

Theology 200 Level Course Descriptions

Spring 2024

THEO 204-001: Religious Ethics and Eco Crisis

Schuck, Michael

Monday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

This course explores integral responses to environmental problems from the standpoints of three world religions. An integral response is observant (scientific), moral (ethical), meaningful (spiritual), and practical (operational) because human life itself is a moral and meaningful journey of sensory observation and practical experience. An integral response to contemporary environmental problems is a fully human response. In this course, specific attention focuses on models of integral living that engage the contemporary ecological crisis from the standpoints of three different religions: Potawatomi (Native American) religion, Buddhism (Pure Land), and Roman Catholicism (Christian). Three contemporary writers from each of these religious traditions are studied: Robin Kimmerer (Potawatomi), Thich Nhat Hanh (Buddhism), and Pope Francis (Roman Catholicism). Their responses to the contemporary ecological crisis--and the religions they represent--are a rich resource for all human beings, whether members of a religion or not.

THEO 231-001, 231-002: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Lester, Mark Andrew

231-001: Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

231-002: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

This course introduces students to the Hebrew Bible, also known as the TaNaKh or the Christian Old Testament. The diverse texts in this collection tell the story of the Jewish people, offer compelling portraits of human love, violence, and loss, and ruminate on the deepest existential questions of life. But what kind of book is the Bible? How do we in the 21st century make sense of it? How have individuals and communities made sense of it in the over two-thousand years since it was compiled? The areas of focus will include: (1) genre; (2) background; (3) interpretation. **Genre:** What are the literary norms that shape these texts? How do these patterns shape our expectations as readers? **Background:** Where do these texts come from? How do they relate to history? Is it possible to discover the circumstances in which they were written? What about the cultures which shaped them? **Interpretation:** What assumptions do we (and others) bring to the Bible? How do these assumptions influence the meanings we find in the Biblical text? How have assumptions and approaches changed in the history of Biblical interpretation in Jewish, Christian, and contemporary critical scholarship?

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THEO 232-001, 232-002: New Testament

Andrejevs, Olegs

232-001: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:30AM – 12:20PM

232-002: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 12:35PM – 1:25PM

This course is designed to acquaint students with basic facts about the New Testament and introduce them to the fundamentals of contemporary New Testament research. We will survey the individual books of the New Testament, their compositional history, and the main questions surrounding their interpretation, following the mainstream conclusions reached over the last two centuries and currently held by the majority of New Testament specialists. The students can expect to gain a working knowledge of the basic points of discussion in contemporary New Testament studies; a proficiency in navigating the canonical New Testament; and an awareness of its key themes and passages.

THEO 232-003, 232-004: New Testament

O'Connell, Lauren Therese

232-003: Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

232-004: Tuesday, Thursday 1:00PM – 2:15PM

In this course, students will be introduced to the early Christian texts that came to be known as the New Testament. During the semester, students will study these texts from an academic perspective, paying special attention to the socio-historical contexts out of which they emerged and to their interpretation and use in the modern day. Utilizing a variety of methods of Biblical analysis (historical critical, narrative, feminist, womanist, African American, disability, queer, etc.) and exploring their application to current events, students will be expected to engage in questions of meaning-making as it pertains to the New Testament. The main goals of this course are for students to attain a fuller understanding of the content of the New Testament by examining its literary genres, historical contexts, and theological backgrounds and to better appreciate the diverse landscape of contemporary Biblical interpretation and application.

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THEO 267-001: Jesus Christ
Skinner, Christopher
Tuesday, Thursday 2:30PM – 3:45PM

Jesus is one of the most significant figures in human history. Especially in the western world, interpretations of his life, ministry, death, and ongoing significance have shaped societies, influenced world cultures, and determined various trajectories of religion, politics, and popular culture. The New Testament introduces us to a Jewish man named Jesus but not in a singular form. Instead, we meet various iterations of the man from Nazareth and these versions of Jesus become fodder for his reception throughout history. Against that backdrop, this course will serve as an examination of the various versions of Jesus that have appeared from the 1st century up to the present day. We will spend significant time considering the development of early Christian ideas about Jesus from the New Testament (1st century CE) up to the “orthodox” declarations of the ecumenical creeds (4th and 5th century CE). After the 5th century we find ourselves in a period characterized by Christian orthodoxy, but the variegated presentations of Jesus persist. With that in mind, we will also examine how Jesus has been portrayed in other religions, presented in art and film, leveraged in political discourse, and how he continues to influence various aspects of contemporary western culture. Once you have completed this course you will be better attuned to the forms in which Jesus has appeared and the ways in which he has been used, both in the ancient and modern worlds, for various religious, theological, artistic, political, and personal ends.

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THEO 276-001: Black World Religion

Steeken, John G

Monday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). In 1890 Afro-Caribbean scholar Edward Blyden adds, "If we live and move and have our being in Him, God also lives and moves and has His being in us," suggesting that each culture, race, and ethnic group reflects an image of the divine that no one else can duplicate. This course explores the revelatory manner in which the divine comes to unique presence and expression among African peoples throughout human history. It will examine: the religious experiences and faith traditions of Africa's ancient Nile valley civilizations, long recognized as cradling the world's spiritual and philosophical wisdom and as influencing the formative development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the religious experiences and faith traditions of indigenous Africans before and after European colonialism; the religious experiences and faith traditions of African descended peoples in the Americas, especially in the United States, during their centuries long liberation struggle to emancipate democracy for all by boldly resisting, countering, and overcoming slavery, legalized segregation, racial terrorism, and all other past and current forms of white supremacist ideology and abuse.

THEO 278-001: Religion & Gender

Diaz, Miguel H

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:45PM – 3:35PM

This course introduces students to some issues and topics surrounding the interaction between religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Beyond introducing students to the main arguments, debates, and points of view involving gendered and sexual ways of being human within religious traditions, emphasis will be placed on Christian theologies. Students will explore central theological constructions of gender and sexuality, underscoring feminist and queer approaches to this human experience.

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THEO 278-002: Religion & Gender
Schoenfeld, Devorah
Tuesday, Thursday 10:00AM – 11:15AM

What is God's gender? The gender of Christ? Did God make covenants with women? Why can women be ordained in some denominations but not others? This course will look at Biblical and theological questions around gender in Judaism and Christianity and how they relate to ongoing questions about women in religious leadership. This course counts towards the Core requirement in theology as a second-tier course and has no prerequisites.

THEO 281-002, 281-003: Christianity Through Time
Topic: Lost Women of the Catholic Imagination
Cain, Emily Rose
281-002: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:40PM – 2:30PM
281-003: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:45PM – 3:35PM

Many of the authentic voices of women within the Catholic Intellectual Tradition are lost to us, yet Late Ancient Christianity is filled with fictional stories of women in the roles of superheroes, martyrs, mothers, saints, philosophers, and as ordinary figures. Why might a male author choose to veil his theological message behind the guise of a feminine character? In this course, we will ask precisely that question as we interrogate the gendered assumptions within these texts of imaginary women. What avenues are opened or closed by these stories and their constructed voices? What assumptions are these authors making about gender, and what power does the text gain or lose with those assumptions? While the content of the course is primarily historical, we will also explore whether similar assumptions and rhetorical power exist in the Catholic Theological Imagination today relating to gender, religion, and power.

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THEO 281-004: Christianity Through Time
Dickinson, Colby
Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

This course will conduct a survey of the history of Christianity from the standpoint of marginalized voices within the Church as they have appeared down throughout the centuries in a variety of diverse contexts. To do this, we will examine a wide array of developments that took place within the Church, including various heresies and how they were dealt with, Gnosticism as a challenge to orthodoxy, antinomian ('anti-law') tendencies within Church structures, the reform impulses of early monasticism and various religious movements throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation and counter-Reformation as confrontations of the status quo, witchcraft and female mystics standing up to an all-male hierarchy, the rise of secularism in the modern period as a possible outcome of Christian thought itself and contextual (plural) theologies from the margins of the Church today that push back against a monolithic (singular) 'Theology' (e.g. feminist, black, liberation and queer theologies). Through learning about these movements, we will simultaneously uncover the heart of Christianity and its claims about humankind, while also paying attention to how each of these movements was, at its core, a response to the sovereignty of Christian claims, especially when viewed in their historical imperialist and colonialist settings.

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THEO 293-001: Christian Marriage

Murphy, Michael

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:20AM – 10:10AM

Marriage as a human institution has existed for a long time—so long that it belongs to the interesting category of “pre-history.” Its precise origins are lost to us; but, as the originating relationship that produces the family, marriage has always been understood as both a primary political unit and social cornerstone of human culture. The purpose of this course is to examine marriage as it exists today in light of both history and contemporary knowledge. Students will come to an understanding of contemporary Christian marriage and how it has evolved from antiquity through the late modern age. We will sort through a variety of interpretations of the meaning of marriage and, using critical reasoning, discern why and how these interpretations might contribute to current understandings of marriage and family—theologically, sociologically, and otherwise. Jesus’ first miracle was at a wedding; St. Paul interpreted marriage as a living symbol which displays and enacts the relationship between Christ and the Church. We are therefore called to examine marriage as a sacramental reality, an inroads to theological understanding, and a unique expression of human rationality. In addition, we will explore the anthropological role of marital vows (and the obligations of love that are expressed in these vows), delve into the mysteries of gender, and workshop healthy approaches to communication. Finally, we will analyze the religious, cultural, and legal debates about love and marriage as they are developing in contemporary culture.

THEO 295-001: Islam

Mozaffar, Omer Mansoor

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8:15AM – 9:05AM

This course will provide you with an introduction to the study of Islam and the Muslims. If you are not at all familiar with Islam, your success in this course should provide you with the skills you need for further study on Islam. If you are advanced in your study, your success in this course should provide you with coherence in the subject matter that you might not have previously appreciated.

To achieve this goal, we will explore the primary sources, being the Qur’an and the life of the prophet Muhammad. We will look at personal narratives and will look at the legacies of past Muslims and the ways their ideas and actions influence our lives today, with the whole course culminating in a study of Islam in America, today. In studying a tradition as large and old as Islam, we will use class discussion to discuss ideas, reading materials to learn concepts and facts, and watch movies to explore real and fictional lives.

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THEO 295-02W, 295-03W: Islam

Hermansen, Marcia K.

295-02W: Tuesday, Thursday 11:30AM – 12:45PM

295-03W: Tuesday, Thursday 1:00PM – 2:15PM

This course constitutes an introduction to the religion of Islam through the study of major religious ideas, movements, and figures prominent in the historical development of the tradition up to the present time. The course will move through three major phases: basic teachings of Islam (including the Qur'an and the role and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), the articulation of the classical tradition (including Islamic law and mysticism/Sufism), and contemporary developments. Discussion of major issues such as unity and diversity within Islam, the role of women, Islamic movements in the contemporary world, and Muslims in America will also be featured.

THEO 297-001, 297-002: Buddhism

Liston, Yarina

297-001: 1:40PM – 2:30PM

297-002: 2:45PM – 3:35PM

This course is designed to give the student a solid introduction to the Buddhist religious tradition. The base of our study will be an examination of Indian Buddhism with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. This will lead us into a further exploration of Buddhism as it develops beyond India into Southeast Asia, the Far East and Tibet. We will focus on the historical and philosophic perspectives while delving into the beliefs, practices and texts associated with Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism. The primary methods of instruction will be lecture and discussion, but the ideas will be further developed through weekly discussions, group presentations, as well as meditation exercises. The primary Religious Studies methods to be used in this course are *historical, philosophical, and psychological*.

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THEO 299-03E, 299-04E

Liston, Yarina

299-03E: Tuesday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

299-04E: Wednesday 4:15PM – 6:45PM

This course is designed to give the student an introduction to the religions of Asia. We will cover Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and Daoism. The base of our study will be a historical examination of the two countries India and China. This will lead us into a further exploration of various topics such as the social system, ethics, the relationship between gods and people, rituals and art. This course covers much material and will focus on comparisons within regions rather than between them. The primary methods of instruction will be lecture, group presentations and discussion as well as an exploration of culturally related physical activities such as yoga, tai chi and meditation. This course has been designated an Engaged Learning course and requires a research project on one of these religions.