to be challenging to the Christian community in the future.

Area: Christian Ethics

THL 8135: Conceptions of God in the Hebrew Bible (Schwartz)

Thursday 9:00-11:20am CRM 29206

This course asks a question that is at once basic and profound: Who, according to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, is God? By studying the Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context and through the history of its composition, we will explore its striking diversity of answers to this question. Issues to be addressed include: Where does God live? Does God have a body? A gender? How powerful is God? How does God communicate with human beings? What is God’s personality? What does God want or need? Is God the only divine being? How do angels fit into the picture? How is God similar to and/or different from deities like Baal or Zeus? Does God change? Is God good? In addition to exploring these questions within the ancient context of the Bible itself, we will also consider (a) how they interact with later Christian and Jewish theology and (b) what implications they may have for other theological disciplines (e.g., systematic or practical theology).

Area: Bible

THL 8240: Sacramental Theology for Pastoral Care (Brunk)

Monday 9:00-11:20am CRN 29207

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.” In a similar vein, the mission statement of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies notes “attention to contemporary issues” and “the need for redemption in a world marked by...suffering.” Additionally, the department encourages pursuit of “a wisdom that can serve as a basis for practical and prophetic action,” as well as “acting responsibly in a world where regard and respect for others have become urgent.”

“Sacramental Theology for Pastoral Care” is a course being offered in response to these goals. We will examine and assess sacraments as instantiations of God’s redeeming grace for individuals—with communal ramifications.

WHY THIS COURSE?

I teach this course because of my passion for sacramental theology. My study in that field, along with experiences in music ministry and in psychiatric social work, convinces me that sacramental celebrations are fundamental to Christian living and to pastoral care (understood here broadly as accompanying believers on their journeys, with their joys and hopes, griefs and concerns; see *Gaudium et spes* 1).

Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology, MMT

THL 8390: THM: Disability Ethics (McDonald Kennedy)

Wednesday 9:00-11:20am CRN 29209

This course will explore key themes and concepts in Christian theology and ethics, including moral agency, human contingency, embodiment, justice, and finitude, through engagement with resources and insights from disability theology, the disability rights movement, and the field of disability studies. The course will consider how various methodologies and disciplines inform how we define disability and understand its relevance as we respond to key questions in Christian ethics related to human flourishing, interdependence, ecclesial belonging, and social justice. We will engage sources that bring theological exploration of disability together with ethnographic methods, bioethical frameworks, Biblical studies, queer theory, and moral philosophy, among other conversation partners. We will explore how various genres—from academic theology, documentary film, and memoir to audio journalism, visual art, and poetry—contribute to conversations on disability and Christian ethics.

Area: Christian Ethics

THL 8415: Ancient and Medieval Christianity (Laird)

Thursday 4:30-6:50pm CRN 29210

Area: History

THL 8445: THM: Catholicism: Vatican II and Global Catholicism (Faggioli)

Thursday 7:00-9:20pm CRN 29211

This course examines the Second Vatican Council in its historical background, its unfolding, and its theological legacy in the global Church today. The first part of the course will put Vatican II in its historical context and study the history of the event between 1959 and 1965. The second part of the course will analyze the texts of the most important of the sixteen final documents of Vatican II, with special attention to the four constitutions, the declarations on religious liberty and non-Christian religion, and the decree on ecumenism. The third part of the course will examine the council’s legacy in the Church over the past fifty years through a study of the reception debate from 1965 to today, with special attention to the reception of Vatican II in the global Church.

Area: History

THL 8570: THM: African Spiritual/Diaspora (Wratee)

Wednesday 7:00-9:20pm CRN 29212

Area: Spirituality

THL 8630: Buddhist-Christian Dialogue (Wong)

Tuesday 11:30-1:50pm CRN 29213

While Buddhists and Christians have interacted with one another throughout history, this class will focus especially on the content and contours of their engagement in the last 75 years. During this time, we have seen Buddhist-Christian dialogue emerge as a concerted, self-conscious effort in three interdependent modes: the "conceptual dialogues" in which Buddhist and Christians scholars compare and contrast theological and philosophical texts and teachings; the "monastic" or "interior dialogue" in which practitioners consider the meditation and prayer resources of their traditions for transformation in spiritual life; and the "socially engaged dialogue" in which activists turn towards issues of joint concern for social, environmental, economic and gender justice. The seminar will not only familiarize students to major points of agreement, difference, and exploration *within* Christian-Buddhist conversation, but also orient them to the varied landscape of dialogue institutes and organizations which sponsor interreligious dialogue in the US and around the world.

Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology

THL 8701: Theological Pedagogy (Hanchin)

Monday 4:30-6:50pm CRN 29214

This seminar initiates the Heart of Teaching program for PhD students and Master's students in the Education Track. It is designed to help students identify theological and philosophical sources for teaching theology and religious studies, analyze educational approaches, and imagine and communicate their approach to teaching. 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.

Area: Heart of Teaching

THL 8702: Teaching Apprenticeship (TBD)

Area: Heart of Teaching

THL 8703: Teaching Practicum (Spitaler)

By Arrangement CRN 29219

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 (THL 8701), in which you developed a teaching philosophy, and (2) Teaching Apprenticeship (THL 8702), in which you served as a Teaching Assistant and developed lesson plans and a syllabus. Now, during the Teaching Practicum (THL 8703), you are a Supervised Teacher teaching your section of THL 1000, with the support and encouragement of the Heart of Teaching faculty and a cohort of other Supervised Teachers.

Area: Heart of Teaching

THL 8801: Seminar in Contextual and Practical Theologies (Edwards)

Tuesday 10:00-11:30AM (1.5 credit) CRN TBD

A seminar entitled, ‘practical theology’ or ‘contextual theology’ suggests a theology focused more directly on immediate ministerial concerns, or on the concrete concerns of a particular community and/or cultural context. These titles may also suggest a theology that is ‘useful,’ ‘down to earth,’ ‘straightforward,’ and ‘relevant in the short term.’ Such perceptions, while not entirely mistaken, can be misleading. This seminar might more accurately be entitled “theologies of praxis,” namely theological discourse that foregrounds the concerns, questions, and demands presented by the world, since the concerns, questions, and demands of a particular community and a particular cultural milieu become the very context within which the task of articulating an understanding of the mysteries of Christian faith is in fact carried out.

Praxis is the crux of practical/contextual theologies. In brief, praxis refers to the intentional movement from practice to theory and back to practice again with the goal of a fuller realization of the kingdom of God on earth. It places particular attention on both epistemology, that is, understanding how human beings come to know, and revelation – how God chooses to become knowable by human beings.

Practical or contextual theology endeavors to further the social transformation of the world first through the transformation of those engaged in theological reflection. These approaches to theology, thus, necessitate a dynamic, ongoing interpretative process that takes seriously the cultural, social, and political context of a particular time and place as well as scripture and the tradition of Christian theology and practice. This seminar will investigate several contemporary understandings of the inherently practical and contextual character of Christian theological reflection. And it seeks to enable each of you to use the terms ‘practical’ and ‘contextual’ as descriptors of theology in ways that express your own reception of the Christian theological tradition from within your contexts.

Some prominent examples of theology which explicitly attends to particular historical contexts include Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology, and Black theology (which we will consider as a kind of case-study in the first half of the course).

Area: MMT

THL 8330: Theology and Suffering (Varela Rios)

100% online – Asynchronous CRN 29208

In this course, we will read and discuss theological thought around suffering and its multiple implications. We will explore possible understandings (McGill, John Paul II), rationales (Weil, Bonhoeffer, Kierkegaard), instantiations (Gutiérrez, Pineda-Madrid), contexts (Nanko-Fernández, Jones), and even its conundrums (Cone, Pinn). Along the way, we will watch movies, analyze art, and study current events through lectures, class discussion, presentations and debates, essays, and/or other projects. By the end, we will have gained vocabulary and skills that can prove helpful when encountering suffering in our own daily lives, keeping this question in mind: what does theology have to say about specific situations of suffering and how does suffering transform/nuance understanding around academic and/or lived theology?

Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology, MMT

THL 8883: Ministry Field Education 3 – First year students (Calderone)

CRN 29221

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 8883: Ministry Field Education 3 – Second year students (Mell)

CRN 29222

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 8999: MA Capstone (Jackson)

Tuesday 9:00-11:20am CRN 29223

The Fall Capstone course has been designed for students in the MA in Theology who have completed at least half of their required coursework and are approaching their spring portfolio requirement. The course provides students with the culminating research, reflection and other professional skills that will equip them for the next steps along their vocational pathways. Students will craft their own intellectual autobiography as a culminating narrative for their degree program. Based on this narrative, they will identify a central or significant question or problem that they wish to explore critically with regard to their future pathway or vocational plans. Throughout the course, students will engage in peer review collaboration, a resume workshop, interview and presentation training, relevant institutional networks, preparation of applications, papers or projects for publication or conferences (if applicable), and further resources that will empower them in their future work and/or study.

Area: Core Curriculum

DOCTORAL LEVEL SEMINARS:

THL 9050: Theories & Methods of Culture (Lloyd)

Thursday 11:30am-1:50pm CRN 29224

If we want to study faith engaging culture, we must first ask, what is culture? How do we understand the dynamics of culture? What is the relationship between culture and religious beliefs, practices, narratives, and affects? And how can theological reflection position itself in the context of theories of culture, draw on their concepts, and reflect on itself as situated within a network of cultural processes? This course will introduce you to some of the main theories, concepts and methods of the study of culture, focusing on central thinkers and texts in the sociology of culture, cultural anthropology, critical theory and cultural studies, including postcolonial critiques of “culture.” We will also explore how theories of culture have informed scholarship in theology and religious studies, and the directions of future scholarship in this field.

Area: Culture

THL 9105: THM: The Breath of God – NT SPI (Spitaler)

Monday 7:00-9:20pm CRN 29225

This course invites students to explore the multifaceted dimensions of spirituality as depicted in the New Testament. It examines how NT texts articulate a spiritual ethos through narratives, letters, and ritual practices, situating these elements within their historical, cultural, and theological contexts. We will critically analyze New Testament texts with a focus on spiritual practices, mystical experiences, and communal identities; trace the development of key spiritual themes—such as divine encounter and the praxis of prayer—and assess their impact on both early Christ-believing communities and contemporary spiritual life; engage with a variety of methodological approaches including literary, historical-critical, and hermeneutical analyses, thereby deepening understanding of the text’s spiritual dimensions; foster interdisciplinary dialogue by integrating insights from theology, history, and cultural studies in the interpretation of NT spirituality. Course topics include the spiritual narrative in the Gospels and Acts; Pauline spirituality and the dynamics of community formation; mysticism and the quest for divine union; the role of ritual in shaping spiritual identity; and the enduring influence of New Testament spirituality on modern Christian practice. As far as course format is concerned, students will engage in close reading and critical discussions, supported by seminar presentations, short research papers, and a final project that contributes (possibly, but not necessarily, original) scholarly insights.

Area: Bible; Spirituality

THL 9343: Moral Philosophy and Ethics (Couenhoven)

Tuesday 2:00-4:20pm CRN 29227

Religious ethics is, unavoidably, philosophical. As a result, it is appropriate to be self-aware about the philosophical aspects of theories and practices in religious ethics. This course offers an overview of key issues in the relation between moral philosophy and moral theology. Among the questions we will engage are the following: What difference does belief in God make to morality, if any? What, if anything, do religious ethicists have to learn from, or contribute to, debates about virtue, natural law, deontology, divine command theory, etc.? What is the goal of the moral life: perfection, happiness, self-giving love...? Would a good God permit moral dilemmas? Should moral theologians be realists about moral truths, or are there better options? We will also take up central

topics in ethics such as eudaimonism, freedom, luck, and human nature (or the lack thereof). And finally, a central and perennially baffling question: what is morality?

Area: Christian Ethics

THL 9530: From Reformations to Revolutions: The Making of Early Modern Christian Spirituality (Grainger)

Thursday 2:00-4:20pm CRN 29228

This seminar offers advanced study of the “lived” devotional worlds of early modern Christians, Roman Catholic and Protestant, as they responded to a series of seismic transformations in religious, social, cultural, and political life between the 16th and late 18th centuries. This period witnessed the lasting division of western Christianity, the rise of the nation state, the wars of religion and the rise of toleration, the “discovery” of the Americas, the birth of global missions, and the global slave trade, the scientific revolution and an emergent mass option for non-theism—all of these and more had significance consequences for the everyday religious worlds of Christians.

Despite, or because of, these transformations, the early modern age was also a period of immense religious and theological creativity. As the immense devotional scaffolding of the medieval church was distilled, discarded, or destroyed, new systems emerged to take their place. This course attends to many of the central movements, practices, figures, themes, and tensions that characterized this fractured, fertile period, with special attention paid to developments in Christian mysticism, especially the emergence of affective movements of popular devotion—the so-called “religion of the heart” (always shadowed by its twinned terror, “enthusiasm”). The course concludes with a look ahead at the complex legacies of the “long reformation” for the modern age.

Area: Spirituality

THL 9900: Dissertation Writing (Smith)

CRN 29229

THL 9910: Synthesis Portfolio (Smith)

CRN 29230

THL 9911: Evaluation Portfolio (Smith)

CRN 29231

THL 9920: Proposal Colloquium (Smith)

CRN 29232

THL 9930: Dissertation Colloquium (Smith)

CRN 29233