Themes in Theological Anthropology  
(Senior Seminar)  
THEO 490.01  

Seminar Description

The following is the course catalogue description of the Senior Seminar:

Reading and analysis of classic works in the historical development of the theology in the church and the university, and in modern and contemporary understandings of theology in relation to both, with the aim of illuminating the communal and public dimensions of theological inquiry. Required of all majors.

The Senior Seminar is designed for senior theology majors to bring their theological education into maturity and integration. Adopting the seminar format, students will explore a major topic within Christian theology (this year Theological Anthropology) over the course of two semesters. The seminar format places special emphasis on student initiative, participation and independent research. In addition to general classroom discussion facilitated by the professor, who will also provide lecture materials on occasion, students will actively lead seminar sessions through formal presentations and responses based upon common texts. The seminar format is designed to promote advanced levels of theological thinking, while providing students opportunities for developing skills related to the communal and public dimensions of theological inquiry.

This year’s Senior Seminar theme is Theological Anthropology, which The New Dictionary of Theology defines in the following way:

Christian anthropology is the articulation of the Christian understanding of human existence. This understanding is grounded in Jesus Christ as the revelation of the meaning of humanity in relation to God. Thus Christian anthropology flows from christology, specifically from that part of christology wherein Christ is portrayed as the paradigm of the human as intended by the creator.

The fall semester of the Senior Seminar takes up standard themes within Theological Anthropology (e.g., nature, grace, sin, free will, human knowledge, finitude, and embodiment) and explores them in terms of biblical foundations, historical developments and contemporary issues. The fall semester is intended to provide a working foundation for the spring semester, in which students will expand their study of theological anthropology into a broader range of contemporary issues related to their own research and vocational interests. At the conclusion of the spring semester, students will present their research to a broader public in the form of a research symposium. Toward that end, students will hone their presentation skills throughout the course of the year, while advancing other research and writing skills germane to theological inquiry.
Seminar Goals

*Students will:*  
1) Integrate their theological education through a year-long study of a major theological theme according to biblical foundations, historical development and contemporary issues;  
2) Explore the subfield of Theological Anthropology by giving special focus to questions of grace, sin, free will, transcendence and embodiment in dialogue with classic theological texts;  
3) Articulate their own theological methods and topical interests with a special focus on their respective vocational goals (e.g., high school teaching, advanced graduate work, business, law, medicine, social work, politics, etc.);  
4) Interact with a variety of faculty with diverse methodological backgrounds and theological interests;  
5) Develop advanced levels of theological thinking, including the exercise of its communal and public dimensions, through student-led sessions involving oral presentations and responses both in class and in a broader public forum.

Skills Development

*Students will:*  
1) Become more competent and efficient readers of classic theological texts by understanding their rhetorical and argumentative strategies, implicit theological methods, and relationships to other key texts in and beyond the seminar;  
2) Develop skills in researching and writing theologically by producing two integration papers and a major research paper;  
3) Develop oral communication skills by giving a major representation in the seminar, a response to another student’s presentation, and participating in a seminar forum that encourages extensive conversation among students and faculty.

Seminar Requirements

*Attendance and Punctuality:* Since classroom discussion is essential for the overall success of the seminar, regular and punctual attendance will be expected. One absence is permitted. For each additional absence, the student’s cumulative grade will be lowered by half a letter grade. Tardiness will be noted as well. If a student is late three times, an absence will be attributed to the student’s attendance record. If a pattern of tardiness continues, the student will risk further grade reduction.

*Major Presentation:* Each student will give a presentation on a portion of the reading material assigned on a particular seminar session. The 15-20 minute presentation will be part summary and part analysis. (See below for more information on presentations.)

*Response to Presentation:* Each student will provide a formal response (3-5 minutes) to another student’s presentation, evaluating the quality of the presentation while providing additional insights for the seminar participants to consider for ongoing conversation.

*Integration Papers:* Students will write two integration papers (5 pages each) based upon the seminar readings. The first (due Friday, Sept. 14) asks students to provide a formal articulation
of their theological methods in light of their previous theological education as majors and the book *Thinking Theologically*, which we will read at the beginning of the semester. The second (*due Friday, Nov. 1*) asks students to analyze three of the five major theologians we have read by that time (Paul, Irenaeus, Augustine, Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas) on the theme of the relationship between nature, sin, and grace. Students will circulate their integration papers to two other students and, in their small groups of three, discuss their work in an hour-long independent session with the professor. No additional research will be required for these papers. However, these papers must be rigorous, thorough and polished. Guidelines for the integration papers will be distributed in class.

**Research Paper:** Students will produce a major research paper (10-12 pages) on some topic related to theological anthropology. Guidelines for this research paper will be distributed later in the semester. *Note: proposals* with a preliminary thesis statement, brief description of the paper and a bibliography must be submitted to the professor by *no later than Monday, Nov. 19*. **Final submissions are due Tuesday, Dec. 11 by noon in my office.**

**Required Texts**


Course Packet made available in class

**Seminar Proceedings**

During those sessions in which students will be presenting and responding, the seminar format shall proceed as follows. During the first half of the session (approximately from 3:45 to 4:55), the professor will provide initial comments, which will range from seminar business to introductory statements related to the reading material assigned for that day. Then two student presentations will be given, each followed by student responses and more general feedback offered by the professor and the rest of the seminar participants. The presentations and responses will be designed to set up conversation for the second half of the session, which will commence after a short break (approximately from 5:00 to 6:15). The professor will facilitate large group discussion based upon the presentations, responses and questions/comments raised by the rest of the seminar participants.

During those sessions in which students are not presenting, the professor will provide lecture materials and facilitate large group discussion based upon assigned readings. On occasion, the seminar will be visited by other members of the faculty.
The nature of this format is designed to provide dynamic, student-led interaction, while preparing students for a variety of settings (academic or otherwise) in which oral presentation, critical response and group interaction are essential. The format is also designed to induct students into a modality of theological thinking that operates conversationally and collaboratively.

The Elements of Good Presentation

While the format and style of student presentations are certainly open to variety and novelty according to the personality and interests of the presenter, there are a few fundamentals that should be a part of every good presentation.

Summary of Context and Content: The presentation should provide a basic summary of the most important points of the reading. It is important that the presenter not simply repeat in tedious fashion what the readings already say. Since the presenter should assume we have all read the material, he or she should avoid plodding through the reading point by point. A good summary highlights major points (four to five) for the purpose of bringing the reading into crystallized form. The best kind of summary will do two things at once: 1) provide an orientation to the broader context of the reading, and 2) illuminate the basic content of the reading. Every text arises from a context (e.g., personal, historical, cultural, ecclesiological, ideological, socio-economic, etc.) Often, though not always, the texts we will read were generated by specific problems or controversies. An effective presentation will show the inner relationship between the context and the content of the reading. In order to provide proper contextualization, the student should consult external research materials such as encyclopedia entries, articles, and books. All consulted sources should be included in the bibliography in the handout (see below on the handout).

Connections: Since we are reading these texts within the broader context of the seminar, and since the seminar itself is intended to be a capstone for the student’s theological education, the presentation should attempt, when possible and pertinent, to make connections with other texts in the seminar, as well as with other texts and issues raised in other courses, especially, though not limited to, those taken as a theology major.

In preparation for the presentation, the student should ask him or herself how the themes and issues raised in the text under discussion relate to themes and issues raised earlier in the course. The student should look at the body of texts assigned for the seminar as an extended conversation, where each text illuminates, expands or contradicts other texts. The presentations are an opportunity to create threads that run throughout the seminar, quite like a giant tapestry. Students may wish to pick up a point from a previous presentation, building upon and advancing a critical issue or theme that has suddenly become live in the course of the seminar conversation.

Additionally, a student may find that connections with another course will help achieve greater integration in his or her theological and personal formation. For example, a presentation on Martin Luther’s theological anthropology might take into account a student’s exposure in another course to early Reformation history and politics. Or, a student presenting on Irenaeus may want to make a connection with the subject of Gnosticism as studied in an early church course. Such connections may also be interdisciplinary. For example, a student who double majors in psychology and theology may wish to bring into discussion the psychological insight in Augustine’s view of sin in terms of habit and addiction. Or, a student presenting on Karl Rahner’s anthropology in terms of evolutionary biology and cosmology may wish to establish a connection with what he or she has studied in a science course.

Evaluation: In addition to summarizing and establishing connections, the presenter should be prepared to make evaluations or informed judgments about the text at hand. This may take on many forms. For example, the presenter may wish to illuminate something about the text’s
argumentative and rhetorical technique. How is the author arguing for a particular point? How does the author appeal to scripture, to tradition, to experience? How does the author attempt to persuade the reader to adopt a particular position? Is the argument effective? Is the rhetoric helpful or excessive? Are there problems or underdevelopment in the author’s position? Or, more ambitiously, is the author right? What are the various aspects of the author’s position that stand to reason or fail to convince? And if a particular author’s position stands at variance with another author’s position (for example, the debate between Martin Luther and the Council of Trent), does one or the other (or possibly neither) provide a more convincing case? In providing a judgment on such matters, the presenter should do more than simply state the point; he or she should provide a set of reasons. The point of the exercise is to bring the presentation into a more provocative position, that is, to provoke discussion for the seminar participants.

Note: it will be helpful to consult the text *Thinking Theologically*, which we will read at the beginning of the course, in forming your evaluation. In this text, the authors provide a set of criteria by which a good theological judgment can be made.

**Critical Questions:** To conclude your presentation, provide the seminar participants critical questions (3 to 5 will suffice) for consideration. These questions should be designed to stimulate conversation for the second half of the seminar. The presenter should also be prepared to answer questions about their presentation, should they come up. The presenter need not think that he or she could answer every conceivable question about the text, but the presenter should be able to field basic questions, typically of a clarifying nature, regarding the substance of the presentation.

**Handout and Bibliography:** The presenter should provide a brief handout that provides visual assistance for following the presenter’s main talking points. The handout might provide a critical definition, key quotes, a visual image or graph, or whatever else might enhance the presentation. All handouts should include the discussion questions and a brief bibliography. The bibliography should include any sources referred to or used by the presenter. It should also provide a series of entries of primary and secondary resources (no more than 10 total) that a general audience might wish to consult for further study.

**Length of Presentation:** The presentation should last between 15 to 20 minutes. On presentation days, two students will (typically) present, followed by two short responses. The presentations and responses take place within the first half of the seminar session (1hr 10min). Thus, time limits will be strictly observed. The presentation should last at least 15 minutes. At 18 minutes, the professor will discretely alert the presenter that 2 minutes remain. At 20 minutes, the professor will indicate that time is up, at which point the presenter has 1 minute more to conclude. At 21 minutes, the professor will stop the presenter.

**Advanced Submission of Presentation Materials:** So that the respondent may have adequate time to prepare, the presenter must provide the respondent with the handout materials and basic outline of the presentation by the Friday preceding the Monday presentation. Although the presenter will likely continue to work on and polish the presentation over the weekend, at least a rough draft of the presentation should be given to the respondent for the latter’s preparation. This is an important courtesy to the respondent in any academic presentation setting. Presenters should also submit advanced materials to the professor, who will include them in the student’s overall evaluation.
Responses to Presentations

The response is an opportunity for students to provide effective feedback to each other in a community of theological inquiry. The response, which should last no more than 5 minutes and no less than 3, should include the following three elements:

Areas of Strength: The respondent will provide a general evaluation of the presentation’s strengths. This may include the quality of the outline, the setting up of context and content, the connections made, the evaluations extended, and the questions provided. It may also include the style of the presenter, e.g., eye-contact, body-posture, voice inflection.

Areas of Improvement: The respondent will provide a constructive criticism indicating where the presentation might be strengthened. This is obviously more difficult than pointing out areas of strength, both for the presenter and respondent. The point here is not to break down confidence, or to criticize arbitrarily. It is, rather, to provide honest, well-intentioned feedback within a community of learners. The respondent’s comments should be delivered carefully with the purpose that the presenter comes away with a specific area of growth. The ability to give and receive criticism is an essential part of any learning community, not least for theologians who serve the publics of the church, the academy, and society.

Additional Insight: The respondent will also furnish the seminar with an original question or insight related to the material that day. This means, therefore, that the respondent should carefully digest the material with a view towards advancing the dialogue. The nature of this advancement may be directly related to the presentation, or it may arise from the respondent’s independent reading and evaluation of the material prior to the presentation.

Grading Guidelines

The following is a description of the letter grading:

A range = Superior, exceptional, outstanding. The assignment demonstrates critical, informed, and creative theological inquiry that reflects superior understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student demonstrates depth of insight beyond what is normally expected. Carefully nuanced reasoning and writing, free from material, structural and grammatical error are presupposed in this grade.

B range = Good. The assignment demonstrates ready command of full range of concepts and shows some critical, informed, and creative inquiry that reflects above average understanding of essential theological/historical concepts. This means the student has produced an assignment that is free from material, structural and grammatical errors.
C range = *Acceptable*. The assignment demonstrates satisfactory ability to describe overall picture and essential concepts. This means the student has completed the assignment in a manner involving no significant errors. Material may not be free from structural and grammatical errors. Nuanced reasoning is not demonstrated.

D range = *Below average*. The assignment demonstrates reasoning that is neither carefully nuanced nor coherently presented; writing is insufficient in depth of insight and/or use of texts; presentation is not free from material error in structure, spelling and grammar. This means that the student failed to respond adequately to the assignment and its intentions.

F = *Unsatisfactory*. In one or more of the following ways the student: 1) failed to turn in the assignment; 2) did not respond to the assignment as given; 3) submitted work so thoroughly flawed as to indicate that the student did not make a serious effort, 4) was involved in plagiarism or cheating.

*Class Participation Grade*: A student will receive an A for this grade if s/he regularly contributes to seminar discussion, asks questions in class and is consistently prepared for the day’s readings. On the other hand, a student will receive a low B or C for participation if the professor cannot identify ways in which the student meaningfully contributed to the classroom experience.

*Presentation and Response Grade*: Students will be graded on the quality of the presentation according to the criteria set forth above (see “The Elements of Good Presentation”). The breakdown is as follows:

- Summary (25%)
- Connections (20%)
- Evaluation (25%)
- Critical Questions (5%)
- Handout (5%)
- Presentation Style (including time, eye-contact, body-posture, voice, etc.) (20%)

*Writing Assistance*

The Writing Center helps students with writing projects, multimedia projects and oral presentations. They offer one-on-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. Take advantage of this learning opportunity. For information and making appointments call 977.2930 or visit http://www.slu.edu/departments/sesc/writing.html.

*Statement of Academic Honesty*

Students must exercise academic honesty in all their work. Simply put: if a student is caught cheating or plagiarizing in his/her work, assignment will automatically receive a failing grade. Other consequences may follow, as instances of academic dishonesty are to be reported to the administration. Academic dishonesty cuts to the very heart of the enterprise of higher learning, and will therefore be treated with great severity.

Please resist every temptation to use someone else’s work as your own. Take note that your professor is quite aware of various Internet sites advertising term paper downloads. There are
tools (beyond the ordinary Google search) that enable professors to check for instances of plagiarism.

_The following is a statement of the university regarding academic honesty:_

“Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the _Policy on Academic Honesty_ of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion by the University.”

_[For further information on the university’s policy, see “Policy on Academic Honesty,” http://www.slu.edu/colleges/AS/academichonesty/html.]

_Submission of Work_

Students are expected to turn in their work on time. Late submissions of work will not receive full credit. The best grade a late submission can receive is a “C.” 24 hours _after_ the original due date (starting with the beginning of class), the best grade the submission can receive is a “D.” After this 24-hour period, late work will not be accepted and the student shall receive a zero for the assignment.

_Students with Disabilities_

Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course—as outlined in the syllabus—due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Disabilities Services. Please telephone the office at 314-977-2930, or visit Room 131 in the Academic Resources Center, 3840 Lindell Blvd. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

_Electronic Devices in the Classroom_

Students are asked to avoid using electronic devices in the classroom, including laptops, due to the increased misuse of such devices since the introduction of campus-wide wireless Internet. Exceptions will be granted by the professor only under very specific circumstances.

_Course Evaluation_

Per department policies, students are required to complete an evaluation of the course at the end of the semester in an on-line format (through WebCT). Instructions for the final evaluation process will be given at the end of the semester. If a student does not complete an evaluation, the participation grade will be reduced by a letter grade.
## Schedule of Sessions

### Theological Method and Overview of Theological Anthropology

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Topic</th>
<th>Reading Material</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>1) Introduction to the Seminar, Overview of Theological Method</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>No Seminar – Labor Day (note: begin reading the lengthier material for next session early)</td>
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| 9.10 | 2) Theological Method and the Study of Theological Anthropology | Howard W. Stone & James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, pp. 1-95  
| 9.14 | ➢ Integration Paper # 1 Due (Friday) | |

### Biblical Themes: Sin, Grace, and Human Community

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<th>Date</th>
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➢ Presentations Profs. Robinette and Hammond |

### Early Church Themes: Gnosticism and Embodiment, “Original Sin” and Freedom

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Irenaeus of Lyons, excerpts from *Against Heresies* (Von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation*), pp. 1-21, 30-36, 40-77, 90-111  
➢ Student Presentations |
The Canons of the Council of Carthage (418 AD), pp. 57-60  
Augustine of Hippo, from *The Confessions*, Book VIII, pp. 133-54  
The Synod of Orange (529 AD), pp. 109-20  
➢ Student Presentations |

### Medieval and Reformation Themes: Grace as World, Grace as Justification

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| 10.15| 7) Thomas Aquinas | Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, pp. 54-78  
Thomas O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian*, pp. 72-82, 97-126  
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa of the Summa* (Peter Kreeft), pp. 243-66  
➢ Student Presentation and Presentation by Dr. Hammond |
10.22  
No Seminar – Thanksgiving Break

10.29  
8) Martin Luther, the Council of Trent, and Recent Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue
   - Council of Trent, from “Decree Concerning Justification,” in *Readings in the History of Christian Theology*, pp. 43-7

11.1  
➢ Integration Paper # 2 Due Friday

**Human Transcendence and the New Cosmology**

11.5  
9) Karl Rahner and Transcendental Anthropology
   - Haight, *The Language and Experience of Grace*, pp. 119-42
   - Karl Rahner, selections from *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner’s Theological Writings*, ed. Harvey Egan, pp. 73-123

11.12  
10) Human Transcendence, Cosmic Evolution, and Christology
   - Dennis Edwards, *Jesus and the Cosmos*, pp. 1-63

11.19  
➢ No Seminar – AAR/SBL
   ➢ Paper Proposals Due

11.26  
11) Human Transcendence, Cosmic Evolution, and Christology (cont.)
   - Edwards, *Jesus and the Cosmos*, pp. 64-116
   - Rahner, “Christology Within an Evolutionary View of the World” (cont.), pp. 173-84
   ➢ Student Presentations
Contemporary Liberationist Themes

12.3 12) Social Sin, Social Grace: Liberation Theology
   - Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace*, pp. 143-86
   - José Comblin, “Grace,” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, pp. 522-31
   - Student Presentations

12.10 13) Feminist Readings
   - Student Presentations

12.14 ➢ Final Research Paper Due Friday