

**THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT
SUMMER**

Courses as of 2/25/26 – Please continue to check Master Schedule for latest updates.

THEOLOGY THL 1000 COURSES

THL 1000 FAITH, REASON, AND CULTURE (Jonathan Yates)

M/T/W/TH 830-10:50AM (6/1/26-6/29/26)

“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), 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will also look at some attempts to construct ways of living which regard (traditional) Christianity as irrelevant, outdated, or (intellectually) exhausted.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 CATHOLIC STUDIES (Mark Graham)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-6/29/26)

This core course introduces students to the sources, traditions, practices, and thinkers that have shaped Catholic responses to God, and we will use resources within the field of Catholic theology to explore the broader thrust of Catholicism as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have developed over time in a range of cultural contexts.

THL 1000 Global Religious Experience (Kerry San Chirico)

M/T/W/TH 8:30-10:50AM (7/1/26-7/29/26)

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 (Kevin Hughes)

T 7:00-8:30PM

100% ONLINE – MIX of ASYNCHRONOUS & SYNCHRONOUS (7/1/26-7/29/26)

Our topics will not be unfamiliar to many of you: *What is religion? And what is theology? What difference might it make in the way we live and think? How do we see the world today, in science and culture, and how does that fit with Christian theology? What do Christians mean by "God"? What does it mean to call God the Creator? Who is Jesus and what difference does he make? What are the other fundamental elements of the Christian way of seeing? (Sin? Salvation? Incarnation? Trinity? Resurrection?) Does Christianity still have an intelligible place in the world today? What critical and prophetic perspective does Christian theology bring, both outwardly to issues in contemporary culture and inwardly to the blindness and failings of Christian institutions, traditions, and leaders? What about Christianity and other religions?* Our fundamental sources and guides for our study will be the Scriptures, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s short book *In the Beginning*, Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*, and James Alison's *Knowing Jesus*, but we will be supplementing that with many other sources. This course will be mostly asynchronous, with regular work participating in online discussion boards and journaling. Once a week we will meet online in the evening to touch base and tie up any loose threads.

THL 1000 FAITH, REASON, AND CULTURE (Margaret Mell)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (7/1/26-7/29/26)

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 responses to the fundamental human questions that underlie all religions and shape the human search for meaning and justice. 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 investigate 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/religious traditions.

THL 2490 THM: Marginality & Scripture (Peter Spitaler)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-7/29/26)

This course explores the intersection of marginality and biblical narratives. Through an examination of selected biblical passages, students will critically analyze the portrayal of marginalized groups, including women, children, foreigners, religious minorities, people with illness and disabilities, and socially and socioeconomically disadvantaged people. The course adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from postcolonial, liberationist, latino/a, feminist, and womanist studies, biblical studies, and theological perspectives. Students will engage with theoretical frameworks that illuminate the ways in which marginality is depicted, challenged, or reinforced within biblical narratives. Discussions will encompass the sociohistorical context in which these texts were written, considering how power dynamics, identity, and social structures influenced the representation of marginalized voices. Furthermore, students will explore contemporary interpretations and applications of these biblical themes, examining how marginalized communities have appropriated or contested biblical narratives for empowerment and social change. Through close reading, critical analysis, and class discussions, participants will develop a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between marginality and the biblical tradition, fostering a deeper awareness of the diverse voices present in these ancient texts. Thus, this course aims to equip students with the analytical tools necessary to engage thoughtfully with biblical literature and to critically reflect on its implications for contemporary issues of marginalization and social justice.

THL 3250 THM: Problem of Evil (Kevin Hughes)

W 7:00-8:30PM

100% ONLINE – MIX of ASYNCHRONOUS & SYNCHRONOUS (7/1/26-7/29/26)

Our aim in this course is not to "solve" the problem of evil. What we will do instead is explore several ways in which the question of evil has been explored, both from within the Christian tradition and with a critical outside eye toward that tradition. We will explore the question through careful engagement with literature, poetry, philosophy, and theology. This is not just a course "about" approaches to the question of evil. One way or another, the question of evil is built into the human experience, so the course aims to offer some clues and some tools from the Christian tradition to help students engage and navigate this question themselves, whether or not they consider themselves Christian. So it will be an opportunity for all students, of whatever creed or faith or religious conviction, or of no conviction at all, to engage this fundamental question for themselves, in conversation with

the resources we will engage together. This course will be mostly asynchronous, with regular work participating in online discussion boards and journaling. Once a week we will meet online in the evening to touch base and tie up any loose threads.

THL 4330 Christian Environmental Ethics (Mark Graham)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-6/29/26)

This course focuses on the ethical dimension of Christian environmentalism, especially recent Christian environmental ethics. Part of this course examines foundational elements of Christian environmental ethics through the work of seminal thinkers and/or religious leaders. Another part of this course examines practical environmental issues such as overpopulation, global climate change, environmental pollution, animal ethics, zoos, and hunting, etc. As an ethics course, the overarching goal of Christian environmental ethics is to enable students to make informed moral judgments about how to conduct their lives.

THL 4990 THM: Spirituality & Pop Culture (Margaret Mell)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-6/29/26)

This course provides an opportunity to explore the role spirituality plays in North American popular expressions such as music, television, film, art, sports, entertainment, or fashion. We will place spirituality into dialogue with popular culture in an effort to understand the complex relationship between the two. The course asks to what extent contemporary practices of Christian spirituality might better engage popular culture and to what extent these practices already reflect the values, patterns, and practices of popular culture. Thus, we will attempt to study spirituality and popular culture not as polar opposites but as complementary and/or competing sources from which people shape their senses of identity, belief, and meaning and through which they construe and configure their spiritual quest.

THL 4990 THM: Spirituality & Pop Culture (Margaret Mell)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (7/1/26-7/29/26)

This course provides an opportunity to explore the role spirituality plays in North American popular expressions such as music, television, film, art, sports, entertainment, or fashion. We will place spirituality into dialogue with popular culture to understand the complex relationship between the two. The course asks to what extent contemporary practices of Christian spirituality might better engage popular culture and to what extent these practices already reflect the values, patterns, and practices of popular culture. Thus, we will attempt to study spirituality and popular culture not as polar opposites but as complementary and/or competing sources from which people shape their senses of identity, belief, and meaning and through which they construe and configure their spiritual quest.

THL 5004 THM: Here She Is World! God on Stage (Brandon Ambrosino)

M/T/W/TH 1:30-3:50PM

100% ONLINE - SYNCHRONOUS

What does Theology have to do with Broadway? Quite a bit, actually. Just ask Elder Cunningham! With its spectacle and heart, the stage is the perfect venue for exploring — and even sending up — theological issues. This four-week course will be organized around four Broadway shows: Book of Mormon, Once On This Island, Spongebob the Musical, and Godspell. For their capstone, students will be asked to analyze the religious issues at play in one of these texts and create a dramaturgy project addressing these themes for the actors and audience.

THL 5005 THM: Middle Eastern Religions & Cultures (Yasemin Akis)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-6/29/26)

This four-week asynchronous course explores the religious traditions that have shaped the Middle East, from ancient civilizations to the present day. It examines the historical and cultural meanings of the "Middle East" as a region and the shared influences among its diverse religious communities.

Students will study key traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, tracing their historical development and their impact on culture, politics, and identity. Special attention will be given to the commonalities between the Abrahamic religions, including their theological concepts, sacred texts, and cultural expressions across different societies. Topics include the emergence of monotheism, the role of religion in empire-building, the spread of Islam, the Sunni-Shia divide, and the experiences of religious minorities. The course also considers how religious identity intersects with ethnicity, governance, and modern social movements.

Through readings, videos, and discussions, students will engage with primary and secondary sources at their own pace while meeting weekly deadlines. This flexible format allows for an in-depth exploration of the region's diverse religious heritage and its ongoing significance in contemporary society.

THL 5005 THM: India Through Religion and Film (Kerry San Chirico)

M/T/W/TH 1:30-3:50PM

100% ONLINE - SYNCHRONOUS (7/1/36-7/29/26)

This course examines Indian religion and culture through the medium of film. A necessarily interdisciplinary course for a place so vast and diverse, we will employ tools from religious studies, theology, philosophy, anthropology, literary studies, film and media studies, cultural studies, gender studies, Indology, and critical caste studies. Key topics include religious devotion (*bhakti*), Hindu nationalism's impact on Bollywood, Tollywood and other regional film industries, representations of inter-religious interactions in modern South Asia, depictions of minoritized communities, the role of film in South Asian diaspora identity formation, and portrayals of Hindu deities and epics. Throughout the course we use Hindu aesthetic (*rasa*, lit. "juice," "essence," "taste") theory to explicate the Indic emotional universe, reflected in particular paradigmatic South Asian films. By pairing ancient with modern, *desī* (of South Asia) with *videsī* (beyond South Asia) ways of seeing,

feeling, and experiencing, we come to better understand religion, film, and religion *through* film, the most conspicuous and widespread artform in contemporary South Asia.

THL 6000 THM: Toward a Greener Faith (Peter Spitaler)

100% ONLINE - ASYNCHRONOUS (6/1/26-6/29-26)

"Towards a Greener Faith" explores the bible-sustainability nexus from a diverse range of viewpoints: theological reflections drawn from biblical narratives, environmental science, ethics, and policy from both public and religious spheres. By integrating these diverse fields, the course seeks to develop a deep understanding of environmental stewardship as both a knowledge base and a moral imperative. Students are encouraged to translate this understanding into practical actions, advocating for sustainable practices within their personal lives, their communities, and at broader societal levels. Special focus will be given to the global-local relationship of sustainability initiatives. The course thus also incorporates sustainability views from non-Christian religious traditions. This broadened approach fosters a multicultural and interfaith dialogue on environmental care, emphasizing sustainability as a universally shared value.