

Theology Department Undergraduate Majors and Minors Courses
Loyola University Chicago
Spring 2025

THEO 280 – 02E: Religion and Interdisciplinary Studies

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 – 11:15 am

Instructor: Mark Lester, mlester2@luc.edu

Engaged Learning – required for THEO and RS Interdisciplinary major tracks.

What makes us human? To what end is human labor directed? How do we interact with the divine realm? This class explores the relationship of myth and ritual in Ancient West Asia and the Hebrew Bible. Individual units are structured around the great literary works of ancient Mesopotamia and Canaan (Gilgamesh, Atrahasis, Enuma Elish, Baal Cycle, Song of Erra and Ishum) and the monumental compositions of the Hebrew Bible (the Priestly Source and the Deuteronomic Composition). Throughout the course, students will be exposed to fundamental methods in the study of religion—particularly ancient religion—including the study of myth and ritual, approaches to orality and textuality, ancient poetics, narratology, and anthropological approaches to the study of ritual. More than anything, however, this class invites us to approach ancient literature on its own terms and to reflect on the timeless questions at the heart of ancient epic, myth, and ritual.

THEO 302 – 001: Wis. Lit. and the Psalms: Suffering and the Justice of God

THEO 373 – 001: Theology Capstone

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30 am – 12:45 pm

Instructor, Robert A. DiVito, rdivito@luc.edu

Course Description: The Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and select psalms serve in this course as classic loci for taking up the questions that swirl around the human experience of suffering, particularly the suffering of the innocent. Like nothing else suffering can challenge all attempts at meaning in life; and so it is not surprising that religious belief both plays a key role in supporting human purpose in the face of suffering and itself is liable to the crises in meaning that same suffering entails. In part that is because the correlation between sin and punishment surfaced early in the religious imagination as a way to explain the phenomenon of suffering. However, what if the sin could not be discovered or the punishment seemed disproportionate to the offense? “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right” (Gen 18:25)?

It is a question especially prominent in a number of the books contained in the third major division of the traditional Hebrew Bible (Tanak), i.e., the “Writings.” The books in question are the so-called Wisdom Books of the Bible (Job, Proverbs, Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes, etc.) as well as the Psalter. In the course of their study the student will have the opportunity to read some of the most profound reflections on the question human suffering poses to belief in God’s justice, reflections that are the product of ancient sages wrestling with the issues that emerge in a shockingly honest way.

Within the Christian canon the primary biblical books up for our consideration (aside from the Psalter) are: Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), the Wisdom of ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), and the Wisdom of Solomon. Job, of course, looms as the most important of these books and deserves extensive discussion. In addition, short wisdom texts from ancient Mesopotamia are introduced:

“The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer: I will Praise the Lord of Wisdom” and “The Babylonian Theodicy.” We will see some of the variety of answers to the questions posed by suffering, including specific developments such as the emergence of belief in an afterlife. To deepen our reading and thinking, a number of contemporary philosophical, theological, sociological, and literary treatments that have as their subject matter our problematic will also be read. These include Peter L. Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy*, a classic text in sociology, the play *J.B.* by Archibald MacLeish, Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s “Rebellion” (*The Brothers Karamazov*), and selections from Paul Ricoeur, G.K. Chesterton, Rudolph Otto, and Karl Rahner, among others.

THEO 318/460 – 001, History of Christian Thought II: Reformation to the Modern Church

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30 – 3:45 pm

Prof. Colby Dickinson, cdickinson1@luc.edu

This course is a historical-theological survey of major Christian thinkers and theologies throughout Reformation, modern and contemporary periods. The aim of the course is to enable students to become conversant with particular trajectories of Christian thought during these eras, including, but by no means limited to: justification and grace in the Reformation, the role of reason and in the influence of the Enlightenment on theology, the role of experience in the modern world, and the significance of contextual (e.g. feminist, liberation, black, etc.) theologies, to name just a few themes. We will pay attention to major theological issues and themes as they have presented themselves within certain historical contexts and as they appear in the primary texts we will be studying. The structure of the course will include lectures (most up front, to provide historical context), close collaborative readings of selected texts and group discussions.

Course texts

William C. Placher and Derek R. Nelson, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Volume 2: From the Reformation to the Present*, Rev. ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017. ISBN 978-0664239343

Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, Vol. III, Rev. ed., Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987. ISBN 978-0687171842

THEO 342/478 – 001: Perspectives on Life & Death

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 – 2:15 pm

Instructor: Aana Vigen, avigen@luc.edu

Mortality and vulnerability are an inescapable part of being human. In fact, they are integral dimensions of all life on earth. Given this reality, what constitutes a “good life” and a “good death”? What does it mean to value and care for life—human and not? What might Christian social ethics contribute to bioethics? This seminar will discuss a range of medical topics (e.g., prenatal care & birth, ARTs, reproductive genetic testing, abortion, care for the chronically ill, definitions of death, euthanasia, end-of-life care options, physician-assisted suicide) within these larger questions. It will also attend to the socio-economic contexts in which these topics are situated. It may also explore what it means to value life in terms of global and ecological health needs/realities.

This course is a combined advanced undergraduate and graduate seminar. It is open to both upper-level undergraduates and to graduate students. Upper level undergraduate and graduate students in Bioethics, SES and WSGS are especially invited to join this class and conversation. Students do not need to be Theology or Religious Studies Majors/Minors, but they do need a strong interest in studying Christian theological sources/figures/themes as they relate to the above subject matter. The emphasis is on collaborative learning. While the professor will make presentations throughout the course, students are responsible for being prepared to participate actively in all class sessions.

THEO 350 / LITR280: Topics in Islam: Masterpieces of World Literature: Sufi Literature

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 9:20 – 10:10 am

Instructor: Omer Mozaffar

Writing Intensive

In this class we will survey the writings of the Sufis. The Sufis represent a variety of approaches to Islam, most commonly within the genre of "Spirituality." In the process of studying these works, we will also construct concepts of Islamic Spirituality within these traditions. As this is a Writing Intensive course, we will also learn some basic rules for effective writing.