

# Summer 2024 Theology Undergraduate Course Descriptions

*\*Please check the Master Schedule for accurate course day/times*

## **THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Mell)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11035**

As an integral part of the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum, this Foundation course involves students of every religion, culture, and worldview in examining the Augustinian vision of “understanding what we believe” (On Free Choice of the Will 1.4). Students investigate Christian and non-Christian religious practices, beliefs, and traditions that have developed over time in diverse cultural and religious contexts as they explore faith, reason, and culture in their many, textured relationships. The course may examine Catholicism theologically, historically, and culturally (Catholic Studies track); explore Christian theological traditions in their cultural contexts (Faith, Reason, and Culture track); or survey religiosity in general and global religions, including Christianity, in particular as well as their commonalities, differences, and cultural expressions (Global Religious Experience track). With these foci, the course introduces students to the sources and major thinkers that have shaped responses to the fundamental human questions that underlie all religions and shape the human search for meaning. Students engage religious truth claims, themes, values, and witness as resources for analyzing and critically evaluating contemporary cultural challenges. This particular course explores Christian theological traditions in their cultural contexts (Faith, Reason, and Culture track). Students investigate Christian truth-claims, themes, values, and witness as resources for analyzing and critically evaluating contemporary cultural challenges. 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 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture (Hughes)**

**100% Online Mix of Synchronous and Asynchronous – Tuesdays 7:00 – 8:30pm**

**CRN 11133**

## **THL 1000: Global Religious Experience (San Chirico)**

**M/T/W/TH 8:30-10:50am**

**CRN 11132**

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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **THL 1000: Catholic Studies (Graham)**

**Wednesday 4:00 – 6:30pm**

**CRN 11134**

This core course introduces you 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 2490: Bible in Popular Culture (Spitaler)**

**100% Online Asynchronous**

**CRN 11036**

This course explores the relationship between the Bible and contemporary popular culture. We will examine the presentation of biblical traditions in materials in printed, visual, auditory, and digital media, designed for everyday life—music, films, comic strips, advertisements, theme parks, television, visual arts, art, sports, entertainment, newspapers, and fashion. By analyzing biblical references found in these contexts, we will study the ways in which the Bible continues to influence our artistic, social, and political landscapes. We will consider how the Bible is used and the effect it has on the interpretation of the Bible itself. The course takes up this bible/culture dialogue against the wider background of the critical study of biblical traditions and popular culture and by exploring the nature of God, self, transcendence, morality, and the spiritual quest as those are construed and configured within popular culture. Thus, we will attempt to study biblical traditions and popular culture not as opposites, but as complementary and/or competing sources from which people shape their senses of identity, belief, spirituality, privilege, diversity, and meaning.

## **THL 2490: THM: The Bible in Music and Film (Spitaler)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11135**

In their works, artists use biblical stories, characters, themes, images, symbols, and phrases. These biblical motifs have been used in film and music since the beginning of the motion picture and the recording industries. Recognizing this trend, the course explores the connections between biblical motifs and select cultural productions. We will examine the influence of biblical motifs on music and on film and survey contemporary answers to a deceptively simple question: How have biblical characters, themes, images, and symbols been appropriated by filmmakers and musicians? Like large questions about the bible and cultural productions generally, it is notoriously difficult to answer in a way that satisfies everyone.

## **THL 3250: Problem of Evil (Hughes)**

**100% Online Mix of Synchronous & Asynchronous – Wednesday 7:00-8:30pm**

**CRN 11136**

## **THL 4330: Christian Environmental Ethics (Graham)**

**100% Online Mix of Synchronous & Asynchronous – Thursday 4:00-6:30pm**

**CRN 11137**

Seminal Christian thinkers have always been interested in “creation,” but until recently, theological work on the status of the natural world has mostly been confined to situating nature as a prop for the grander drama of the unfolding God-human relationship, in what’s come to be known as “salvation history.” In the late 1960s, however, Lynn White, Jr.’s infamous “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” reverberated like a bombshell throughout Christian theological circles, as he claimed that responsibility for environmental devastation in the western world legitimately ought to be laid on Christianity’s doorstep. His essay prompted a flurry of responses, and over the course of the next couple decades interest in environmental issues continued to grow to the point where Christian environmentalism became a staple topic in seminary and university theological curricula.

This course will focus 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 food and agriculture, biodiversity, global warming, environmental racism, children and pollution, automobile use, 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, and students will be expected throughout this course to share their considered moral judgments with their classmates.

## **THL 4990: Popular Spirituality (Mell)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11037**

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 5005: THM: Mid East Religions and Culture (Akis)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11375**

Understanding the modern Middle East is almost impossible without first developing an appreciation for the importance of its diverse religious traditions, and the role that religion has played in the development of the region since antiquity. This course examines the many ways that religion has functioned in Middle Eastern societies, beginning with ancient, pre-Islamic practices, such as the Zoroastrian religion of the Persian Empire, the development of Judaism among the ancient Israelites, and the spread of Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire.

During the semester, we will try to expand awareness and a better understanding of factors related to the wide ranges of diversity and experiences among people of the "Middle East". This course looks at the Middle East through the lens of religion. Understanding the modern Middle East is almost impossible without first developing an appreciation for the importance of its diverse religious traditions, and the role that religion has played in the development of the region since antiquity. Religion was used for conquest, creating kingdoms, and building empires in the region we now call the Middle East, and beyond. Religion has been and remains a powerful force in the Middle East, not just for members of one religious' community, but as a cultural influence affecting everyone.

## **THL 6000: THM: Theology and Popular Culture (Spitler)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11039**

This course is designed to provide an opportunity for students to explore the role theology and religion play in creating and maintaining North American culture through popular cultural expressions such as music, television, film, art, sports, entertainment, or fashion. We will place theology and religion into dialogue with popular culture to understand the complex relationship between the two. The course takes up this dialogue against the wider background of the critical study of theology/religion and popular culture and by exploring the nature of God, self, transcendence, morality, and the spiritual quest as those are construed and configured within popular culture. The course asks to what extent contemporary expressions of Christian worship and spirituality might better engage popular culture and to what extent these expressions already reflect the values, patterns, and practices of popular culture. Thus, we will attempt to study theology, religion and popular culture not as polar opposites, but as complementary and/or competing sources from which people shape their senses of identity, belief, spirituality, privilege, diversity and inclusion, and meaning.

## **THL 5004: THM: Bible and Marginality (Spitaler)**

**100% Asynchronous**

**CRN 11038**

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, latine, 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.