In this course, we will explore some of the assumptions, modes of reasoning, and literary styles of ancient and medieval Christian theology. This is neither a primer in Christian doctrine nor a historical survey of the church, but an engaged attempt to enter into the thought world of ancient and medieval Christianity. Our study will focus on three questions fundamental to Christian thought: Who am I? Who is God? How can I know or be united to God? These deceptively simple questions organize a number of problematics that run through Christian theological reflection: the order of the universe and the knowability of that order; the relationship between the body and the mind; the dynamics of human desire and its role in the spiritual life, and the ways in which women and men write about their experiences of the divine. We will trace these themes through hagiographies and writings of women (Thecla, Perpetua, Macrina, Mary of Egypt, and Hildegard of Bingen) and of men (Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine of Hippo, Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, Bonaventure, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, and John of the Cross).
Numerous theological voices addressing various forms of human oppression have contributed to birth the emergence of contemporary liberation theologies. Among other human experiences, these theologians have critiqued human oppression rooted in economic, gender, racial, physical ability, and cultural factors. The option for the “poor” in liberation theology has led Christian theologians to denounce these various forms of human oppression. In recent times, a new approach characterized by the irruption of the sexual subject into history has given birth to a new way of doing theology. This contemporary theological approach seeks to denounce sex-based oppression and defend the intrinsic dignity of the sexual subject. This course explores the history and development of contemporary liberating approaches to human sexuality, highlighting how “queer” thinkers engage, critique, and revision Christian theological traditions.
Midrash is a traditional Jewish way of doing theology by retelling and reinterpreting biblical stories. It was the most common form of Jewish theological writing in the time of Jesus and into the Middle Ages and is still practiced. In this class we will examine different theoretical approaches to Midrash and selected midrashic texts from both classical and contemporary authors, with particular attention to womanist, feminist and LGBQT uses of Midrash today.
The role of women in Islam has long been a source of perplexity and criticism in the eyes of the West. Students in this course will learn about gender and especially about women in Islam as articulated in normative religious and legal systems and as embodied during various historical periods in a range of Muslim societies. In addition to reading a number of the most important academic works in this field, we will consider anthropological and cultural materials including films and short stories that disclose Muslim practices and concepts of femininity, masculinity, and gender relations.

Course participants will critically consider current Western views of Muslim women as victims before reading translated Islamic texts on gender and examining evidence about women’s religious and social activities. These works include the Qur’an, legal texts, and biographies of women warriors, political leaders, religious scholars, and Sufi mystics. We will learn how contemporary apologists as well as Muslim feminist thinkers use such materials to justify their positions.

In terms of examining embodiment in Islam, attitudes toward the body—involving sexuality, purity, and female seclusion—will be viewed in comparative contexts. Muslim women’s activism and participation in contemporary religious and political movements worldwide, including in the United States, will be the final topic on the syllabus.
This course will explore the ways in which Christians (and, to some extent, persons from other religious traditions) have brought their faith to bear in political activism, the impact of faith-based organizing on social change, and the relation between community organizing and democratic citizenship. We will read some classic texts on community organizing techniques, both secular and faith-based, and consider how these inform one another, where they diverge, and in what ways the techniques they describe have been effective. We will look at the civil rights movement, struggles for a living wage, and the role of faith in contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rev. William Barber’s Poor People’s Movement, activists on various sides of the abortion debate/reproductive justice movement, and efforts to confront climate change.

Students should emerge from the course with a richer understanding of theological underpinnings of activism for social justice, greater knowledge of the history of such activism, and a better understanding of how their own political action can be most effective.

Readings are likely to include:

Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*
Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today*
D. A. Dirks, *To Offer Compassion: A History of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion*
Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*
Selected writings by Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Melissa Snarr, and others.
By studying the most common features of the Christian “Gnostic worldview” (including their Christologies, theologies and anthropologies), we will try to analyze the complexity and transformations of some early Christian reflections from around the end of the first century through the third. This will help us understand the reasons for the success and perceived threat of what was then called “The Heresy of Evil,” particularly because of its presumed dubious morality.

To accomplish this purpose we will read and discuss key passages from the so-called Gnostic Gospels (The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Mary [Magdalene], The [only recently published] Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of Truth) and from other Gnostic texts, focusing particularly on the nature and mission of the Savior and on the way(s) salvation was conceived and (believed to be) obtained.
In this course students will explore the composition, thematic development, and theologies of the first five books of the Bible--the Torah, or Pentateuch. Together these books comprise the most revered part of the Hebrew Bible, the foundational story of the Christian Old Testament. After reviewing the traditional documentary hypothesis and recent challenges to it, the course will proceed to a close reading and literary-critical analysis of significant portions of the Pentateuch and its dominant theological themes.

Two goals inform the approach taken in class. These are: (1) to develop a habit of close and precise reading, such that one can grasp in its main lines the original message of the Pentateuch and the impact it had; and (2) to encourage class members to articulate in a contemporary idiom what these scriptures have to “say” today and what theological questions emerge from the text. To achieve these goals, throughout the course emphasis will be on developing basic exegetical skills and learning what is involved in a critical reading of the text. In addition, class time each week will be dedicated to an explicit consideration of the material’s theological significance.

To succeed in accomplishing these objectives, it is essential that everyone come to class prepared, by having read the biblical texts assigned and done the required background reading. Much of the class time will be devoted to lecture, and here special attention should be given to the passages highlighted in the syllabus for treatment in class. Sometimes students will have a brief written assignment to help in their preparation for class. But nearly every week one or two members of the class will be responsible for leading the discussion of the material’s implications for theology (see below). N.B. Students should regularly check Sakai for course documents and news.
This course investigates the Acts of the Apostles, which tells vivid stories about the growing early Jesus movement. Organized around the topics of (1) spirits, (2) shipwrecks, and (3) saints, this seminar will engage in a close reading of Acts and compare it with three surrounding bodies of ancient literature: histories, novels, and non-canonical acts. In the first unit, we will consider the ways ancient Jewish, Christian, Greek, and Roman historians spoke about the past, through speechwriting and storytelling. We will also use Acts, with its numerous supernatural events, to interrogate the modern task of historiography—describing, or redescribing, the past—when the accounts we have about the past interweave the actions of human beings with those of cosmic forces, superhuman beings, or what we might call the numinous (here, “spirits”). The second unit will read Acts of the Apostles alongside ancient Greek novels, considering the motifs of mistaken identities, arduous journeys, and disasters at sea (“shipwrecks”). Tracking resemblances between novels and Acts will complicate our understanding of the genre of Acts and our ability to identify it as “history.” Finally, the course will conclude with a unit locating the canonical book of Acts among other accounts of apostolic deeds (e.g., Acts of Paul and Thecla, Acts of Peter, Acts of Thomas, etc.). Gender will receive special attention in our reading of these canonical and non-canonical apostolic accounts. We will trace the roles these texts play in valorizing certain apostolic figures, women and men, over time, and the ways that early Christian cults of the saints develop in light of their portrayals (“saints”). This course will familiarize students with the Acts of the Apostles and orient students to critical topics in the study of the Bible, early Christianity, and ancient religion more broadly.
This course will be conducted as a graduate seminar on the topic of heretical movements in Christian history with a specific focus on their antinomian tendencies. Starting with the division between grace and law that has allowed some contemporary interpreters to label Christianity as an internal antinomian Jewish movement, we will take a look at a variety of heretical movements and their orthodox critics in order to determine why antinomianism recurs cyclically throughout the history and doctrines of Christianity. Course topics will include, but are not limited to, Manicheanism, Arianism, Irenaeus’ Against Heresies, Gnosticism, the Cathars, Waldensians, medieval spiritual movements, the writings of particular medieval mystics, Johannes Agricola and Martin Luther’s antinomian theses, Sabbatianism and Jacob Frank, the case of Anne Hutchinson, modern pantheisms and various contemporary theorists of the antinomian, including mid-Twentieth Century counter-cultural movement.
Over the last decades, bioethics has become an almost independent sub-discipline of ethics that addresses the individual medical practices, the research and development of new technologies in multiple areas, the institutional health frameworks, and the policies that govern health-related and biomedical issues.

The goal of this course is to understand bioethics as a field of social ethics that requires transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research.

The course has two main parts: In the first part, students will familiarize themselves with the history of bioethics as it evolved after World War II; from there, we will discuss the main approaches to biomedical ethics, and their critique from feminist bioethics, Foucauldian ethics, and critical race studies. Finally, we will inquire how Catholic bioethics was conceived in the past, and how Catholic Social Bioethics may contribute to the ongoing discourses in a different way.

In the second part of the class, we will focus on one area of bioethics only, i.e. reproductive medicine and genetic testing (prenatal and preimplantation genetic diagnosis), and the new developments of germline gene editing. We will approach the topic from different perspectives: cultural anthropology and kinship relations; the sociology of parenthood, the sociology and ethics of abortion, embryo selection, and In Vitro Fertilization; the commodification of human body parts (eggs, sperms, tissue) over against the ethics of the “gift”; and the commercialization of human reproduction. We will study the history of eugenics and racism, and analyze enhancement technologies in relation to global health & justice. We will read some newer reports on gene editing, and discuss the way forward for the relation of science & society, and science & religion.

Students will work on independent projects in this area, and these projects will be presented in a (public) poster session at the end of the semester.
THEO 600 - 001 (7056): Dissertation Supervision
Dr. Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar

Students who have filed the dissertation paperwork and are currently writing should be enrolled in this course. You must be enrolled in some course every semester.

THEO 605 – 001 (7058): Master’s Study
Dr. Sandra Sullivan Dunbar

Master’s students should enroll in this course during the semester in which they plan to take their comprehensive exams

THEO 610 – 001 (7059): Doctoral Study
Dr. Sandra Sullivan Dunbar

Students who have completed their doctoral level course work and are studying for the written and oral comprehensive exams should be enrolled in this course. You must be enrolled in some course every semester.