

THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES DEPARTMENT
SPRING 2027

Courses as of 9/30/26 – Please continue to check Master Schedule for latest updates.

THEOLOGY UPPER-LEVEL COURSES

THL 2490: EMPIRE IN BIBLICAL HISTORY (Ethan Schwartz)

T/TH 10:00-11:15 AM

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 of how this international drama left a lasting mark on the Bible—including in ways that reverberate in Christianity and Judaism down to today.

Attribute: Core Theology

THL 2760: AUGUSTINE'S INFLUENCE & LEGACY (Jonathan Yates)

T/TH 1:00-2:15 PM

By now you have probably encountered Villanova's self-description as "one of two Catholic, Augustinian institutions of higher learning in the United States." For many Villanovans, this legacy is a very good thing that they are happy to perpetuate. But what does it mean exactly? How closely related to the lifestyle and thought of either Augustine or the Order of Saint Augustine (O.S.A.) does an institution or individual need to be to qualify as "Augustinian"? More specifically, how "Augustinian" are you now, and how "Augustinian" do you aspire to be? By reading and discussing Augustine in his own words, as well as some of what both his admirers and detractors have written in the 1600 years since his death, this course will give you the opportunity to answer these and other questions.

Following a review of the details of Augustine's life in its Late Antique context, this course will dive into some of Augustine's ideas to help you develop an understanding how Augustine saw himself, how others (both friends and enemies) have seen Augustine, and what he wanted others to believe and to experience as a result of his work as a Christian bishop and theologian.

Like (almost) everyone else's, Augustine's thinking about God, human nature, and the life of faith changed over time. And where he ended up on all counts proved to be almost as controversial as they were influential. Thus, a major focus for this course will be his thinking and writing from the years 411 to 430 CE, his so-called "Anti-Pelagian" Period. Although the disagreement began over the denial of Original (or inherited) Sin, it rather quickly escalated into an intense and wide-ranging debate over issues such as God's attributes, Christ's role in salvation, the inherent or natural capacities of the human being,

the definition and role of theological grace, the working of the human will, and the nature of human sexuality.

Many historians and students of Christian theology still classify these debates as unresolved. But all agree that the implications of the positions that Augustine assumed and defended in these decades remain central for a proper understanding of (Western) social and intellectual history as well as for how Westerners think and believe today.

Attribute: Core Theology

THL 2900: THEMES IN US CATHOLICISM: CATHOLICS AS POLITICAL INSIDERS

(Massimo Faggioli)

M/W 8:00-09:15 AM

This course will examine the growth of the Catholic Church in the history of the United States. The social and political views and behavior of US Catholics will be the primary focus. After a brief introduction on the diversity of roots in American Catholicism, the course will focus on the history of this community from the minority, immigrant Church of the 19th century to the Catholic Church in the USA as the single, largest Church in the country today. In the semester during the final weeks of the 2024 presidential campaign and election and with close attention to current developments, the course will help students develop an understanding of the historical developments of the role of Catholicism in the changing social landscape of United States, with a particular emphasis on the social and political engagement of Catholics in the period from the Civil War to today. This periodization includes the election of the second Catholic president of the USA, Joe Biden, in 2020, and of the relations between the USA and the Vatican during the pontificate of the first pope from the USA, Leo XIV.

Attribute: Core Theology, Peace & Justice

THL 3450 PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK (Tim Brunk)

T/TH 4:00-5:15 PM

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.

Attribute: Core Theology, Health, Humanities, Medical Arts, Peace & Justice

**THL 3790: BLACK MORAL IMAGINATION: LITERATURE, THEOLOGY, AND PUBLIC LIFE
(Naomi Washington Leaphart)**

T 6:15-8:55 PM

This course examines how Black literary and theological traditions cultivate moral imagination under conditions of social and political constraint. Through sustained engagement with writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Octavia Butler, and Toni Morrison, students will explore how narrative, memory, critique, longing, and speculative thought shape ethical vision and public life. Attending to themes of freedom, faith, power, and communal responsibility, the course invites students to consider how moral worlds are *formed*, and how they might be *transformed*.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 3790: THM: THEOLOGY & SCIENCE (TBD)

MWF 8:30-9:20 AM

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4330: CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS (Mark Graham)

T/TH 2:30-3:45 PM

Ethics seeks to answer questions such as, what makes a human being good or bad? What constitutes a life well-lived? What makes an action right or wrong? How should our political, economic, and social institutions be structured? and What responsibilities do we have to God, ourselves, family, friends, strangers, the poor and oppressed, animals, or the environment? As a course in Christian ethics, however, our paramount objective is to develop a Christian response to these questions. On a theoretical level, this entails attending to the reality of God, who God is, what God wants from us, and how we cooperate with God to help the universe unfold in the way God intends. It also requires attending to the God-human relationship, which situates the moral life in the context of an ongoing response to God who creates, who has become incarnate in the person of Jesus, and who desires an intimate, loving relationship with every person. On a foundational level, this entails attending to a broad array of concepts and sources which have become firmly embedded in the Christian ethical tradition (the Bible as a source of moral wisdom; the life and teachings of Jesus; natural law deliberation; the role and function of moral norms, etc.) as well as an examination of practical issues that are germane to being a Christian in the contemporary world.

Attributes: Core Theology, Peace & Justice

THL 4480: INTRODUCTION TO BIOMEDICAL ETHICS (Brett Wilmot)

MW 1:55-3:10 PM

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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Health, Humanities, Medical Arts

Prerequisites: ETH 2050 -or- PHI 2115

THL 4490: BLACK THEOLOGY AND BLACK POWER (Timmy Lucky)

MW 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).

Attributes: Core Theology, UNITAS Division I, Peace & Justice

THL 4490: THM: CHRISTIAN PEACEBUILDING (Ken Fleischer)

T/TH 8:30-9:45 AM

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: STEWARDSHIP AND BIBLE (Dan Griffin)

T/TH 8:30-9:45 AM

T/TH 10:00-11:15 AM

In the opening chapters of *On Christian Teaching* (I.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” (I.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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Sustainability

THL 4490: SOLIDARITY AND PEACEBUILDING IN EASTERN EUROPE (Gerald Beyer)

T/TH 2:30-3:45 PM

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.

Attributes: Core Theology, UNITAS Division 3, Peace & Justice

THL 4490: THM: ETHICS IN THE STYLE OF JESUS (Brandon Ambrosino)

1:55-3:10 PM

6:15-8:55 PM

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4550: THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION (Fr. Martin Laird)

T/TH 11:30-12:45 PM

How do we search for God who is already, as St. Augustine says, “closer to me than I am to myself”? This course is a sustained exploration of this very question. By examining ancient Christian texts on the cultivation of inner peace, in the face of whatever life brings our way, we will come to a deeper understanding of the roots of our own anxieties, self-doubt, self-loathing, depression, among other inner afflictions. But more than just this, we will learn that there is something practical to do about this suffering: the ancient art of the practice of contemplation.

Like Buddhism and Hinduism, Christianity likewise has a sophisticated tradition of cultivating interior stillness and peace by *drawing to stillness the inner noise that creates and sustains not only much of the suffering and anxiety within each of us but also maintains the sense that God is far away* (or doesn’t exist at all). This interior stillness facilitates the deepening of personal identity and ultimately the overcoming of the sense of separation from God and others. Union with God is not something we acquire but gradually come we realize *as always been the case*.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4990: SPORTS AND SPIRITUALITY (Edward Hastings)

T/TH 8:30-9:45 AM

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

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 4990: THM: SACRED BLACK WORLDS (Byron Wratee)

MW 4:45-6:00 PM

Attributes: Core Theology, Africana Studies

THL 5000: THM: BODY IN RELIGION (Stefanie Knauss)

T/TH 1:00-2:15 PM

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. Since we all are embodied beings, our bodily experience can serve as a common ground when encountering the religious body practices of others, and there will be times in this course when we will recognize these experiences in our own bodies. However, we will also see that the significance and

meaning given to these bodily experiences, or the practices through which they are elicited, vary widely and can appear strange. While all humans are bodies, those bodies are made to signify and to be experienced in different ways across contexts and times.

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 that 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, and how these are still formative in secular contexts. 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. As we discuss religious body practices and beliefs about bodies, we will also attend to how these practices or beliefs surface in or are challenged by contemporary issues related to embodiment, such as AI, controversies over trans identities or the problem of cultural appropriation of Indigenous medicine.

We will encounter the practices, beliefs, and traditions of a range of different cultures and religions, from Christianity to Hinduism 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, and history, in addition to theology and religious studies, in an interdisciplinary conversation.

In this course, we will study religion as something that is done by humans and thus inherently presupposes a relationship to the body, embodied practices, and beliefs about embodied human existence. As human practice, religion is also a part of its cultural context, and thus its expressions, practices and beliefs are shaped by and shape culture. This also means that religious ideas about bodies may impact mundane cultural practices such as food preparation, and that cultural norms or practices influence the role of the body in the religious context. Focusing on the body as a site of religious and cultural meaning making shows that the boundaries between the two are porous and blurry. Note that this course is seminar-style and discussion based, with lectures limited to a minimum. This means that your contributions, questions and insights are just as important as the questions or comments I might provide related to our readings and other material.

Attributes: Core Theology, Gender and Women's Studies

THL 5000: THM: INDIA THROUGH RELIGION AND FILM (Kerry San Chirico)

T/TH 2:30-3:45 PM

Attributes: Core Theology, UNITAS Division 2

THL 5003: THM: ANGELS AND DEMONS (Fr. Francis Caponi)

MW 4:45-6:00 PM

Until the modern era, the real existence of angels and demons was widely taken for

granted. They were regarded neither as symbolic expressions of the human psyche nor as literary devices, but as personal subjects who routinely acted in human history. In our own time, things are not so straightforward. True, angels are invoked at Mass and explored in theology; but they are also featured in movies and on television – often in ways that bear little resemblance to their Biblical and traditional portraits. In the pages of Scripture they rise up, fierce and fearsome, the sound of their wings beating “like the voice of God Almighty speaking” (Ezekiel 10:5). Yet, in religious art, they appear as tame, baby-faced cherubs. Demons, too, are found in revelation, where they are rebuked, silenced, and exorcized by Jesus Christ and his disciples; but in literature and entertainment, they have morphed into brooding, misunderstood misfits and humorous, likeable rogues.

With an emphasis on Scripture, the Magisterium of the Church, and the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, this course will follow the historical unfolding of Christian thought on angels and demons: their places in creation, their roles in salvation history, and their unique nature as purely spiritual intellects. Among our key questions are: What influence have other cultures had on Jewish and Christian thinking? What connections are there between angelology and demonology and Catholic reflection on grace, sin, revelation, the sacraments, and the final things? Can modern people raised with the scientific method, philosophical materialism, and a historical-critical approach to Scripture believe in angels and demons?

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5003: THM: HISPANICS IN THE US CATHOLIC CHURCH (Ruth Bolarte)

MW 1:55-3:10 PM

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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Latin American Studies

THL 5003: THM: LIBERATION THEOLOGY (Fr. Art Purcaro)

T/TH 8:30-9:45 AM

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 relationship with Augustinian spirituality and charism, 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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Latin American Studies, Peace & Justice

THL 5003: THOMAS MERTON (Edward Hastings)**T/TH 11:30-12:45 PM**

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.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5004: THM: STORYTELLING AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE (Tekoa Robinson)**T/TH 1:00-2:15 PM**

What’s your story? How does the writing, reflecting on, and sharing of our stories help us to better understand our lived theologies/spiritualities? How are these lived theologies/spiritualities related to our professed theologies and how might they be in tension with our professed theologies? This interdisciplinary course will help us to explore how our various lived theologies are reflected through the stories we tell ourselves and others, and how we interpret and respond to the stories that are being told to us by individuals, institutions, artists, and algorithms, etc. We will engage in creative writing, oral storytelling, theological reflection, and cultural analysis as we develop the spiritual practice of self-reflexive reflection in order to gain deeper self-knowledge in relation to the divine, others, and the wider culture and grow our awareness of the pervasive role that human spirituality plays in the ongoing development of culture in the United States.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 5005: THM: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST (Yasemin Akis)**MWF 12:50-1:40 PM**

Understanding the modern Middle East requires an appreciation of its diverse religious traditions and the central role religion has played in shaping the region from antiquity to today. This course examines religion as both a historical and contemporary force in Middle Eastern societies, beginning with pre-Islamic traditions such as Zoroastrianism, and moving through the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Students will analyze how religion has influenced conquests, kingdom-building, and empire formation, while also functioning as a cultural and social force that transcends faith boundaries. The course emphasizes religion as a key marker of identity and a factor in inter-communal contact and conflict, exploring themes such as Sunni–Shia divisions, the role of non-Muslim minorities, the rise of Sufi traditions in Anatolia, and the impact of religious practices on daily life. Contemporary issues—including secularism in Turkey, religious politics in Iran, and the challenges faced by Christian and other minority communities—are also considered.

By engaging with sacred texts, historical scholarship, media sources, and case studies, students will develop a nuanced perspective on the complexities of Middle Eastern religious life. Assignments, discussions, and presentations will encourage critical reflection on themes such as Orientalism, stereotypes, and the intersection of religion with ethnicity, politics, and culture.

Attributes: Core Theology, UNITAS Division 1, UNITAS Division 3

THL 5005: ORIENTALISM AND RELIGION (Yasemin Akis)

MWF 11:45-12:35 PM

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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Unitas Division 1, Unitas Division 3

THL 5005: AFRICAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY (Fidelis Olokunboro)

MWF 11:45-12:45 PM

MWF 12:50-1:40 PM

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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Africana Studies, Unitas Division 3

THL 6000: THM: BIBLE AND SUSTAINABILITY (Fr. John Abubakar)

T/TH 8:30-9:45 AM

In the opening chapters of *On Christian Teaching* (I.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” (I.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.

Attributes: Core Theology, Sustainability

THL 6000: SOUND, MUSIC, AND SPIRITUALITY (Brett Grainger)

T/TH 1:00-2:15 PM

From the calming drone of a Tibetan singing bowl to the pulsing rhythm of a hand drum, from gospel and blues to jazz, country, and New Age music, sound has long provided a powerful means of expressing and experiencing the sacred. Americans encounter these sounds not only in churches, temples, and concert halls but in schools, workplaces, medical centers, stores, and digital environments. While many Americans have trouble defining spirituality, most would say they know it when they hear it.

What makes music sound “religious” or “spiritual” to our ears? How do musicians use melody, rhythm, harmony, improvisation, and silence to communicate religious ideas and experiences? How do listeners learn to distinguish “sacred” sounds from “secular” ones? And how have particular musical forms come to signify religious, racial, and cultural identities—Black and white, eastern and western, traditional and modern?

This course approaches music and sound as forms of artistic expression through which individuals and communities imagine, encounter, and communicate religious experience. Drawing on examples from a range of religious traditions and musical genres—including gospel, blues, jazz, country, rock, New Age music, and others—we will develop skills for attentive listening and interpretation. Rather than treating music simply as an illustration of religious beliefs, we will ask how the formal and aesthetic qualities of sound themselves create meaning, evoke emotion, shape experience, and make claims about the sacred. We will also explore how technologies of musical production and consumption have transformed the experience of religious sound. Recording, amplification, electronic instruments such as the synthesizer, and the movement from vinyl records to digital streaming have altered not only how music circulates but what artists and listeners understand music to be. A recurrent theme will be the idea of sound as both a technology for altering consciousness or accessing “spirit” and a possible manifestation of spirit itself. Throughout, students will listen closely to musical performances and recordings, interpret them in their historical and cultural contexts, and consider how aesthetic choices give form to religious ideas and experiences. No prior background in music or musicology is required. Just bring your ears.

Attributes: Core Theology

THL 6001: THM: WHAT, THEN, IS RELIGION? (Hector Varela Rios)

T/TH 11:30-12:45 PM

Abstract: This course is an introduction to classical and contemporary theories of religion. Religion is an equivocal term, with a rich if conflicting history in the Western academy; indeed, scholars do not agree what the word ‘religion’ even means! In this undergraduate course, we will discuss classical theories of early religious scholars such as Hume, Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim, Weber, Otto, and James, paired with contemporary theorists such as Stark, Lincoln, Tweed, Boyer, Strenski, De León, Doniger, Armstrong, Daly, and Jones. For evidence, we will explore and evaluate religions both ‘recognized,’ such as Christianity, Yoruba/Santería, and/or Agnostic, and ‘debatable’ such as Jediism, Pastafarianism, and the NFL and FIFA, using the concepts/systems arising from the theorists discussed (for example, belief, experience, myth, magic, secular, science, power, society, borderland, and ritual).

Attributes: Core Theology