

**THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT**  
**FALL 2026**

*Courses as of 02/16/26 – Please continue to check Master Schedule for latest updates.*

**THEOLOGY MASTER'S LEVEL COURSES**

**THL 8000: FOUNDATIONS IN SYSTEMATIC AND CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY**

**TH 9:00-11:20AM Stephanie Wong**

This course will introduce you to the foundations for doing Christian systematic and constructive theology – familiarizing you with theology's historical development, enduring questions, and contemporary shape. It aims to equip you with a) a working understanding of what theology is and the sources that systematic/constructive theologians use; b) concepts and language for interpreting and thinking theologically, and c) to practice methods of doing theology at the intersections of faith and culture. 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 can participate in our discussions.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

**THL 8001: FOUNDATIONS IN BIBLE**

**M 11:30-1:50PM Carey Walsh**

This course is a graduate seminar in theological analysis of the Pentateuch as the entrance into divine instruction (*Torah*). The course is thematic with a spiritual and theological emphasis on the reception of the Pentateuch as a whole in Christian and Jewish traditions. It concentrates on family dynamics, involving patriarchs, matriarchs, and children, as the primal social context for the expression of faith and fear. Monotheism is a new adventure in ancient Israel; it is portrayed as a generational experiment amidst the cultural and economic situations of domestic life. Through the use of the family sagas of the generations from Abraham to Moses' death, the Pentateuch depicts the development of faith in God, along with some of its major threats, namely, fear, abuse of power, violence, and disregard for life. The Pentateuch offers a compassionate view of the struggles of human life and the sheer ardor of the greatest commandment to 'Love the Lord ... and Love your neighbor as yourself' (Matt 22:37-39). It is a fitting entry into the Scripture of a compassionate God.

*Area: Biblical Interpretation; MMT*

**THL 8003: FOUNDATIONS IN SPIRITUALITY**

**100% online – Synchronous**

**W 7:00-9:20PM Chris Barnett**

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: FOUNDATIONS IN ETHICS**

**TH 11:30-1:50PM Emma Kennedy**

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

*Area: Christian Ethics; MMT*

### **THL 8135 JUSTICE IN BIBLICAL TRADITION**

**M 9:00-11:20AM Ethan Schwartz**

The Hebrew Bible has a complicated relationship with justice. On the one hand, it clearly and repeatedly affirms justice as a value. On the other hand, it has been wielded as an instrument of injustice for virtually its entire history. Among those who have inherited the Bible as scripturally or culturally authoritative, there is a regnant paradigm for understanding this seeming paradox: it reflects a struggle over justice within the Bible itself, between the three domains of prophecy, law, and worship. On this view, to be a prophet is to speak boldly on behalf of justice against the oppressiveness of legal authority and the vanity of official worship. Those who mobilize the Bible toward justice are the heirs of prophets, while those who use it to perpetuate injustice are the heirs of jurists and priests. In this course, we will critically investigate the biblical bases and subsequent intellectual history of this paradigm. How does the Bible construct prophecy in relation to justice? Why do these constructions so frequently turn on criticism of the legal and cultic spheres? How do later figures, beginning with Jesus and continuing on to contemporary theologians and activists, adopt and/or transform these constructions? By pursuing these questions, we will problematize the widely assumed unity of prophecy and justice in opposition to law and worship. In so doing, we will gain a more complex appreciation of justice as a pluriform biblical value—and, in turn, of the richness of the Bible as a resource for contemporary justice-oriented theology.

*Area: Biblical Studies*

### **THL 8210 CHURCH AND LAY MINISTRY VATICAN II**

**TH 4:30-6:50PM Jaisy Joseph**

Before the opening of the Synod on Synodality in October 2021, Pope Francis stated that “the theme of synodality is not just a chapter in a treatise on ecclesiology; even less is it a passing fashion, a slogan, or a new term to be used and exploited in our meetings. No! Synodality expresses the nature of the Church, its form, its style, and its mission...I am

following what we may consider the first and most important manual of ecclesiology, the book of the Acts of the Apostles.”

As part of Pope Francis’ fresh reception of the Second Vatican Council, synodality calls the global Catholic church to both structural reforms and deeper interior conversion. The first half of the class is dedicated to Pope Francis’ application of the see-judge-act method to the Covid-19 pandemic in his book *Let us Dream* and how this method informs the communal discernment and co-responsibility of laity at the heart of his call for synodality. The second half of the class will then focus on different wounds that have been expressed in the synod documents and be guided by the question – what does it mean to minister in the context of this wound? Wounds include racial divisions in the Church, ministry among the differently abled, ministry among LGBTQ+ persons, and ministry amidst ecological crisis.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology; MMT*

### **THL 8390 FREEDOM, TRAGEDY, AND CULPABILITY**

**T 2:00-4:20PM Jesse Couenhoven**

Freedom, Iris Murdoch wrote, is not just “chucking your weight around.” So, then, what is it—and is it actually quite rare? Is God free, and does being perfect make God less so? Can luck play a role in how good we humans are? Are morally tragic situations (where a person will feel guilt or shame no matter what they do) possible or even common? And in light of all of those questions—is it appropriate to blame others (and ourselves), or do we do it too much? Readings will be both contemporary and historic, philosophical and theological.

*Area: Christian Ethics*

### **THL 8455 CHRISTIANITY IN HISTORY (ANCIENT & MIDIEVAL)**

**W 4:30-6:50PM Jonathan Yates**

Christianity and history are intractably intertwined. After all, Christianity’s fundamental event, the Incarnation of God the Son, happened in history in “the fullness of the time” (cf. Gal. 4:4). It follows that relevant Christian theological work and/or ministry cannot be carried out in a historical vacuum or without a well-developed historical consciousness. This course surveys major themes and events in the history of Christianity from the death of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 30 CE) through (some of) the major developments of the so-called High Middle Ages (ca. 1300 CE). Topics we will address include: (1) the rise and expansion of Christianity; (2) the establishment of Christian identity; (3) Christian lifestyles and witness (including martyrdom, asceticism, and monasticism); (4) Christianity’s relationship to non-Christians (including Jews, “pagans,” heretics, and Muslims); (5) Christianity’s relationships to the political powers (both before and after Christianity’s legitimization; both inside and outside the Roman Empire); and (6) debates relevant to the development of central Christian doctrines (including God’s nature and attributes, Christology, soteriology, and [theological] anthropology).

In addition to the course’s textbook, we will read selections of (translated) primary sources alongside a handful of the best critical secondary studies. The format of the course will be largely seminar-style discussion, although most meetings will also include introductory (mini-)lectures intended to focus discussions and to frame the assigned readings.

*Area: History*

### **THL 8510 BLACK RELIGION, THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUAL**

**M 2:00-4:20PM Byron Wratee**

This course explores the key methodologies that shape the academic study of Black religion, theology, and spirituality. It begins with Black and womanist theologies, analyzing how these theologies use and develop Tillichian methods of correlation to interpret Christian doctrine through Black experiences. The course then explores Black religious studies and the history-of-religions approach, focusing on the debate between Charles H. Long and James H. Cone over the task, methods, and socio-political implications of studying Black religion. Finally, the course examines African and diasporic spiritualities through comparative religious and theological methods. Overall, it aims to equip students with analytical tools to study Black religion, theology, and spirituality as related yet distinct fields in the modern theological and religious academy.

*Area: Spirituality*

### **THL 8701 THEOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY**

**T 9:00-11:20AM Christy Lang Hearlson**

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: Religious/Theological Education, MMT*

### **THL 8703 TEACHING PRACTICUM**

**By Arrangement**

**Peter Spitaler**

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 8803 INTRODUCTION TO COUNSELING**

**TH 2:00-3:20PM Carly Ellman**

Counseling skills present a general orientation to counseling and helping skills, as a way of assisting others to cope more effectively with personal, spiritual, and non-pathological concerns. This course is designed to support students in the Master of Arts in Ministry and

Theology degree program in their skill development to prepare for aspects of their careers where they will help and support others.

Students will be introduced to the basics of effective and ethically responsible counseling and helping skills to assist others explore presenting issues and concerns, gain deeper interpersonal insight, and make changes in their lives. Opportunities will be provided for students to enhance their interpersonal communication and self-awareness and gain knowledge and skills in helping and counseling that can be applied widely to work related to pastoral counseling and ministry, as well as other helping positions.

*Area: MMT*

### **THL 8840 HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Multimodal (50% Online)**

**W 2:00-4:20PM Nicholas Collura**

Every stage of human life, from womb to grave, has its own psycho-spiritual themes and challenges. This course will be organized as a journey through the stages of human development, from pre-natal growth to infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to old age to the dying process. We will explore the psychological, sociological, and spiritual background that may lie behind each stage of life with a mind to refining our pastoral care interventions and to seeing and respecting people as pilgrims on a great human journey. Our texts will include spiritual writings; classic developmental theories (Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Fowler, etc.); postmodern, feminist, and other contemporary challenges to the linear life stages as traditionally construed; and research into neuroscience and attachment.

*Area: Spirituality; Systematic and Constructive Theology; MMT*

### **THL 8883 MINISTRY FIELD EDUCATION 1**

**Fr. Joseph Calderone**

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

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

*Area: MMT (First-year students should register for this section)*

### **THL 8883 MINISTRY FIELD EDUCATION 2**

**Joanne Campbell**

Field Education is a central component of the Master of Ministry (MMT) program. It provides students with an opportunity to deepen vocational discernment and prepare for professional ministry within Christian, interfaith, and secular contexts.

The Ministry Field Education Supervision course supports students as they engage in supervised ministry placements that foster formation, self-awareness, and skill development. Through structured reflection, students explore their understanding of ministry, vocation, and professional identity while integrating academic learning with lived experience.

Students reflect on the meaning and practice of ministry in relation to:

- Academic coursework
- Personal and communal formation
- Spiritual growth
- Discernment of vocation

*Area: MMT (Second year students should register for this section)*

### **THL 8999 CAPSTONE**

#### **TH 2:00-4:20PM TBD**

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 for 2<sup>nd</sup> year MA Students*

### **THEOLOGY DOCTORAL LEVEL COURSES**

#### **THL 9050 THEORIES & METHODS OF CULTURE**

##### **W 9:00-11:20PM Kerry San Chirico**

If we want to study faith engaging culture, we must 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 and religion, 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.

Throughout this course, as you begin your doctoral program, it is critical that you remember what brought you here. What are the nagging questions that need answering *for you*? It is

important that as you read theorists of some repute, you remember *your own* animating questions. You will benefit the most from this course by allowing your questions to engage those of the other—other theorists and other classmates. Through such dialectic you may find your questions changing or taking on a new hue. At the very least, I would argue that you are involved in a cultural activity that you did not begin and that you will surely not complete. And that is something to ponder.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

### **THL 9105 PAULINE LETTERS UNPACKED**

**M 7:00-9:20PM Peter Spitaler**

This graduate seminar offers an intensive, text-centered exploration of the Pauline epistolary corpus, treating the letters not as abstract theological treatises but as historically situated communications shaped by conflict, collaboration, pastoral strategy, and rhetorical craft. Through close reading of selected letters attributed to Paul the Apostle and the broader Pauline tradition, students will examine how arguments are constructed, how communities are imagined and addressed, and how theology emerges in the pressure points of mission, worship, ethics, and identity formation. The course “unpacks” Paul by pairing detailed exegetical work with major interpretive approaches in contemporary scholarship. Topics include epistolary conventions and ancient rhetoric; the social and economic worlds of Pauline assemblies; the place of Scripture in Pauline argumentation; participation in Christ, spirituality, ethics, and ecclesiology; law, covenant, and the debated meaning of “justification”; apocalyptic motifs and eschatology; gender and household order; and the formation of the Pauline legacy (including questions of authorship, pseudonymity, and canonization). Students will be encouraged to test methodological lenses—historical-critical, literary-rhetorical, socio-scientific, theological, and reception-historical—asking what each clarifies and what each risks obscuring.

*Area: Biblical Studies*

### **THL 9105 THEOLOGIES OF LOVE AND DESIRE**

**Multimodal (50% Online)**

**M 4:30-6:50PM Stefanie Knauss**

**Schedule:**

**September 4, noon to 5pm (to be confirmed), in person**

**October 2, noon to 5pm, in person**

**November 13, noon to 5pm, in person**

**Mondays, August 24 to November 2 (hybrid; online sessions will be announced at the start of term)**

Erotic love – and with it desire – has often been dismissed as an inappropriate form of Christian love and longing: too passionate, too self-centered, too bodily. But there have also been attempts at lifting eros up as the drive that urges us towards the divine in bodily pleasure and connection. This course will investigate historical and contemporary resources for thinking theologically about love and desire, drawing on biblical, philosophical, theological and cultural texts, from Plato’s dialogues to Bataille’s writings on

the erotic, from the Song of Songs to medieval mysticism, from Augustine to contemporary cinema.

A second focus of the course will be the development of skills in academic writing for publication, with the main outcome being the production of a journal article draft ready for submission by the end of the course.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

## **THL 9200 XCULTURAL/INTERRELIGIOUS MARIOLOGIES**

**T 11:30-1:50PM Hector Varela Rios**

In Christianity, Mary of Nazareth is the human mother of Jesus Christ and co-mediator of divine grace. Mary is also admired and venerated in non-Christian religions and non-Western cultures around the globe. Indeed, doctrines around and devotion to Mary (studied as ‘Mariology’) are so ubiquitous around the world that it has been argued that she is an interreligious and cross-cultural *pontifex* in spheres well beyond religion such as local politics, racial/gender conflicts, and colonized epistemologies. This wide Marian influence is not exempt from controversy: for one, institutional Mariology often clashes with popular devotional practices and the local theologies that undergird them. In any case, due to Mary’s broad and deep religio-cultural agency, these conversations provide a space to delve deeper into a unique example of human-divine interaction of global importance.

*Area: Systematic and Constructive Theology*

## **THL 9300 CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

**TH 7:00-9:20PM Mark Graham**

This course focuses on seminal thinkers and schools of thought in Christian environmental ethics. Part of the course is spent addressing foundational philosophical and theological issues in Christian environmental ethics. Significant attention is also given to practical environmental issues such as the moral standing of animals, agriculture, global warming, pollution, and others.

Course requirements: regular attendance; regular class participation; a final oral exam; one or more in-class presentations; a 20+ page final project; and approximately 75-100 pages of reading per week.

*Area: Christian Ethics*

## **THL 9325 LOVE AND CARE**

**M 11:30-1:50PM Dana Lloyd**

Can a mother go on strike? Should white people have the right to adopt Indigenous children? Do sex workers have the right to unionize? This course brings into conversation feminist ethics of care and religious ethics of love to explore themes of relationality, emotions, and vulnerability, as well as labor, land, and disability. We will read ethnographic, literary, legal, and philosophical texts to think about the entanglement of care and love. While some critics argue that love is used to exploit care workers, others point out the harm that can result from practicing care without love. How can religion help us out of this conundrum?

*Area: Christian Ethics*

**THL 9440 WOMEN CARMELITE MYSTICS****TH 7:00-9:20PM Martin Laird**

When thoughts turn to the “Carmelite mystics” we think immediately think of St. Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross. While this needs no particular justification, things often stop there. But in point of fact the continuation of this lineage is through the women of this tradition even to our own day. This course will focus on these women. Beginning with St. Teresa of Avila (Teresa of Jesus), we shall in turn look at St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face), St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, St. Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), concluding with a woman of our own day Mary McCormick (Mary of St. Joseph). Based on close readings and discussions of their writings, this course will allow us to see how many of the assumptions about union with God, contemplation, affliction, social engagement, and lifestyle are overturned by the extraordinary ordinariness of their lives.

*Area: Spirituality*

**THL 9900 DISSERTATION WRITING****Rachel Smith****THL 9910 SYNTHESIS PORTFOLIO****Rachel Smith****THL 9911 EVALUATION PORTFOLIO****Rachel Smith****THL 9920 PROPOSAL COLLOQUIUM****Rachel Smith****THL 9930 DISSERTATION COLLOQUIUM****Rachel Smith**