



PMIN 236: Creation, Science, & Ecological Theology Living in Faith on a Planet in Peril

Class Time: M 6-9 PM, Dowd 208/MM
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The field of ecological theology, or ecotheology, reflects critically on the Christian faith in light of the reality of ecological degradation and contemporary scientific insights into the “nature of nature” and the universe we inhabit. Following Pope Francis’s observation that “an ecological approach always becomes a social approach,” the discipline also attends to the intersection of ecological and social concerns, including racism, sexism, poverty, and other “obstructions of justice.” Applied to the life of the church, ecotheology asks what Catholic Christians can **do** for the good of the world we share with what Charles Darwin described as “endless forms most beautiful”: palms and squirrels, rivers and mountains, which Psalm 148 describes as praising God by simply being what they are. In this way, ecological theology offers a unique perspective on the intersection of theoretical, theological, pastoral, and ministerial concerns, seeking new ways of understanding God’s will to life, flourishing, and the “splendid universal communion” of all God’s creatures (*Laudato Si*).

In keeping with the GPPM’s twofold emphasis on cultivating **theological reflection and pastoral-ministerial skills**, this course aims cultivate students’ capacity for critical reflection on the Christian faith—to engage in “faith seeking understanding”—in conversation with contemporary science, especially ecology, which is a vital resource for understanding the meaning and significance of the Christian doctrine of creation—the umbrella field under which ecological theology falls. To achieve this end, we will engage in reading, writing, and thinking in an atmosphere of mutual, constructive engagement.

The course aims to foster the following Learning Goals:

Goal 1: Theological Foundations | Knowledge of the broad intellectual foundation for ministry in the areas of scripture, systematic and contextual theology, and spirituality; and incorporate theological reflection to enrich their ministerial practices across varying contexts.

Goal 3: Servant Leadership | A commitment to identify injustices and developing skills to work individually and in collaboration with other ministers, in accompanying those in need and in service to the poor, the marginalized, and the alienated, both within and outside the Church.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

What do we aim to achieve? By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Think, speak, and write critically about the relationship between Christianity and science from the standpoint of contemporary theology
- Articulate what biblical texts ‘say’ about humanity’s relationship to nature in terms of 1) domination and control and 2) the flourishing of life in communion with other creatures and with God
- Articulate the challenges and opportunities offered by historical theological accounts of the meaning of creation and reflect critically on possible future(s) for Christian theology in light of Earth’s present peril (there will be a beyond!)
- Apply theological reflection on creation to the lived experience of the Christian faith and the work of ministry
- Develop practical strategies for sustainable living and parish resources for actualizing creation care.



EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS (FOR YOU AND FOR ME)

1. **Be Respectful:** We will discuss numerous viewpoints, some or many of which may conflict with your own. While you can and should disagree with one another (and with me!), please do so with a spirit of generosity and understanding.
2. **Be Responsible:** There are **no excuses** for late work, frequent absences, or anything else. Readings must be read; papers and projects must be turned in on the date indicated. Yes, sickness, emergencies, and other bad things happen, and I hope they don't happen to you! But the basic rule doesn't change: **There are no excuses.** That said, **if something comes up, please speak to me in advance.**
3. **There are three BP's in my class:**
 - a. **Be Prompt:** Arrive on time. Lateness will be noted and may result in penalties.
 - b. **Be Present:** Come to class. Be present mentally **and** physically. Let's make the most of our time together.
 - c. **Be Prepared:** Complete all readings and assignments on time. Come with what you need to get to work.

REQUIRED TEXTS (AVAILABLE IN THE BOOKSTORE OR FROM AMAZON)

**All texts will be available on Camino (<https://camino.scu.edu>)
or via the library website (<https://www.scu.edu/library>)**

If acquiring course texts causes you any financial hardship, please speak with me before the course begins.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Burning Questions:** This course intends to hone the skills necessary to be excellent critical thinkers and critical readers of texts. But texts aren't just sources of information; they're carefully constructed arguments, with which you might agree or disagree. To get the most out of such texts, you must "think with the text" as you read.

To practice this skill, when **Burning Questions are assigned, please submit 2-3 detailed questions, comments of reflections on specific quotations from the assigned texts. Write out the quotation (with page number) and then offer your question or comment. Responses might ask for clarity or depth on a particular idea or reflect on ideas that struck you as you read.** They should demonstrate critical textual engagement. Fulfills LGs 1 & 3

2. **"Two Ways to Interpret the Text":** Interpret each of the texts indicated on the syllabus **in two different ways**. There are **no right or wrong answers** to this exercise, but your interpretations **should be based on close, careful readings of what the text actually says**. Think of the characters, the stories, and what seems to be going on. What is strange or striking about the text? What was the text meant to convey in its original context? What might it mean now?
3. **Five 2-Page Theological Reflection Papers (weeks of your choice).** TRPs provide opportunities to practice the skill of theological reflection. Essays should begin with a clear thesis formulated in response to the question given in class. A rigorous analysis that puts critical theological reflection into dialogue with your understanding of ministry should follow. Papers should incorporate **close, critical textual analysis** and be supported by **examples and quotations** from course texts.
 - Headings should include your **name and the assignment number**. There's no need for a title.
 - The body **may be double- or 1.5-line spaced**. There isn't room for introduction, **so jump in with your thesis**.
 - Make sure your paper is clear, well-structured, and supported by **specific examples from the text**. Cite sources using **parenthetical citations**, i.e. (Rahner 85). P
 - Papers **must be proofread for grammatical and spelling errors** prior to submission. Please use one-inch margins, standards fonts, 12-pt. type. Fulfills LGs 1 & 3
4. **"For the Beauty of the Earth" Final Research Paper & Ministry Proposal (~20 p., detailed instructions to come)** Fulfills LGs 1 & 3

Reflecting on all we've done this quarter and on your own pastoral experience/expertise, this essay invites you to 1) engage in deeper research and reflection on any aspect of the church's faith to 2) construct a parish program or resource that applies your reflection on the science and the theology creation to the community you serve.

For the Final Paper, please follow the [GPPM style guide](#). (continued below)

1. Material taken **verbatim** from another source **must be enclosed in quotation marks** (i.e. “Generally speaking, the Roman Empire had little time to worry over the particularities of the Jewish faith.”) and should be followed by a **footnote reference** to the source of the material.
2. Material **paraphrased** from another source **should be introduced as belonging to the author** (i.e. Ehrman explains that the Roman Empire was quite tolerant of the Jewish religion, as long as it did not pose a threat to their rule).

Grading Scheme

20%	Constructive Participation in discussions, activities, completion of readings;
10%	Burning Questions
30%	Theological Reflection Papers
40%	Final Paper

Grading Scale

94-100	A	Honors level work.
90-93	A-	Excellent work.
89-87	B+	Very good work; near excellence, but has minor problems.
83-86	B	Good work; solid performance; above average.
80-82	B-	Good work, but lacking some completeness, or accuracy.
77-79	C+	Acceptable work.
73-76	C	Acceptable work, but lacking in completeness, critical thinking or accuracy.
69-72	C-	Perfunctory work; may be simply rehashing sources.
60-68	D	Unsatisfactory work; shows minimal grasp of concepts or sloppy analysis.
0-59	F	Failure.

Essays graded with **letter grades will be translated into a numerical grade** at the instructor’s discretion. Letter grades will typically receive the numerical average of the range of any grade. However, **the instructor reserves the right to raise or lower numerical averages** where circumstances dictate.

Attendance Policies and Procedures

Attending class is indispensable to 1) learning the subject matter and 2) mastering the critical skills this course intends to cultivate. Students will be allowed **one** unquestioned, excused absence. Unexcused absences of **two or more** may result in one whole letter-grade deduction each (i.e. B to C). **For unavoidable absences, please speak to me in advance.** Accommodations will rarely be made if you speak to me **after** a class meeting.

Mixed-Mode (Live/Zoom) Attendance Policy

Attending class is indispensable to 1) learning the subject matter and 2) mastering the critical skills this course intends to cultivate. This course runs like a traditional classroom but with some students present in person and others present from remote locations; all students meet at the same time, “coming to class” promptly at 6:00 PM. **Students located in the Dioceses of San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland are required to attend in person.** Students in other areas may attend via Zoom.

Students will be allowed **one** unquestioned, excused absence. Unexcused absences of **two or more** may result in one whole letter-grade deduction each (i.e. B to C). **For unavoidable absences, please speak to me in advance.** Accommodations will rarely be made if you speak to me **after** a class meeting.

Students at all locations are expected to arrive promptly at 6:00 PM. Zoom-based students must attend from a **quiet environment, free from distractions.** Students should follow best practices for Zoom meetings, including: 1) operating in a **well-lit area with one’s laptop connected to power and on level surface** (setting your laptop on top of a pile of books to raise it to eye level is a big help); 2) **muting your laptop when you are not speaking** and raising one’s hand (via Zoom or physically) to enter the conversation; 3) **eating mindfully, if at all,** to minimize distractions other students; 4) **avoiding cell phone use.**

Technology & Class Recordings Policy

1. Laptops and other electronic devices may be used **when indicated by the instructor**.
 2. **Audiovisual recording of class is prohibited unless approved by the instructor.** As stated in the Student Conduct Code: "...Dissemination or sharing of any classroom recording without the permission of the instructor would be considered "misuse" and, therefore, prohibited. Violations of these policies may result in disciplinary action by the University. At the instructor's discretion, violations may also have an adverse effect on the student's grade." **All online classes will be recorded and made available on Camino.**
 3. All materials in this course are protected by United States copyright laws. I am the copyright holder of the materials I create, including notes, handouts, slides, and videos. You may make copies of course materials for your own use and you may share the materials with other students enrolled in this course. You may not publicly distribute the course materials without my written permission.
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Academic Integrity

The Academic Integrity pledge is an expression of the University's commitment to fostering an understanding of—and commitment to—a culture of integrity at Santa Clara University. The Academic Integrity pledge, which applies to all students, states:

I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code.

Academic integrity is part of your intellectual, ethical, and professional development. I expect you to uphold the principles of this pledge for all work in this class. I will clarify expectations on academic integrity -- including the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and course sharing sites for all assignments and exams in this course. If you have questions about what is appropriate on any assignment, please let me know before you hand in work. For resources about ensuring academic integrity in your work, see [LibGuide on Academic Integrity](#).

AI/ChatGPT Policies

The emergence of AI technologies (e.g. ChatGPT) has raised new practical and ethical questions about what it means to learn and "do the work" in college-level courses. We're working our way through this transition together, and while clear-cut answers are hard to find, we need strategies for navigating this new reality. With that in mind, I have formulated some guidelines to define what constitutes the proper and improper use of AI/ChatGPT. Please take these guidelines seriously as you choose how to approach your work.

- **As a baseline norm, the use of AI is discouraged.** If you don't want to navigate the complexities of these guidelines, the easiest solution is to choose not to use AI/ChatGPT (as you did for most of your life!).
 - The use of AI **is never permitted on daily assignments** (burning questions, study guides, debate notes, etc.).
 - The use of AI **is only permitted on essays** (microthemes, the final project).
 - If you opt to use ChatGPT or another AI construct on an essay, you must **name ChatGPT (or the construct you used) as a co-author** (i.e. put "with ChatGPT" after your name).
 - **Further, you may only use AI for the following purposes (considered "proper use"):**
 - Brainstorming essay topics; organizing your ideas into a logical and coherent structure (outlining);
 - Answering technical writing questions, checking grammar and spelling, defining words, etc.
 - However, please keep in mind that we'll be learning definitions proper to our course in class; definitions supplied by AI may not correspond with what we've learned, especially when we're talking about arcane topics.
 - **Anything else, including having AI draft an essay for you, constitutes "improper use"** and will result in the following:
 - If I suspect that ChatGPT/AI has been used improperly, I will consult with colleagues and several AI detectors. If my concerns remain, I will email you and contact you via Camino about the situation. **You must respond within 24 hours, and you have two options for response:**
 - If you engaged in improper AI use, **you may admit to improper use** and explain why you used AI improperly.
 - If you did not use AI improperly, **please explain**. I reserve the right to **request a 3-question oral exam** based on the assignment in question.
 - The first improper use of AI technologies will result in **automatic failure of the assignment (a "0")**. The second offense will result in **automatic failure of the course**.
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Office of Accessible Education (OAE)

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact the Office of Accessible Education (OAE), Benson 216, <http://www.scu.edu/oae> as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodations with the University. If you have already arranged accommodations through the OAE, please be sure to request accommodations through myOAE and discuss them with me within the first two weeks of the quarter.

While I am here to assist you in any way I can, I am unable to provide accommodations until I have received verification from OAE. The OAE will work with students and faculty to arrange proctored exams for students whose accommodations include double time for exams and/or assistive technology. Students with approved accommodations of time-and-a-half should talk with me as soon as possible. OAE must be contacted in advance to schedule proctored examinations or to arrange other accommodations. The OAE would be grateful for advance notice of at least two weeks. **For more information, you may contact OAE at 408-554-4109.**

Accommodations for Pregnancy and Parenting

In alignment with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and with the California Education Code, Section 66281.7, Santa Clara University provides reasonable accommodations to students who are pregnant, have recently experienced childbirth, and/or have medically related needs. Absences due to medical conditions relating to pregnancy and childbirth will be excused for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student's doctor, and students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work. Alternatively, a pregnant or parenting student experiencing related medical conditions may seek assistance with accommodations through OAE or Title IX.

Safety Measures

In order to meet our learning objectives, we must uphold the highest standards for safety and mutual respect. Students are required to adhere to current university mask mandates at all times; to make their best attempt to make themselves heard when asking questions or contributing to discussions; and refrain from eating or drinking in class. It is expected that everyone will follow university guidelines about health and public safety measures outlined on the [Prepared SCU website](#).

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct (Title IX)

Santa Clara University is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free of all forms of discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct. California law SB 493 **requires faculty members to report** any information brought to their attention about incidents of sexual harassment or misconduct to the SCU [Equal Opportunity and Title IX Office](#) (408) 551-3043. This includes, but is not limited to, disclosures in writing assignments, class discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

Should you need support, SCU has dedicated staff trained to assist you in navigating campus resources, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and filing a formal complaint with the University or with law enforcement. Please see the [Student Resources](#) page for more information about reporting options and resources.

I am also here as your ally and advocate.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, or stalking, please tell someone immediately. If you wish to speak to a confidential resource who is not required to report, please utilize one of the following SCU resources:

- [SCU Wellness Center](#)
- [CAPS](#)
- Any individual (clergy, counselors) acting in a professional capacity for which confidentiality is mandated by law.

I am happy to help connect you with any of these resources. For more information, please consult the University's Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Policy or contact the University's EEO and Title IX Coordinator, Jenna Elliott, at [408-551-3521](tel:408-551-3521), jrelliott@scu.edu. Reports may be submitted online through <https://www.scu.edu/osl/report/> or anonymously through [Ethicspoint](#).



SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

DATE & TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENT (S)
Week 1: 4/1 The Doctrine of Creation: Meaning & History	<p style="text-align: center;">Read Syllabus</p> Anne M. Clifford, CSJ, "Creation" (https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.scu.edu/stable/j.ctt22nm83q) Denis Edwards, <i>Christian Understandings of Creation</i> , Ch. 2-7 (p. 21-150, e-book through library website: https://www.scu.edu/library)	Come with 1-2 questions and/or comments on the readings.
Week 2: 4/8 (Re)introducing Revelation & the Bible in Dialogue with Science (or: the Bible: what it is and what it ain't)	Raymond E. Brown, SS, "The Human Word of Almighty God" Stoeger, "Biblical Creation Literature" Stoeger, "Is Big Bang Cosmology in Conflict with Divine Creation?" Paul J. Schutz, "Hermeneutics Handout" Genesis 11:1-9; Genesis 18-19; Romans 11	Burning Questions (BQs) Ways to Interpret the Text
Week 3: 4/15 Creation in the Hebrew Bible, Part 1: Genesis & Liberation	Genesis 1-3, 6-9 Exodus 2:11-3:15 Richard Bauckham, <i>The Bible and Ecology</i> , Ch. 1 Phyllis Trible, "Genesis 2-3 Reread" Paul J. Schutz, "Fire of Justice, Breath of Life"	TRP (optional) & BQs
Week 4: 4/22 Creation in the Hebrew Bible, Part 2: The Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 3, 8, 9; Wisdom 7 Job 1, 38-42 Psalm 8, 19, 104, 148-150 Theodore Hiebert, "Air: the First Sacred Thing" James Limburg, "Who Cares for the Earth?" William P. Brown, <i>The Seven Pillars of Creation</i> , Ch. 6 and 7	TRP (optional) & BQs
Week 5: 4/29 Creation in the New Testament	Matthew 19:16-30, 22:23-40, 25:31-46 (the Gospels) 1 Corinthians 12-15; Colossians 1:15-20 (the Epistles of Paul) John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-4, 3-4 (the Johannine literature) Richard Bauckham, <i>The Bible and Ecology</i> , Ch. 5 James Nash, <i>Loving Nature</i>	TRP (optional) & BQs
Week 6: 5/6 Theology and Science: From Conflict to Conversation	Ian Barbour, "Ways of Relating Science and Religion" William R. Stoeger, SJ, "Reflections on the Interaction of My Knowledge of Cosmology..." William R. Stoeger, SJ, "Our Experience of Knowing in Science and Spirituality" Paul J. Schutz, "20 th and 21 st Century Catholic Voices on Theology, Science, and Nature" Duncan Aikman, "Lemaître Follows Two Paths to Truth" Lee Billings, "Atheism is Inconsistent with the Scientific Method..." https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/atheism-is-inconsistent-with-the-scientific-method-prize-winning-physicist-says/	TRP (optional) & BQs

<p>Week 7: 5/13 The Divine Action Problem and the Divine Action Project (DAP)</p>	<p>Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i> (excerpts) Elizabeth Johnson, <i>Ask the Beasts</i>, Ch. 5 Stoeger, "Describing God's Action in the World in Light of Scientific Knowledge" Stoeger, "Cosmology, Evolution, Causality, and Creation" Stoeger, "Conceiving Divine Action in a Dynamic Universe" (ONLY p. 225-239)</p>	<p>TRP (optional) & BQs</p>
<p>Week 8: 5/20 From Science to Ecology: A Baseline Approach</p>	<p>Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i>, Intro & Chs. 1-3 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" Paul Santmire, <i>The Travail of Nature</i>, Ch. 1 Elizabeth Johnson, "Turn to the Heavens and the Earth" William R. Stoeger, SJ, "Our Intimate Links with the Universe and Nature" Paul J. Schutz, "Cultivating a 'Cosmic Perspective' in Theology" Elizabeth Johnson, <i>Ask the Beasts</i>, Ch. 7</p>	<p>TRP (optional) & BQs 3 1-Paragraph Proposals</p>
<p>Week 9: 5/28 (TUESDAY/TBD) Science, Integral Ecology, and Social Justice</p>	<p>Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i>, Ch. 4 Paul J. Schutz, "Environmental Sciences" James Cone, "Whose Earth is it Anyway?" Delores Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies" Elizabeth Johnson, <i>Women, Earth, Creator Spirit</i> (10-28; 41-68) Aruna Gnadaason, "The Integrity of Creation and Earth Community"</p>	<p>TRP (optional) & BQs Final Project Proposal</p>
<p>Week 10: 6/3 Possible Futures for Our Imperiled Earth: Lines of Action</p>	<p>Pope Francis, <i>Laudato Si'</i>, Chs. 5-6 Pope Francis, <i>Laudate Deum</i> Johnson, <i>Ask the Beasts</i>, Ch. 9-10 Stoeger, "Astrobiology and Beyond" Norman Wirzba, <i>The Paradise of God</i> (excerpts) Erin Lothes Biviano, <i>Inspired Sustainability</i></p>	<p>TRP (optional) & BQs Annotated Bibliography</p>
<p>6/12</p>	<p>FINAL PROJECTS DUE BY MIDNIGHT</p>	