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Figure 1: University of St. Thomas - Core Curriculum

1 The Return to God

1.1 Corey Stephan, Ph.D.

coreystephan.com

- Email: corey.stephan@stthom.edu
- Office hours by appointment (email in advance)

Spring 2025 Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:35AM - 10:50AM Robertson #116

Following the University's closure for a winter weather event, the scheduling portions of this syllabus were revised on January 26.

Notes:

1. As of the start of the semester, some aspects of this syllabus remain to be determined.
2. I reserve the right to revise this syllabus at any time during the semester.

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.

1.2 Journey

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.

1.3 Destination

By the end of the semester, which is also near the end of your time as an undergraduate student at the University of St. Thomas, you will: 1. Be able to give an account of the contemplative end of man as fulfilled in the Body of Christ. 2. Show that you 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. 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. Be able to articulate accurately the sacramental worldview 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 – possibly mine but possibly yours. This must be a team effort.

To that end, we have a “Return to God Class Survey and Contract” in the “Start” page in Blackboard that everyone is required to complete and 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 be prepared for engaging full-group and small group discussions with your assigned Truth Troop Teams (study groups) at set intervals during the semester.
-

1.4 Required Materials

I have prepared a master .pdf document for this class called “The Return to God Reader” (abbreviated *Reader*). You are strictly required to do the following:

1. Print the *Reader*, preferably in a neatly bound manner, by the start of the second week of the semester.
2. Bring the printed *Reader* with you to class every day for the entire semester.

1.5 Recommended Materials

The required portions of the following items are included in the Reader. If you are someone who likes to hold a traditional book, then you might wish to purchase these separately. *The Catholic Study Bible: Third Edition* (#1) is particularly recommended, since it is a superb scholarly resource that one can use long past graduation.

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 Schmemmann [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 Foreward by Robert Cardinal Sarah
 - ISBN 9781621644293

1.6 Other Materials

I will distribute supplemental readings in Blackboard either as .pdf scans or via hyperlinks to online materials in the public domain.

1.7 Themes

The course is broadly divided into five thematic units that will last approximately three weeks apiece:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Christ
4. Liturgy
5. Eternity

This thematic sequence approximately aligns with the traditional Christian understanding of the unfolding of salvation history.

1.8 Grades

The total class grade is weighted out of 100 points.

1. Start of Term: (5%) READER PRINT & BIND
 - Having the *Reader* printed and bound by the start of the second week of the class earns 5% of the class grade in itself.
2. Start of Term: (2.5%) CLASS SURVEY AND CONTRACT
3. Semester Long: (20%) TRUTH TROOP TEAM TASKS
 - 5 study group tasks, 1 during each thematic unit, in which you demonstrate your collective understanding of the assigned material
4. Unit 1 (Creation): (15%) SHORT ANSWER TEST (Early Term Exam)
 - Timed test in which you will write short paragraphs synthesizing the material from Unit 1 into your own reasoned language, thinking of yourselves as ‘instructing the instructor’
5. Units 2 and 3 (Fall and Christ): (20%) PARTNER/GROUP DEBATE
 - Partner or small group ‘staged’ argument for and against one aspect of traditional Christian belief
 - Each pair or group will be required to provide critical feedback on 3 other pairs’ or groups’ projects
6. Unit 4 (Liturgy): (20%) TRADITIONAL LITURGY REFLECTION
 - Attend and write a critical reflection on an unfamiliar traditional Christian liturgy, drawing clearly upon lessons learned in the class
7. End of Term: (15%) CLASS ROUND-TABLE
 - During the last week of the semester, all students will be expected to attend 1 of 2 to 3 scheduled virtual round-table discussions about the class and share their sincere reflections about it.
8. End of Term: (2.5%) UST LEARNING OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT QUIZ *or* DR. STEPHAN ASSESSMENT QUIZ (Details TBD)
 - Online assessment quiz required for University accreditation *or* short quiz prepared by Dr. Stephan to help assess the learning results of the class. As of the start of the semester, details are to be determined.

1.9 Schedule

You are expected to complete the assigned readings and lectures prior to the beginning of the marked class period. (For example, an assignment listed for Thursday, January 30 must be completed before arriving to class on that date.)

Items specially labeled “Optional” are *recommended* for all students but not, in fact, *required*. They variously serve as ready-to-go ‘backup’ tasks in case of unexpected changes to our class and supplemental materials to assist regular student learning.

All items not labeled “Optional” are *required* for all students.

Each instance of “Blackboard #” corresponds to a specific matching numbered module (folder) inside the “Readings & Lectures” tab in Blackboard.

Each instance of ” *Reader*, ##-##” corresponds to my pagination in the bottom-right of each page in the *Reader*.

1.9.1 Unit 1: Creation

Fundamentally and permanently good – but fragile

1.9.1.1 Week 1: Introductions Blackboard 1: Introductions

1.9.1.1.1 Tuesday, January 14 & Thursday, January 16 Complete the Faith, Reason, and Revelation Class Survey & Contract in Blackboard by **9:30 AM (the start of class) on Thursday, January 16.**

Truth Troop Team assignments will be made by the end of the first week.

Lectures

- What is this Return to God class?
- The Return to God: Syllabus & Class Bones (Fall 2024)
- Return to God Truth Troop Teams: Study Group Recordings & More (Fall 2024)
- What is Catholic theology? 30 Minute Guide
- How to Read and Think Like a Theologian
- How do I use the Catholic Study Bible?
- Optional: The Best Free Computer Sources for Catholic Theology
- Optional: Oxford Reference Website: Theology & History Usage Guide

RECOMMENDATION: During the first week, start reading Bonaventure’s *Life of Francis* during free time (e.g. between classes on campus), since you will need to have read the entire story (book) by the end of Unit 1 (*Reader*, 128-214).)

1.9.1.1.2 Tuesday, January 21 and Thursday, January 23 – UNIVERSITY CLOSED for winter weather event

1.9.1.2 Week 2: Genesis and Creation Blackboard 2: Genesis and Creation

1.9.1.2.1 Tuesday, January 28 Printed and bound *Readers* are required in-class every day starting on Tuesday, January 28 (originally January 21). This is when I (Dr. Stephan) will take record of who has his/her *Reader* printed, bound, and ready for use.

1.9.1.3 5% of the course grade comes from arriving to class with the Reader on this date. Lecture

- Genesis 1-3 Theological Dive: Why did God create us? What does it mean that we are fallen?

Readings

- *Reader*, 1-27 | Catholic Study Bible: Genesis Reading Guide (RG 120-134), Genesis Introduction (pp. 9-11), Genesis Ch. 1-3 (pp. 11-16)

1.9.1.3.1 Thursday, January 30

- *Reader*, 28-91 | St. Basil's Hexameron, Homilies I-IX (all) on newadvent.org

1.9.1.4 Week 3: Thinking through Creation with Sts. Maximus and Francis Blackboard 3: Thinking through Creation

1.9.1.4.1 Truth Troop Team Task #1 will happen this week.

1.9.1.4.2 Tuesday, February 4 Lecture

- Who is St. Maximus the Confessor?

Readings

- *Reader*, 92-127 | Maximus's *Cosmic Mystery*: Introduction, Ambiguum 7, and Ambiguum 8 (pp. 13-78)

1.9.1.4.3 Thursday, February 6 Lecture

- Who is St. Francis of Assisi?

Reading

- *Reader*, 128-214 | Bonaventure's *Life of Francis* (all)

Lecture

- Optional: Who are the Fathers of the Church?

1.9.1.4.4 SHORT ANSWER ESSAY TEST ON Tuesday, FEBRUARY 11 (originally February 4). The short answer essay test is specifically scheduled for the day after all Truth Troop Teams have given their first presentations.

1.9.2 Unit 2: Fall

Is all lost?

1.9.2.1 Week 4: The Fall of Man Blackboard 4: The Fall of Man

1.9.2.1.1 Thursday, February 13 Lecture

- Optional: What is original sin? CCC 385-390 & 396-421 Deep Dive

Readings

- *Reader*, 224-234 | John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book IV (available on poetryfoundation.org)
- Optional: CCC #396-401

1.9.2.1.2 Tuesday, February 18 Lecture

- The Fall of Man: A Close Reading of St. Maximus the Confessor's *Ad Thalassium* 61

Readings

- *Reader*, 215-223 | Maximus's *Cosmic Mystery*: *Ad Thalassium* 61 (pp. 131-143)

RECOMMENDATION: During this fourth week, start reading the Chadwick translation of Augustine's *Confessions* during free time (e.g. between classes on campus), since you will need to have read it in full by the end of Unit 2 (*Reader*, 235-381).

1.9.2.2 Week 5: Augustine's Journey through Sin and Death Blackboard 5-6: Augustine's Confessions

1.9.2.2.1 Truth Troop Team Task #2 will happen through Weeks 5-6 (on Augustine).

1.9.2.2.2 Thursday, February 20 Lectures

- The Life of St. Augustine and How to Read his Confessions
- Optional: What is the Problem of Evil?

Readings

- Optional: Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil: A Reader, Introduction*, Plato's *Timaeus*, and Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*
- Optional: CCC #309-314

1.9.2.2.3 Tuesday, February 25 Readings

- *Reader*, 235-302 | Augustine's *Confessions*: Chadwick's Introduction and Books I-VII (first half)

1.9.2.3 Week 6: Augustine's Conversion and Christian Life Blackboard 5-6: Augustine's Confessions

1.9.2.3.1 Thursday, February 27 Reading

- *Reader*, 302-381 | Augustine's *Confessions*: Books VIII-XIII (second half)

1.9.3 Unit 3: Christ

The Savior of the Universe...but how?

1.9.3.1 Week 7: John's Gospel Blackboard 7: John's Gospel

1.9.3.1.1 Tuesday, March 4 Lectures

- John's Gospel: The Descent & Ascent of the Logos
- Optional: What are the Gospels?
- Optional: Who did Jesus claim to be? An Introduction to Jesus's Profession(s) about Himself in the Gospels

1.9.3.1.2 Thursday, March 6 Readings

- *Reader*, 382-437 | Catholic Study Bible: Gospels & Acts Reading Guide (RG 411-414), John Reading Guide (RG 457-468), John Introduction (pp. 1486-87), and John's Gospel (all, pp. 1487-1525)

1.9.3.2 SPRING BREAK: NO CLASSES March 11 or March 13

1.9.3.3 Week 8: Maximus on Christ as the Unifier of the Cosmos Blackboard 8: Maximus on Christ as the Unifier

1.9.3.3.1 Truth Troop Team Task #3 will happen this week.

1.9.3.3.2 Tuesday, March 18 Lecture

- Christ's Reunification of the Cosmos: St. Maximus the Confessor's Ambiguum 41

1.9.3.3.3 Thursday, March 20 Reading

- *Reader*, 438-464 | Maximus's *Ambiguum* 41, introduced and translated by Fr. Maximos Constatas

1.9.3.4 Week 9: Debate Week(s) Blackboard 9: Debate Week

1.9.3.4.1 March 25 (Tuesday), March 27 (Thursday), April 1 (Tuesday), & April 3 (Thursday) Debate project details are TBA.

1.9.4 Unit 4: Liturgy

Living the traditional Christian life in the modern world

1.9.4.1 Week 10: What is liturgy? Blackboard 10-11: Introduction to Liturgy

1.9.4.1.1 Truth Troop Team Task #4 will happen across Weeks 10 and 11 (on liturgy).

1.9.4.1.2 Tuesday, April 8 Lecture

- Introduction to Liturgy, part 1: What is Traditional Christian Liturgy? (Citing CCC & the Didache)

1.9.4.1.3 Thursday, April 10 Reading

- *Reader*, 465-595 | Ratzinger's *Spirit of the Liturgy* (all)

1.9.4.2 ADDENDUM: Liturgy Attendance (originally later) Blackboard 12: Liturgy Attendance

Lecture

- Return to God Class: Liturgy Attendance Assignment (Fall 2024)

1.9.4.2.1 The Liturgical Immersion Assignment will be due no later than 9:35 AM (the start of class) on Tuesday, April 22 (originally Wednesday, April 16). *I have moved the assignment directions to this location so that you may have two full weekends to complete the project and will not strictly need to do so during Triduum/Easter Break (your choice).*

1.9.4.3 Week 11: Why perform liturgy? Blackboard 10-11: Introduction to Liturgy

1.9.4.3.1 Tuesday, April 15 Lecture

- Introduction to Liturgy, part 2: What is the Purpose of Traditional Christian Liturgy? (Citing Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World*)

Reading

- *Reader*, 596-685 | Schmemmann's *Life of the World* (all)

1.9.4.4 TRIDUUM/EASTER BREAK: NO CLASS April 17

1.9.5 Unit 5: Eternity

What is your ? Dare you hope for Heaven?

1.9.5.1 Truth Troop Team Task #5 will happen over Weeks 13 and 14 (on Eternity).

1.9.5.2 Week 13: Spiritual Senses Blackboard 13: Spiritual Senses

1.9.5.2.1 Tuesday, April 22 Lectures

- Song of Songs & the Spiritual Senses (Live Class Recording)
- Optional: Grace, Central A/C, and the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1.9.5.2.2 Thursday, April 24 (originally April 22 – moved so that there is not a new large reading over Triduum/Easter break) Readings

- *Reader*, 686-699 | 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)
- Optional: CCC #1804-1831

1.9.5.3 Week 14: Heaven as a Dance REMOVED

1.9.5.3.1 Tuesday, April 29 *This is now a 'Flex Day,' that is, a 'free' day built into the syllabus so that if we have an unexpected class cancellation we may simply push back our class schedule by one day. If the 'Flex Day' is unused, then this may be a day without class.*

Students are now encouraged – but not required – to read the Reader's final entry, that is, Pieper's *In Tune with the World*, chiefly as an act of intellectual self-enrichment.*

1.9.5.4 Week 15: Class Finale

1.9.5.4.1 Thursday, May 1

1.9.5.5 CLASS ROUND-TABLE NO READINGS, NO LECTURES

Attending and actively participating in the class round-table discussion will count as 15% of the student's grade.

1.9.5.5.1 ASSESSMENT QUIZZES DUE BY 11:59 PM ON FRIDAY, MAY 2 (details TBD).

1.10 University Policies

1.10.1 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.

1.10.2 Preparation

You must have the printed and bound *Reader* with you for every class period, starting on Tuesday, January 28 (originally January 21).

1.10.3 Meetings

I encourage you to meet with me (Dr. Stephan) outside of the classroom, especially for guidance on the readings and assignments. Generally, appointments will be planned ahead by email (24 hours or more).

1.10.4 Communication

You must use university email for electronic correspondence with me. I do not communicate digitally with students via any other means.

1.11 Other Class Policies

1.11.1 Late Submissions

I (Dr. Stephan) 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, I have structured class assignments in such a way that there should not be any legitimate reason for anyone to make a late submission. Most late submissions will incur a late penalty, and, occasionally, I will not be able to accept a late submission at all.

1.11.2 Statement on Software Freedom

I (Dr. Stephan) 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 class infrastructural tools that are currently required as part of our experience at the University of St. Thomas (e.g. Microsoft Teams and Blackboard) or otherwise of practical necessity for our work at hand. Whenever possible, I will encourage you to prepare your work in free software and submit it in formats with open standards.

1.12 Class Prayer

A Prayer by St. Thomas Aquinas

Grant, O Merciful God, that I may ardently desire, prudently examine, truthfully acknowledge, and perfectly accomplish what is pleasing to Thee for the praise and glory of Thy name. Amen.