

From: Jorge A. Aquino, Dept. of Theology & Religious Studies
To: Mark Meritt, COAS Assessment
Re: Annual THRS Program Assessment (2022-2023) — PLO #2
Date: Dec. 18, 2023

This annual assessment exercise from our department closes the circle on our overall program assessment over several years. This year we assess student work and our curriculum for Program Learning Outcome #2. That PLO reads as follows:

Articulate the particularities of various faith traditions (including creedal vision, moral teachings, historical context, social expression, and key rites and symbols) in the context of the plurality of world religious traditions, as encouraged by Vatican II's stance on the Catholic Church's relationship with other faiths.

Commentary. Re-reading PLO #2, it is striking how its language dates our curriculum. It resounds with the mission that a theology and religious studies department in a progressive Catholic university might have taken up a generation ago, perhaps even as far back as the late 1960s. The language of a “plurality of world religious traditions” shows its late-modern Catholic provenance, in the age of the Second Vatican Council, particularly Pope Paul VI’s interreligious declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (1965). Likewise, the focus on “faith traditions” “creedal vision ... and key rites and symbols,” shows the religious comparativism so characteristic of the period between 1960 and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

If we were to characterize THRS’s curriculum today as *post-modern*, it would be so in several senses. First, in many respects THRS has become a post-Catholic department. Probably half our department today can be described as scholars in the academic study of religion (sociology and anthropology of religion, with backgrounds and research interests in Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism), with the other half are scholars in some sort of theological study (scriptural studies, Catholic-Christian spirituality, systematic theology, theological ethics). While there are a number of Catholic-identified scholars on our faculty — both FTF and contingent faculty — the homogeneity of Catholicism itself is fractured by differences in geographical, national, and cultural perspectives, particularly as those differentiate First World from Third World Catholic identities. Thus, while Catholics may speak of “one Catholic and apostolic Church,” in fact there are many Catholicisms lived and represented, both in this department and in the real world on and off USF’s campus.

Secondly, Roman Catholicism throughout the world is passing through a decisive phase in its history — one that can be described as an even more radical secularization of its culture than took place in the four centuries between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). That radical secularization has been accelerated by a moral crisis around several topics concerning the body, the family, sex, sexualities, and gender identifications. The crisis revolves around deep resistances in the Roman magisterium to update, with a 21st century *aggiornamento* of Catholic teaching on those themes — especially questions about the membership and participation of queer Catholics, their ordination and that of women, questions about married priests, as well as manifold questions on sexual practice (marriage, monogamy, family relations, masturbation, etc.).¹ In the decades since Vatican II, the

1. This report is being drafted in the days right after Pope Francis released a new declaration on the nature of “blessings” in Catholic liturgical and sacramental culture — Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans: On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings* ([Dec. 18, 2023](#)). The declaration that may open

institutional Catholic Church has suffered a growing crisis of its secular identity, and entire generations who were raised Catholic are voting with their feet — leaving their Catholic churches, or marching away from Christianity or religion altogether. These trends of Catholic *exodus* are exacerbated by the moral stench of half a century of scandal that has attended the institutional Church's mismanagement of a widespread clergy sexual-abuse crisis. It is difficult to find places in the Church — even in a progressive Catholic universities like USF — where a critical mass of Catholic identity can be harnessed to orient a coherent vision of education in the Jesuit-Catholic tradition as we slouch toward the middle of the 21st century. This fact we see reflected in our very low counts for Majors and Minors in THRS in recent years.

All of these elements inform our reading of the data we culled from our 2022-2023 teaching. One overarching observation from this report is how much THRS's mission is about service to the university's core curriculum, and only minimally as a department that services Majors and Minors. Secondly, the small portion of our faculty that can be said to teach theological studies are so globally and regionally far-flung that the department as a whole cannot be said to offer a focused program of study toward a baccalaureate degree in Catholic Theology. In fact, given constraints on class sizes and required minimum-enrollments, THRS is hardly able to offer more than one or two courses annually that would cater primarily to Majors and Minors. The result is that students who do major in THRS study do their work almost entirely in courses that are geared to fulfill a Core requirement for non-majors. Such courses are often too large for instructors to focus on more specialized learning that Majors might hope for. There is also nearly no opportunity for THRS Majors and Minors to have more than one or two courses that represent an authentic cohort experience for them *vis a vis* other THRS students.

The Data. One course more than any other in 2022-2023 had a concentration of THRS Majors and Minors sufficient to show a critical mass of engagement in the *materia* of PLO #2 — our **THRS 101: Methods and Theories in Theology & Religious Studies**. This is a required course for Majors and Minors, giving them some theoretical rudiments for study in our field, and introducing them to our faculty and their (literally) worldwide research interests. In Fall 2022, THRS 101 enrolled 13 students. The syllabus for that course is attached as Appendix #1. The material moved between Christian and Catholic theological perspectives and presenters, to those of other faiths and/or other disciplinary backgrounds (i.e. non-theological). Most of the active members of the department, plus a couple of outside experts, participated as guest presenters in the course. Students began by writing a religious autobiography, considering their religions or non-religious upbringings. Maybe half the students had some background in Catholic or Christian churches — either as churchgoers, in church-based religious education programs, or whole-hog Catholic or Christian schooling. The rest either grew up in some non-Christian religious tradition, or were raised atheist or without any sort of religion. As the main instructor, I had a sense that the more exposure to Catholicism or Christianity a student had, the most likely they were to feel substantial ambivalence about their tradition, and about religion in general. This is consistent across other courses I teach, with THRS students as well as non-THRS students. We

the way for Roman Catholic churches to bless same-sex unions without simultaneously conferring on them the sacramental status of a marriage. The declaration is being widely publicized as a step forward in the Church's opening to non-heterosexual Catholics. Yet a close read of the document shows the same ambivalence and resistance to the normalization of queer Catholics within the life of the Church. In fact, same-sex unions gain no formal recognition and maintain their second-class (if not *no-class*) status.

have seen a lot of literature in recent years about the great de-churching that has been going on, especially in the First World. Catholic and Protestant denominations are seeing a mass exodus, especially among the younger generations who would otherwise represent the future socialization of Christianity. As a theologian, I ascribe some of this abandonment to matters of ill reputation in Christian confessions.

But in addition Christian theologians have long noted the epistemological force of what is often called *postmodernity*, which in sum represents a massive shift in the human sense of reality, moving it from the old metaphysical sense of transcendence to something perhaps more materialistic, naturalistic, or cultural. Our faculty is not immune from these cultural shifts whatsoever. In fact, the sorts of pedagogical shifts that might be categorized under this loose rubric of *postmodernity* have already long been reflected in the THRS curriculum. Everyone on the faculty, almost without exception, teaches religion and theology in more or less interdisciplinary and intercultural style, especially crossing borders between disciplines in our sourcing of methods.

To read between the syllabus (Appendix #1) and the end-of-term seminar roster of student presentations, the Methods seminar shows how this postmodern interdisciplinarity worked in practice. That student-presentation exercise called for students to offer an article for our collective review, with an abstract stating why they chose that piece, and proposing a class-wide seminar discussion therefrom. Based on those proposals I pulled together a seminar schedule, impaneling students who seemed to share common interests. Ergo, one panel considered the religious interpretation of colonialism and capitalism; another took up theological questions around climate change; a third considered queer theologies in Christianity, Hinduism, and Native American indigenous religions. In these cases students mixed the analysis of questions stemming from religious traditions and identities with consideration of secular contexts and consequences. In all events these students were guided by, and modeled, the interdisciplinarity and inter-religious interests of the faculty who presented in the course. The result was a collective structure of learning that went far beyond the rote sort of comparativism implied in the language of PLO #2, of “faith traditions” imagined as more or less homogeneous, with consistent creeds, rites and symbols, as though one “religion” could be singularly “compared” to its brethren. If, as mentioned above, there are many Catholicisms, not just one, there are also many Judaisms, many Hinduisms, many Islams, many Buddhisms. The multiplicity of these religious movements is itself a product of the intricate and infinite ways they are ensconced in their diverse secular cultures. Of course, today no one studies religion(s) without heavy sourcing and reference to the broader cultural worlds they inhabit.

All this is preface to the suggestion — noting the departure of our curriculum from the outdated frame of our program outcomes — that it is time for an update. (As a member of the University’s Task Force to Revise the Core Curriculum, it seems the time has arrived for us — and other programs — to take up this updating.)

I add the final “Seminar Map” we used for Methods in THRS, representing the panel proposals from our students, as illustrative of these points (Appendix #2). Lastly, I enclose a zip folder (Appendix #3) with student work on the final paper, and the prompt for that assignment. The prompt listed the four PLOs for THRS, and instructed students to

write an essay in which you discuss how your learning in this course fulfilled any two of the aforementioned PLOs. As you work out your essay, please cite from the

materials we reviewed, or other materials you consulted or studied in pursuit of your studies in this class. But also feel free to integrate your own real-world studies — from whatever adjacent fields or auxiliary disciplines you work in.

Of the 13 students in the class, six arrayed their final essays in some measure on outcome #2. The grid to the right represents the outcomes pursued in the paper; the score merely signified my sense of how explicitly and/or thoroughly PLO #2 was addressed. I am not sure how meaningful such a score can be, given the wide range of themes the students chose to reflect on. But one insight that emerges from reading all the papers is

Student	PLOs	Score (1 - 5)
██████	1, 2	5
██████	2, 4	5
██████	2, 3, 4	4
██████	2, 3	5
██████████	2, 3	4
██████	2, 3	5

illuminating, and perhaps informative as to reflection on reconstructing THRS Core and Program outcomes: It seems that many students approach and practice religion and theology not from inside confessional or ecclesial perspectives, but rather from the “outside,” considering real-world problems as presenting the key questions to which theologies or religious faiths have various responses. Today’s problems have to do with gender and sexual identities; with ethno-racial relations and identifications; with challenges of poverty, class, war and genocide; and with ecological crisis. Students come at religion from the standpoint of *those issues*, rather than coming to study religion for religion’s sake.

All these comments and observations reflect the new situation of our department vis a vis the old PLOs. In the Vatican II era, the Roman Catholic Church was looking outward to the world, in a new spirit of engagement and dialog that has now blossomed perhaps beyond anyone’s expectations. So it would appear that our catalog has up and left our Vatican II-era outcomes in the dust.

Data From Other THRS Courses. Generally the colleagues who supplied data for this report saw at most one or two THRS Majors during the course of the year. So the data is limited, and its interpretation more or less anecdotal and speculative.

THRS 200: Christian Feminist Theology. Offered both in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023, this course surveys feminist Christian theologies. Its strongest intersections with theology are intercultural. The course considers gender and sexuality in the perspectives of many cultures, from a critical focus on patriarchy in theology and its axial role in the cultural formations of the West. The instructor enclosed exercises from both offerings of the course. In each case, the “supplemental” document purports to describe the weekly student worksheet assignment as presented. As with the other courses discussed here, the analysis of religion unfolds from the standpoint of a real-world problem or concatenation of problems (quoting the Fall 2022 “supplemental” document):

Ecofeminist theology is a theory that considers the historical denial of paganism (through witch burnings) and indigenous ways of knowing and being (through genocide) as underlying our current climate crisis. Paganism and indigenous traditions are traditions whose “faith” aligns with building material relationships with the natural world. This assignment was built to help students get a sense how indigeneity and the wisdom of women have been the building blocks of other faith traditions. In addition, faith, in these traditions, is embodied in relationships and practices. This assignment seeks to help students understand faith as materiality.

This exercise sets its comparison points between religious traditions — Western Christianity *vis a vis* indigenous and pagan religious traditions. “Religion” as here presented does not have a life that is autonomous or “foundational,” but rather is read growing out of the cultural perspective. And in the case of pagan or indigenous religions, the background of secularity implied in the PLO #2 framing of interreligious encounter becomes obscured almost to the vanishing point. In this intercultural mix, the foundational crisis (“our current climate crisis”) is read as a cultural problem rooted in Western theo-epistemology — theological and cultural patriarchy. Those roots are brought into relief by the very concrete intercultural comparativism with pagan and indigenous cultural traditions. (Materials from THRS 200, both Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 terms, are attached as Appendix #4.)

THRS 236: Refugees, Justice & Ethics. This course, under the Swig Program for Jewish Studies and Social Justice, is a community-engaged learning course that places students in different social work or social justice organizations as part of their learning. The course placed students in organizations serving refugees and migrants, “steeped in diverse faith traditions.” The instructor in that course forwarded a single two-paragraph discussion post from a Catholic THRS Major who was placed in two organizations: one an Islamic center and the other an ecumenical Christian youth organization. More or less in the manner observed above, the real-world question tended to drive the recourse to religions or theology in this student’s work, though the writing showed little concrete discussion of the religious faith tenets or practices, or any of the particularities, of Islam or the Christianities the student encountered (see Appendix #5).

THRS 367: Intro to Buddhism. This course offers a generic introduction to Buddhism. It dwells on rudimentary perspectives and originary texts and cultures of global Buddhisms. However there is also an intercultural dimension to the course with its distinctions between “heritage” Buddhists versus converts in America. This is a substantial theme for Buddhism in the U.S., with its enormous cultural portations from Asia. The instructor offered a final exam questionnaire and work from a THRS Major, attached herein as Appendix #6.

THRS 373: Introduction to Islam. The instructor of this introduction to Islam course presented work from two students — one Major and one Minor: questions and responses from a midterm quiz. The material and student responses make no reference to any religion other than Islam, nor do they make reference to any particular cultural context — other than the originary historical context of Islam, referencing the narratives about the Qur’an, and the Prophet Muhammad. Materials therefrom are attached as Appendix #7.

THRS 470: Contemporary Moral Issues. This course focuses on the preeminent moral condition of the 21st century, the deadly planetary creep of climate change. The instructor from the Spring 2023 version of this course presented a student’s final paper — on the commodification of the Andean hallucinogen, Ayahuasca, and its environmental impacts from drug tourism and cultural displacement in the Andes and Central America. Posing the problem of the neo-colonial exploitation of an ancient indigenous ritual from the Andes, the paper shows the intercultural and interdisciplinary approach to religion characteristic of THRS today — showing a mission that has grown and matured far beyond the dated frames of our PLOs. The material from this course is attached as Appendix #8.

Conclusions. Reviewing student work in fulfillment of PLO #2, it becomes clear how much USF’s curriculum in THRS has evolved — breaking decisively with the originary vision of the program as adopted many years ago. It is clear that this represents no sort of drift, but in fact

show a very decided *evolution* in our curriculum — one growing in tandem with the development of our faculty and its research interests. All this suggests that the time has come for the department — in tandem with the university's broad revisioning of its Core Curriculum — to restate our mission as a program. ■

Appendix 1

- Syllabus for THRS 101 — Methods in Theology & Religious Studies, Fall 2022

METHODS & THEORIES IN THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES



Instructor: Jorge A. Aquino, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Dept. of Theology & Religious Studies

Class Time/Place: T/R 9:55 - 11:40 a.m., Education Building, 102

Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. | or by appointment

Email: jaaquino@usfca.edu

Faculty Office: Kalmanovitz 135 | THRS Dept. Mailbox: Kalmanovitz 152

THIS COURSE FULFILLS THE 'METHODS' REQUIREMENT FOR
MAJORS AND MINORS IN THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

This class serves as an introduction and first apprenticeship, for THRS majors and minors (and other interested participants), in the themes, practices, and disciplines of theology and religious studies. All of these terms should be understood in the *plural*: Religion has no single or simple definition — and indeed, many contradictory ones (as we will see in week 1). Likewise, “theology” is no single *thing*. Broadly speaking, theology the study of the discourse — and discursive communities — in people oriented by faith in a God/god/G*d, in the so-called *theistic* religions.¹ In its etymology, *theology* names the *logos* or *logic* of how people understand and talk about *God*. Theology is — *and studies* — *God-talk*. Since faith in God has given many names

1. Rosemary P. Carbine, “Theism / Theistic,” in *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and James B. Nickoloff (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 1367.

for the divine, theology as an intellectual project cuts across the many confessions of world Christianity and multiple religions.

Class will mostly be structured as a roundtable seminar — which means working by reading, research, conversation, and writing. You will have wide leeway during the course to pursue your own interests and topics, and to do work that allows you to explore your own spiritual / inner life. My role will be as a seminar organizer and facilitator, and as a writers-workshop coordinator. I designed the course:

- To situate you in the fields of theology and religious studies in terms of your own personal story, history, biography, and interests. To that end the first assignment will be an **autobiographical reflection paper**, in which you reflect on your upbringing and cultural formation — in religion (or not!), but also how that mixed with your ethno-racial, class, gender, or sexual identifications (straight / queer / trans ...), etc.
- To offer you a **smorgasbord of themes and methods** in our fields, showing the enduring importance of *religion* as a multifaceted and universal cultural practice.
- To **introduce you to our faculty** by having them present their work and perspectives in a formal setting.
- To have you do **writing that sharpens your vocation** either to the major or to the minor, in some corner of theology and/or religious studies.
 - If you are a major, we will consult do group workshopping and individual consultation, to fortify your research skills, and encourage sustained work that allows you to begin conceiving a Capstone / Thesis project for your senior year. (You will meet peers who have been through the process and will talk about their formation in our department, and their Capstones.)
 - If you are a minor, this course will allow you to target a project that involves research or sustained reflection — either on a theme involving personal or institutional faith, or perhaps something on the socio-dynamics of religion and theology. The form of this work will be flexible, but developed and assessed principally in short papers you will write semi-monthly throughout the course.

Expectations, Major Assignments, & Grading

Religious Reflection via Autobiography (15%). Most scholars who become committed in our fields did so because life had taught them of the importance (cultural, spiritual, political ...) of religion. You will begin grasping the importance of religion by writing an auto-biographical reflection essay (8-20 pages) on your own formation as a religious subject. Reflect on the religious upbringing you had (or didn't have — if you are atheist, agnostic, or "none"), and take positions on the sorts of things you were taught. Tell us the story of your struggle to understand, integrate, or resist the claims about religion that you were given in your family, in school, with your friends, and in the larger society. In working out this assignment we will hold multiple class discussions in which you will share with peers about your religious formation. With this autobiographical foundation in place, you can begin to articulate concrete, researchable questions in the scholarship of theology and/or religious studies. In the preparation of this writing:

- Discuss your religious **upbringing**. Narrate stories, memoirs, and vignettes about:
 - Your general religious upbringing — its perspectives, ideas, sources of authority, texts, institutions and practices, including your commitment to (or dissent from) its tenets

- The religious tradition(s) your parents were raised in, and how that seemed to affect how they raised you
- Life in the institutions and schools in which you received religious education (including education touching on religion in public or secular venues)
- What you learned growing up — and / or believe today — about transcendence, the divine, God (G*d), the cosmos, religious institutions, and their relation to nature and society
- What your religious upbringing prescribed for your identity — understood in terms of gender, ethno-racial identity, sexuality, and class.
- **Write a brief on your decision to major / minor in THRS.** Pivoting from the discussion of your religious upbringing, discuss here your motives, interests, researches, and goals as a student doing work in theology and religious studies. Consider your engagement particularly in terms of any / all of the typical ways students are drawn to the study of religion:
 - **Personal existential questions:** Describe any compelling personal questions you may have about life that you work out through reading and thinking in religion or theology.
 - **Ethico-moral questions about societies, cultures, and human relations:** Discuss whether / how your work in THRS relates to your thinking about social relations and politics.
 - **Intellectual or scholarly questions:** Discuss whether / how your interests in THRS spin on less personal and more strictly intellectual or academic questions or investigations. What are those questions / interests?

It might be helpful and relevant to discuss particular assignments, readings, or writings you have undertaken in prior THRS studies (here or before university), and how those fulfilled your search for answers.

- **Present concrete questions for research,** if you have them, in this seminar. Having reflected on your religious upbringing, and articulated how it connects to your prior studies in THRS, you now should present a few of the compelling questions you might like to take up for serious work in this seminar. This can be in the form of a simple list of questions, which we will discuss in class. The idea is that the questions you present here will become the basis for your first forays in the library, in search of a term project.

Short Essays (40%). These will be four (4) shorter writings — 1,000 - 1,500 words each (4-6 pages) — reflecting on themes that emerged in the preceding section of readings and presentations. Due dates for these papers are marked in the schedule.

Final Project. (25%). This final project can be either a **research paper**, or a **religious-reflection paper**, or some other sort of mixed-media project that we discuss and I approved well in advance. If you are a **THRS major**, you are advised to consider a research paper, keying its theme to something you might expand into a Capstone / Senior Thesis later in your USF career. That's not a requirement; just a strong suggestion. We can consult on best practices to organize such a longer-term enterprise. You will benefit from visits with some of our grads and more senior students who can confer with you on how they developed their own outstanding projects here. And of course our outstanding faculty is available for consultation as well. If you are a **THRS minor**, you are free to write a reflection paper or something more in the way of formal

research. Likewise, if studies in your major field seem to cross over into your theological studies, we can discuss a more hybrid, interdisciplinary project.

Closing Student Seminars (20%). Students will organize and lead seminars in the last five sessions of the course. I will serve as co-organizer and advisor. My suggestion is that everyone (a) proposes a theme for a short talk (10-15 mins) on some topic of their interest from the course; (b) writes up an abstract on that topic (max 500 words); (c) offers up a short reading (either a news item, magazine article, short video, or scholarly paper). An organizing committee, including me, will whip the class for submissions, culling them into a series of panels, in a schedule that is thematically coherent, more or less in the manner of a professional scholarly society in one of our fields. This closer will be a Capstone to our semester's work.

Notes on Ethics, Participation, Course Credit

Bible in One Hand, Newspaper in the Other. The great Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth insisted that theology should be done with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. But the same maxim obtains for religious studies too. You should pay attention to current events, reading newspapers, magazines, or other internet news sources on a daily basis. I will not limit your reading; nor grade you on this suggestion *per se*. But current-events reading will always be an indispensable ancillary task for this course — and for life in general. Start getting in the habit!

Respect and Dialogue. I take our work in this course very seriously. You should too. Your success hinges on your capacity to engage in a critical and respectful public dialogue with your colleagues. Your regular attendance and your mature, thoughtful participation will prove indispensable.

Participation: Quantity. Three unplanned / unexcused absences will result in a peremptory grade demotion (an A converts to A- ; a B+ to B ; etc.). Five or more absences will cost a double demotion (A → B + ... B - → C, etc.) I must receive word from you, by email, of an excusable absence before the commencement of class. Lateness will also be noted and lead to grade deduction.


Participation: Quality. In general, you can demonstrate your attention to readings and themes of the course in two ways: the quality of your written work, and the quality of your classroom participation. With respect to written work, I am looking for clear, grammatically correct writing; coherent thematization and organization of your arguments; conventional scholarly citation practice; and provocative analysis. With respect to participation, I am looking for an ability to comment explicitly and accurately on points that appear in our readings; and an ability to show respect for the views of others in the course. I will measure respect in terms of your good manners, and your capacity for thoughtful integration (whether in agreement or disagreement) of the comments of others.

Academic Honesty. I have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty of any sort — above all, plagiarism. Anyone whose work is found to have been lifted from other sources, without proper citation, will suffer maximum penalties. Consult university policy on academic honesty in the Fogcutter Student Handbook, online at <http://www.usfca.edu/fogcutter>.

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities	
I. Biography, Positionality, and Researching Religion	
Week 1	
Tues. Aug. 23	<p>Overtures. Getting to know one another ... talking about religion in our lives and experiences ... notes on <i>theism</i>: nuances and contradictions in ideas about “God.”</p> <p>Orlando O. Espín and James B. Nickoloff, eds., <i>An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies</i> (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007): entries on “Theism / Theistic,” “Theocentric,” “Theocracy,” and “Theodicy.”</p>
Thurs. Aug. 25	<p>What is Religion?</p> <p>Introduction to the religious auto-biographical essay</p> <p>Harvey J. Sindima, “What Is Religion? The Search for a Definition,” in <i>Introduction to Religious Studies</i> (Lanham: University Press of America, 2012), 24–32.</p>
Week 2	
Tues. Aug. 30	<p>Elements of Religion</p> <p>Sindima 2012, op.cit., “The Elements of Religion,” 33–49.</p>
Thurs. Sept. 1	<p>Distinguishing “Theological Studies” from “Religious Studies”</p> <p>Francis X. Clooney, “Religious Diversity and Comparative Theology,” in <i>Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders</i> (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3–23.</p>
Short Paper #1 — ‘What is religion?’ — due Saturday, Sept. 3 by midnight	
Week 3	
Tues. Sept. 6	<p>From Religious Experience to Researchable Questions</p> <p>Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, “Researching Religion: The Vocation of the Sociologist of Religion,” <i>International Journal of Social Research Methodology</i> 5, no. 2 (2002): 133–46.</p>
Thurs. Sept. 8	<p>Identity and Positionality in Research on Religion</p> <p>Guest: Profe Aaron Hahn Tapper, Director of the Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice at USF, on “Social Identities and Religious Studies: Integrating Oneself into Scholarship.”</p> <p>Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, <i>Judaisms: A Twenty-First-Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities</i> (Oakland: UC Press, 2016), intro & ch. 1.</p>

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities

Week 4

Tues. Sept. 13	Contextual Theologies: Positionality in Theological Reflection Discussion groups toward the autobiographical reflection essays Jorge A. Aquino, "Overture: Theology, Biography, and the Subject of Racism," (Manuscript)
Thurs. Sept. 15	Biography and the Impulse to Research Discussion groups toward the autobiographical reflection essays Jorge A. Aquino, "Reflections of a Recovering 'Outer Catholic,' " Presidential Address to the Academy of Catholic-Hispanic Theologians of the U.S. (2014). <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-right: 10px; text-align: center;"> Triptych from the exhibition 'My Cathedral' by Alex Donis </div>  </div>

Autobiographical Reflection Essay Due Saturday, Sept. 17 by midnight

II. The Polymorphous Topic of Sexuality in Religion and Theology

Week 5

Tues. Sept. 20	Primer: The World of Queer Theologies How our intimate sexual experiences, and the social identities that grow from those experiences, inflect theology and pastoral work today. Guest: Profe Hugo Córdova Quero, Starr King School for the Ministry Hugo Córdova Quero, "Queer Liberative Theologies," in <i>Introducing Liberative Theologies</i> , ed. Miguel A. De La Torre (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015), 210–31.
Thurs. Sept. 22	Religion and Sexual Freedom: Queering a Catholic Campus Ministry Guest: Rabbi Camille Angel, USF's Resident Campus Minister Lea Loeb, "Meet the Rabbi 'Queering' Religion at Jesuit Catholic USF," <i>J. The Jewish News of Northern California</i> , Feb. 11, 2022, https://wp.me/p8mtLd-Xyi ; and Glickman, "Queering is a Verb."

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities	
Week 6	
Tues. Sept. 27	The Personal is Political Religious: Miguel Díaz's <i>Queer God de Amor</i> How one scholar intersected his sexuality, ethno-racial identity, and an early modern Spanish mystic to forge a new approach to Catholic sexual theology <i>Miguel H. Díaz, Queer God de Amor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), Introduction and chapter 1.</i>
Thurs. Sept. 29	The Personal is Political Religious: Miguel Díaz's <i>Queer God de Amor</i> Class convenes at 5 p.m. in Xavier Auditorium, Fromm Hall, for a public lecture and discussion with Profe Díaz.
Short Paper #2 — on Theology and Sexuality — due midnight Saturday, Oct. 1	
III. Borderlands I: From 'Systematic' Theology to Interdisciplinary Theopolitics	
Week 7	
Tues. Oct. 4	Method in Catholic Theology: Bernard Lonergan Guest: Profe Mark Miller Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., "Religion," in <i>Method in Theology</i> (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 101–24.
Thurs. Oct. 6	Karl Rahner: Theologizing Between Existence and Transcendence Guest: Fr. Joseph Nguyen, S.J. Thomas O'Meara, "Fashioning a Theology for Today," in Thomas O'Meara, <i>God in the World: A Guide to Karl Rahner's Theology</i> (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 35–55.
Week 8	
Tues. Oct. 11	Religion and Reparation: Controversies in African Theology Guest: Profe Lilian Dube Lilian Dube, "Land Justice for Broken Women Healing Earth: Colonization to COVID-19," in <i>Valuing Lives, Healing Earth: Religion, Gender, and Life on Earth</i> , ed. Theresa A. Yugar et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2021).
Thurs. Oct. 13	An Apophatic Hermeneutics of Scripture Guest: Profe Vincent Pizzuto What violence in the Bible can teach us about the ineffability of God in studying Catholic-Christian spirituality Vincent Pizzuto, "The Deus Absconditus of Scripture: An Apophatic Hermeneutic for Christian Contemplatives," <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture</i> 44, no. 2 (2014): 101–8.

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities	
Week 9	
Tues. Oct. 18	No Class — Fall Break
Thurs. Oct. 20	Research & Writing Workshop Guest: Matthew Collins, Gleeson Library Class Activity: Tour of Gleeson Library research resources
Week 10	
Tues. Oct. 25	<i>How Long, O Lord? The Challenge of Theodicy in Black Christianity</i> Religion is a major resource of resistance in African American communities. But sometimes religion seems to offer false hope: in a God who apparently fails to <i>deliver us from evil</i> . We consider <i>theodicy</i> as a problem for Christian faith — and for social-justice organizing. Jorge A. Aquino, “‘ <i>This Ain’t Your Daddy’s Civil Rights Movement!</i> ’ Reflecting on Theodicy in Light of the Uprising Over the Police Shooting of Michael Brown, Jr.,” <i>Religión e Incidencia Pública</i> , vol. 10 (2022).
Thurs. Oct. 27	Black Theology and the Politics of Racial Reparations Guest: Professor James Taylor (Politics Dept), for a roundtable discussion on the City of San Francisco’s reparations task force — and the Black Christian organizing and theology behind it. City of San Francisco, African American Reparations Advisory Committee, <i>Efforts to Support the Preparation of a San Francisco Reparations Plan</i> (San Francisco Human Rights Commission: December 2021). State of California, Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, <i>Interim Report</i> (June 2022), executive summary.
Short Paper #3 — Theological Perspectives — due midnight Saturday, Oct. 29	
IV. Borderlands II: Ethical Challenges For Researchers in Religion and Theology	
Week 11	
Tues. Nov. 1	Reading Through Cracked Lenses Epistemological sensibility and the interdisciplinary weave of theological reflection. Jorge A. Aquino, “Pussy Riot: Indecent Theology in the New Russian Revolution,” in <i>Indecent Theologians: Marcella Althaus-Reid & the Next Generation of Postcolonial Activism</i> , ed. Nicolas Panotto (Alameda, CA: Borderless Press, 2016), 57–84.

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities	
Thurs. Nov. 3	Ideology and Intertextuality in Liberation Theology A critique of Pope Francis's encyclical, <i>Laudato Si</i> , from the Marxist critical theory that the Church anathematized and abandoned in the heyday of Latin American liberation theology (1970s and 1980s). Jorge A. Aquino, "Twilight of the Idol — or of Planetary Life? Reflections on <i>Laudato Si</i> , Climate-Change Fatalism, and Global Capitalist Civilization." (Manuscript, 2022)
Week 12	
Tues. Nov. 8	The Bleeding Edge of Ethics in Ethnography Adventures, misadventures, and the ambiguities of intercultural encounter in field research. Guests: Profes Lois Lorentzen and Oren Kroll-Zeldin Reading TBA
Thurs. Nov. 10	Intertextuality and Interdisciplinarity in Theological Studies The discursive construction of religion and theology, interdisciplinary research, and ethical responsibility to the religious communities one is researching. Guest: Profe Aysha Hidayatullah Reading TBA
V. Inspired Research Projects from THRS Alums	
Week 13	
Tues. Nov. 15	Ayahuasca Tourism: Self-Improvement as Cultural Neocolonialism Guest: Ella Quinn (THRS major, Class of 2023) Quinn discusses her research on Ayahuasca tourism, its implications for Westerners engaging in traditional Andean religious rites — and their displacement of indigenous cultures.
Thurs. Nov. 17	The Challenge of Theodicy in Judaism Guest: Zack Migdail (THRS major, Class of 2022) Migdail will discuss his Senior THRS Capstone project on <i>theodicy</i> — a major challenge to historic Jewish faith that has led many Jewish communities to sideline faith in God in favor of a more muscular social ethics. Zachary Migdail, "When Faith Is Not Enough: The Evolution of Jewish Theodicy," (Capstone Thesis manuscript, University of San Francisco, Dept of Theology & Religious Studies, 2022).

Course Schedule, Readings, Activities	
Short Paper #4 — on Research Ethics — due midnight Saturday, Oct. 29	
Week 14	
Tues. Nov. 22	Closing Special-Topics Seminars
Thurs. Nov. 24	No Class — Thanksgiving Holiday
Week 15	
Tues. Nov. 29	Closing Special-Topics Seminars
Thurs. Dec. 1	Closing Special-Topics Seminars
Tues. Dec. 6	Closing Special-Topics Seminars End-of-the-course celebration ...
Final Essay Due [TBA]	

IMPORTANT ADDENDA

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability or disabling condition, or if you think you may have a disability, please contact USF Student Disability Services (SDS) at (415) 422-2613 within the first week of class, or immediately upon onset of disability, to speak with a disability specialist. If you are determined eligible for reasonable accommodations, please meet with your disability specialist so they can arrange to have your accommodation letter sent to me, and we will discuss your needs for this course. For more information, please visit: <http://www.usfca.edu/sds> or call (415) 422-2613.

Learning & Writing Center

The Learning & Writing Center provides assistance to all USF students in pursuit of academic success. Peer tutors provide regular review and practice of course materials in the subjects of Math, Science, Business, Economics, Nursing and Languages. Other content areas can be made available by student request. To schedule an appointment, go to the LWC homepage at www.usfca.edu/lwc. Students may also take advantage of writing support provided by Rhetoric and Language Department instructors and academic study skills support provided by Learning Center professional staff. For more contact the LWC at (415) 422-6713 or by email lwc@usfca.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Our diverse staff offers brief individual, couple, and group counseling to student members of our community. CAPS services are confidential and free of charge. Call (415) 422-6352 for an initial consultation appointment. Having a crisis at 3 AM? We are still here for you. Telephone consultation through CAPS After Hours is available between the hours of 5:00 PM to 8:30 AM; call the above number and press 2.

Confidentiality, Mandatory Reporting, and Sexual Assault

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a faculty member.

I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on USFs campus with the University. Here are other resources:

- To report any sexual misconduct, students may visit Anna Bartkowski (UC 5th floor) or see many other options by visiting our website: https://www.usfca.edu/student_life/safer
- Students may speak to someone confidentially, or report a sexual assault confidentially by contacting Counseling and Psychological Services at (415) 422-6352.
- To find out more about reporting a sexual assault at USF, visit USFs Callisto website at: <https://usfca.callistocampus.org>
- For an off-campus resource, contact San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR) (415) 647-7273 (www.sfwar.org).

Appendix 2

- Seminar Schedule, THRS 101 — Methods in Theology & Religious Studies, Fall 2022

METHODS IN THRS

FALL 2022 SEMINAR MAP (NOV. 21 - V. 0.2)

Themes / Presenters / Abstracts

Religion: Coloniality, Capitalism, Genocide

Christian Theology & the Human Ontology of Market Capitalism

Karren Ibuna. This session considers perspectives presented in an article by John Schneider, as well as our class's dissection of *Laudato Si*. I am interested in sharpening my understanding the mechanics and drivers of capitalism, taking an approach by way of theological humanism, a woefully understudied problem. By understanding how capitalism functions, and the key activities that drive it, we can better understand how it impacts our religious lives, our scholarly discourse, and the differing influences of capitalism on other big topics like racism, poverty, and equity in government and market society. I will consider both the positive and negative aspects of capitalism, as Schneider discusses them, and search for ways we as educated students in theology can advocate for reform of our capitalistic society from our individual or community level.

John R. Schneider, "Christian Theology and the Human Ontology of Market Capitalism," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 10, no. 2 (2007), <https://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/233>.

Coloniality of Religion as a Tool of Assimilation and Destruction

Khloe Wahl. This sessions reflects on how Protestantism, settler colonialism, and indigenous cultural genocide accompanied the establishment of the state of Oklahoma in 1907. What role did religion play in practices abetting the decimation of tribal nations — sending Native children to white boarding schools, and paving over indigenous cultural values with the colonial religion of Protestant Christianity. The religious roots of colonialism have an ongoing life today, particularly in the loss of indigenous control over environmental policy on tribal lands.

Russell Cobb, *The Great Oklahoma Swindle: Race, Religion, and Lies in America's Weirdest State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

Religion and Climate Change

Re-thinking Scriptural Readings Of Climate Change

Tyson Underwood. In my panel presentation I would like to discuss the use or misuse of scripture to delay and degrade restorative climate action, to the detriment of the natural world. I want to focus specifically on what arguments have been made to Christians that green energy is somehow un-Christian and that the *blood of the underworld* is a problem-free source of energy going forward. Hermeneutics will be central to my research. If possible I would also like to consider any "green" theological narratives that have gained traction, for comparison.

William Bradford Nichols, "What's Really behind Evangelicals' Climate Denial?,"

TheHumanist.com, April 23, 2019, <https://thehumanist.com/magazine/may-june-2019/features/whats-really-behind-evangelicals-climate-denial/>.

Ryan LaMothe, "Climate Emergency as Revelation: The Tragedy and Illusion of Sovereignty in Christian Political Theologies," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060524>.



Noah rides out the flood

Religion, Environmental Ethics, Climate Change

Will Evans. All the religions of the world have some discourse on the environment and the roots of life in the natural world. Often nature is represented as sacred, rooted in divine creativity, underscoring calls to respond to climate change. This video, from a research think-tank at Yale, considers the growing interest among religious in human impacts on the environment.

Yale University Forum on Religion and Ecology, "Religion and a New Environmental Ethic," YouTube (2009)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG0bQ3SwDI8>.

Themes / Presenters / Abstracts

Science, Religion, and Climate Change

Benjamin Calderon. In my presentation I consider the question of whether / how religious beliefs and perspectives *should even have a place* in debates on confronting climate change. Why should religion have a say in the topic of climate change? And can we really do anything to actually help change the climate change happening around the world? The video and article on which I will present discuss a *new Ten Commandments* that are supposed to help our dying world so we can care for it, nurture it back to health, and allow for greater unity among the world's religions.

KTTZ Texas Tech Public Media. (2016). "Religion has nothing to say about climate change, right?" YouTube. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from <https://youtu.be/W53uRqITk2I>.

Sling and Stone. (2022). "They've Been Revealed!!! New Ten Commandments," Mount Sinai, Pope Prophecy 2022. YouTube. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from <https://youtu.be/b2hTrfaJWD0>.

Ecology and Spirituality

Giancarlo Laguna. Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian founder of liberation theology, is a leading global voice mapping the connections between ecology/environmentalism and its relationship to spirituality. I will discuss how Boff's views on ecology exhibit connections of a divine presence. By providing various methods like that of postmodern science, and references to Jesus's proclamation of God, Boff is able to provide insight on the organic interconnections joining human life to the life of the natural world. In discussion of the deterioration of our "common home, or the Earth," Boff emphasizes that the current crisis humanity faces is one that relates to all living things, and calls for a "global partnership" to care for the Earth. My presentation includes a video interview in which Boff discusses how mysticism and contemplation can tune our consciousness to help restore the Earth.

Gianluca Montaldi, "Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway: 'Ecology and the Theology of Nature,' " *Concilium* (blog), January 14, 2021, <https://concilium-vatican2.org/de/originale/boff-hathaway/>.

WCCM, "Interview with Leonardo Boff: How Mysticism Can Heal the Planet," YouTube. Retrieved November 21, 2022, from https://youtu.be/ngaA_nkgBJE

Theologies of Gender and Sexuality

Marcella Althaus-Reid: The Trouble with *Normality* in Theology

Brianna Moreno & Rebecca Pugh-Dempsey. Rebecca and I will discuss liberation theology and its fusions and faultlines *vis a vis* feminist / indecent theology. We will center our dialogue around critiques of male-centered symbolism and imagery, focusing on the *caminata* Marcella Althaus-Reid traces in an article on her *indecent* theology.

Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology," in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 20–38.

Hinduism and the 'Third Gender'

Paavani Lella. For my presentation, I'm planning on talking about the Hijra / Third Gender community of India, and their significance in Hinduism. I hope to discuss the portrayal of the Hijra community in Hindu texts, their role in society today, as well as health and living barriers that the community faces today. I plan on showing how LGBTQ+ gender identity intersects with Hinduism.

"Hinduism Embraces the 'Third Gender,' " *The Mail & Guardian*, April 13, 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-04-13-00-hinduism-embraces-the-third-gender/>.

Shiva Prakash Srinivasan and Sruti Chandrasekaran, "Transsexualism in Hindu Mythology," *Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism* 24, no. 3 (2020): 235–36, https://doi.org/10.4103/ijem.IJEM_152_20.

Themes / Presenters / Abstracts

Two Spirit Sexualities

Yuni'Kaikyo Hanover. Two Spirit Identity is not very well known outside of Indigenous communities. Those who have heard about it often show limited understanding, analogizing it to concepts like *non-binary*, *gay* or *mediator*. I will unpack Two Spirit Identity with specific emphasis on misconceptions.

Materials: Cleopatra Tatabele (She/They): (1) Collaboration ([short youtube video](#)); (2) Abuela Taught Me ([online](#)); (3) Eight Things You Should Know About Two Spirit People ([online](#)); (4) Eight Two-Spirit Artists, Activists, and Healers Showing the World Queerness is Indigenous ([online](#)); (5) Two Spirit: The Story of a Movement Unfolds ([online](#)); (6) Indian Health Services article on Two Spirit identity ([online](#)).

Mysticism, Scriptures, Power

Jewish Mysticism: Introduction to *Kabbalah*

Annika Costello. As this class has reviewed Christian mysticism, this seminar theme will evaluate Jewish mysticism, also known as Kabbalah. Kabbalah started in the medieval ages and is practiced in many forms, but these are three main elements: the ten divine powers, also known as *sefirot*, one of the divine powers is feminine, which set the trend of gender dualism, and an allegory of a tree encompasses the divine powers. This and more will be described in an informative video, "What is Kabbalah?" from Dr. Andrew M. Henry, the host of "Religion For Breakfast" on Youtube. The video informs the history of Kabbalah, their teachings and influence in Jewish practices.

A. M. Henry, "What Is Kabbalah?" Religion For Breakfast, YouTube, Mar. 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLaE996B-IQ>.

'In the Name of God ...': Biblical Narrative and Domination

Nick Aguirre. In American culture and politics, the Bible has been used as a power tool, religious traditions/stories found in the Bible have been spun to be heard as words of power with a wide range of meaning/interpretation depending whom is using the Bible. This in turn impacts cultural and political climates. People take parts of the Bible, offer interpretations without a sense of the social context of the biblical authors. Thinking about the Bible being used as a tool of power and how its language can function as a form of social action allows one to reflect on the negative impact this has on people and how the Bible is read and the dire importance of keeping one's spiritual beliefs at a personal level and not allowing them to get entangled with their political beliefs.

<https://youtu.be/AzBhYhu7NYI>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-roe-v-wade-decision-overturn>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/>

<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/biblical-attack-capitol>

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/donald-trump-and-uses-and-misuses-of-the-bible>

<https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2020/06/12/donald-trump-bible-and-white-supremacy>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20177522>

<https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1119&context=clr>

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion/article/abs/bible-in-the-political-rhetoric-of-the-american-founding/DB3BA9889B69F7D78617785A702243AD#>

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Andrew Koepp.

Further Appendices (links to [Google Drive folder](#))

- Appendix 3: Materials from THRS 101: Methods & Theories in THRS
[[Appendix-3_THRS-101_Methods_Final.zip](#)]
- Appendix 4: Materials from THRS 200: Christian Feminist Theology
[[Appendix-4_THRS-200_Xian Fem Theology.zip](#)]
- Appendix 5: Materials from THRS 236: Refugees, Justice & Ethics
[[Appendix-5_THRS-236_Refugees Justice Ethics.zip](#)]
- Appendix 6: Materials from THRS 367: Intro to Buddhism
[[Appendix-6_THRS-367_Intro-Buddhism.zip](#)]
- Appendix 7: Materials from THRS 373: Intro to Islam
[[Appendix-7_THRS-373_Intro Islam.zip](#)]
- Appendix 8: Materials from THRS 470: Contemporary Moral Issues
[[Appendix-8_THRS-470-Contemp.Moral.Issues.zip](#)]