



UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Core Curriculum

The Return to God

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Fall 2022 Online and Asynchronous

The glory of God is man fully alive, but the life of man is the vision of God.

-St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

-St. Augustine, Confessions I

A synthesis of readings and themes introduced in prior core instruction, this course draws together fundamental questions considered throughout the curriculum dealing with such topics as revelation, history, transcendence, suffering, death, and salvation. The course orients life in the context of a Christian sacramental vision to the final end

of the human person: the contemplation of the vision of God.

Spiritual Partner

You will have a spiritual partner for the whole semester, that is, a classmate with whom you meet weekly to discuss the hard contents of the class, as well as (if you so choose) pray, meditate, etc. Together, you will submit video recordings of the 'results' of many of your discussions as a post on the Blackboard page.

Destination

Guided by the riches of the Catholic intellectual and moral tradition, you will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to confront, formulate, and answer the question of what makes our lives, at bottom, unified and meaningful, and to see a Christian answer to that question as a serious and persuasive one. You also will learn how in the concrete sacramental and spiritual theology of the Church, such a meaningful life might realistically be pursued.

By the end of the semester, which is (of course) also near the end of your time as an undergraduate student at the University of St. Thomas: 1. You will be able to give an account of the contemplative end of man as fulfilled in the Body of Christ. 2. You will show that they can accurately compare and contrast, in the light of divine revelation, the conception of the human person as contemplative with one in which the purely technical predominates. 3. You will be able to give an account of the progression of the spiritual life as flowing from the sacraments and expressed in the liturgy of the Church. 4. You will be able accurately to articulate the sacramental world-view of Christian theology and apply its consequences to their lives and the contemporary context.

I, Dr. Stephan, will consider anything short of this to be a failure--most likely mine, but possibly yours. This must be a team effort.

To that end, we have a [Return to God Class Survey and Contract](#)) that all of us, myself included, are required to sign by the end of the first week.

Above all, note that you are expected: 1. To do all assigned readings and watch or listen to all assigned lectures every week, 2. To prepare to record a video meeting with a class spiritual partner every Wednesday or Thursday (by doing #1), and 3. To prepare for a video meeting with the instructor (me, Dr. Stephan) every Friday (by doing #1 and #2).

Class Webpages

The [class webpage](#), which I (Dr. Stephan) host on my professional website (coreystephan.com/teaching/return-to-god), will contain: * this syllabus, * lecture recordings (audio and/or video), * blog posts, * hyperlinks to class readings, and * other (semi-)permanent materials related to the class.

Since this is a pilot/demo version of this class (and you are its first students), please also note that the [class GitHub page](#) will contain work-in-progress materials on which you should feel free to comment in order to assist my colleagues and me in building the future of the University of St. Thomas.

Required Books

All of these books are strictly required in order to participate in the class. We will be reading six of these seven items in full; only the Bible will be excerpted (and that for three whole Books). All of these items are available pre-owned, as cheap paperbacks, and/or for rental, and the total cost should be lower than that of even one textbook in some disciplines. Nevertheless, if the cost of acquiring these items should be a burden for you, then I encourage you to check the library for copies (including via interlibrary loan) and/or split the costs with a classmate by sharing. If all of that should fail or otherwise not be viable, then do please speak with me (Dr. Stephan) in private about a financial accomodation.

1. The Catholic Study Bible: Third Edition [Catholic Study Bible]
 - ISBN 9780190267230
2. Saint Augustine: Confessions [Augustine's Confessions]
 - Translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford World Classics)
 - ISBN 978-0-19-283372-3
3. On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor [Maximus's Cosmic Mystery]
 - Translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Popular Patristics Series)
 - ISBN 978-0-88141-249-9
4. Bonaventure: The Life of St. Francis [Bonaventure's Life of Francis]
 - Translated by Ewert Cousins with a Foreward by Donna Tartt (Harper Collins Spiritual Classics)
 - ISBN 0-060057652-9
5. In Tune with the World by Josef Pieper [Pieper's In Tune with the World]
 - Translated by Richard and Clara Winston
 - ISBN 978-1890318338
6. For the Life of the World by Alexander Schmemann [Schmemmann's Life of the World]
 - St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Classics Series: Volume 1
 - ISBN 978-0881416176
7. The Spirit of the Liturgy by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) [Ratzinger's Spirit of the Liturgy]
 - Commemorative Edition with a Foreword by Robert Cardinal Sarah
 - ISBN 9781621644293

I will distribute other assigned readings either as .pdf scans or via hyperlinks to online materials in the public domain (shared in the class webpage linked above).

Required Electronic Equipment

1. Stable Internet (WAN) access
2. Webcam (may be built-in, such as is ubiquitous in laptop computers)
3. Microphone (may be built-in, such as is ubiquitous in laptop computers)

You *must* be able to do live video conferencing, as well as self-recordings, for this class. You do *not* need to purchase any special, high-end equipment, but all of your audio and video (both live and recorded) *must* be clear. A smart phone generally will *not* work for our purposes (save, perhaps, one of the most expensive models). A tablet *might* work, but a proper computer with a desktop operating system (GNU/Linux, FreeBSD, OpenBSD, Apple MacOS, Microsoft Windows, etc.) will be best. You *may* (of course) use the equipment that is included in your tuition in the Doherty Library (and elsewhere on campus).

Themes

The course is divided into five thematic units that will last three weeks apiece: 1. Creation 2. Fall 3. Christ 4. Liturgy 5. Eternity

In lectures and discussions, we will consider each of these themes as they align somewhat chronologically inside both 1. Salvation History and 2. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

Grades

The class has five grades worth 20% apiece, each of which will allow you to foster (and showcase) a different set of skills:

I. Total of required on-on-one meetings (partly oral exams) with the instructor (me, Dr. Stephan)

- Graded as A (strong), B (good), C/D (poor), and F (did not attend or obviously failed)
- 1 week automatically dropped (to account for life)

II. Total of required recorded meetings with semester-long spiritual partner

- Graded as A (strong), B (good), C/D (poor), and F (did not write or obviously failed)
- 1 week automatically dropped (to account for life)

III. Augustine spiritual journey documentary / video presentation

- Graded 100, 95, 90, etc.
- Due the day before Midterm Break
- The whole class will be invited to provide feedback

IV. Liturgy attendance assignment

- You will attend an unfamiliar traditional liturgy (e.g. Catholic Latin Mass or Orthodox Divine Liturgy)
- Graded 100, 95, 90, etc.
- Due the day before Thanksgiving Break
- 3-5 page formal essay (our *only* formal writing assignment)

V. Original poem or short story recitation about Hope for Eternal Life

- Must draw upon all five class themes (Creation, Fall, Christ, Liturgy, and Eternity)
- Recital must be 5-10 minutes
- To be performed during a full-class meeting before Christmas break (our *only* full-class meeting)
- Graded 100, 95, 90, etc.

Reading and Lecture Schedule

Theme I: Creation

Fundamentally, unbreakably good--but fragile

Week 1

Lectures

a. Class introductions:

- What is this Return to God class?
- Why do I have a spiritual partner?
- How will this class 'work'?

b. Content:

- Genesis and Creation

Readings

- Catholic Study Bible: Genesis Reading Guide (RG 120-134), Genesis Introduction (pp. 9-11), Genesis Ch. 1-3 (pp. 11-16)
- St. Basil's Hexaemeron, Homilies I-IX (all) on newadvent.org

Week 2

Lecture

- Introduction to St. Maximus the Confessor

Readings

- Maximus's Cosmic Mystery: Introduction, Ambiguum 7, and Ambiguum 8 (pp. 13-78)
- Terence Nichols's The Sacred Cosmos -- excerpts (scanned by Dr. Stephan)

Week 3

Lecture

- Introduction to St. Francis of Assisi

Reading

- Bonaventure's Life of Francis (all)

Theme 2: Fall

Is all lost?

Week 4

Lecture

- The Fall of Man

Readings

- John Milton's Paradise Lost, Book IV on [poetryfoundation.org](https://www.poetryfoundation.org)
- Maximus's Cosmic Mystery: Ad Thalassium 61 (pp. 131-143)

Encouraged Reading

- Start Augustine's Confessions

Week 5

Lecture

- St. Augustine's Journey through Sin and Death

Readings

- St. Augustine's Confessions: Chadwick's Introduction and Books I-VII (first half)

Week 6

Lecture

- Augustine's Conversion to Christianity

Reading

- Augustine's Confessions: Books VIII-XIII (second half)

AUGUSTINE DOCUMENTARY

Due before Fall Break

Theme 3: Christ

The Savior of the Universe..but how?

Fall break's encouraged reading: Start John's Gospel

Week 7

Lecture

- Introduction to John's Gospel

Readings

- Catholic Study Bible: John Reading Guide (RG 457-468), John Introduction (pp. 1486-87), and John's Gospel (all, pp. 1487-1525)

Week 8

Lecture

- St. Maximus on Christ as the Unifier of the Cosmos

Readings

- Ambiguum 41, introduced and translated by Fr. Maximos Constas (scanned by Dr. Stephan)
- Maximus's Cosmic Mystery: Ad Thalassium 21, 22, 42, and 60 (pp. 109-130)
- Hans Urs von Balthasar's Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor (translated by Fr. Brian Daley, S.J.), excerpts (scanned by Dr. Stephan)

Week 9

Lecture

- St. Thomas Aquinas on why God became Man

Readings (all available on [aquinas.cc](#))

- Summa Theologica III.1-21
- Commentary on the Gospel of St. John: Prologue & Chapter 1

Theme 4: Liturgy

Living the traditional Christian life in the modern world

Week 10

Lecture

- What is liturgy?

Readings

- Ratzinger's Spirit of the Liturgy (all)

Week 11

Lecture

- What is the purpose of liturgy?

Reading

- Schmemann's Life of the World (all)

Week 12

Lecture

- How to Attend Liturgy: Preparation, Mindset, and Prayer

NO READING

LITURGICAL IMMERSION ASSIGNMENT

Due before Thanksgiving break

Theme 5: Eternity

What is your τέλος? Dare you hope for Heaven?

Week 13

Lecture

- The Five Spiritual Senses: Taste, Touch, Smell, Hearing, and Sight

Readings

- Catholic Study Bible: Song of Songs Reading Guide (RG 303-307), Song of Songs Introduction (p. 890), and Song of Songs (all) (pp. 891-898)
- St. Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs, excerpts (scanned by Dr. Stephan)

Week 14

Lecture

- Heaven as a Dance

Reading

- Pieper's In Tune with the World

Week 15

NO LECTURE, NO READING

ORIGINAL POEM OR SHORT STORY ABOUT HOPE FOR ETERNAL LIFE

- Full class meeting
- Time to be scheduled via Doodle poll
- Ideally, on campus

University Policies

Accommodations

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the University of St. Thomas will provide academic accommodations to ensure access for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who require accommodations for this class, must register with the Office of Access & Disability Services (ADS) and provide documentation of a disability to determine what accommodations are most appropriate. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and disability accommodations are not provided until a Course Accessibility Letter has been provided to the instructor. For questions regarding academic accommodations and accessibility, please contact the Office of Access and Disability Services by email at ACCESS@STTHOM.EDU, or visit the ADS website at STTHOM.EDU/ACCESS.

Preparation

You must have all the required textbooks, ideally as soon as the class begins. Their ISBN numbers must match those on the syllabus. It is your responsibility, not the bookstore's, to arrange to have the proper books.

Meetings

I encourage you to meet with the TA or me outside of the classroom, especially for guidance on the readings and assignments. Generally, appointments will be handled via Jitsi (meet.jit.si/DrStephan).

Communication

You must use university email or Teams for electronic correspondence with me and with the TA. Any lost or missed communication as a result of using third party email, or failing to maintain one's UST email account under quota will be considered to be your fault.

Other Class Policies

Late Submissions

I know that life happens, and I know that the best work sometimes has to be submitted late (the Sistine Chapel's painting went behind schedule, after all).

At the same time, this class is a team effort, so we all must strive to have our work to share with each other on time. Even one 'weak link' can tear down everyone's experience; you (as an individual student) really do matter to the class as a whole.

With all that in mind, let me make this policy as simple as possible:

1. With legitimate excuse(s), I will accept 1 late submission from you with no penalty.
2. Without legitimate excuse(s), or if you are submitting a third item (of three formal submissions, no less!) late, then you will incur a 10% penalty per day.
3. After the grading deadline has passed at the end of the semester, I will not accept any more work.

Revision

For whichever projects for which this is possible (*as noted explicitly by me, Dr. Stephan*):

If you are not satisfied with your grade, you may do a full revision (or even start from scratch) and resubmit for full credit as though it were your first submission.

Statement on Software Freedom

I am a longtime advocate of Free Software as defined by the [Free Software Foundation](#). I encourage you to teach yourself about software freedom. For my part, I promise that I will never require you to use non-free software, except tools that are currently required as part of our experience at the University of St. Thomas (e.g. Microsoft Teams). To the contrary, whenever possible, I will encourage or require you even to submit your work in formats with open standards.