



LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

JOHN FELICE ROME CENTER

THEO 100-A01: Christian Theology
Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Joseph F. Wagner, SJ	Class Meetings: MW 5:15-6:30
Office: A10	Room TBD
Office Hours: TBA	Email: jwagner9@luc.edu

Required texts

McGrath, Alister E. 2018. *Theology: The Basics*. 4th ed. Wiley Blackwell. This book is available at no cost using your Loyola ID [HERE](#).

McGrath, Alister E. 2018. *Theology: The Basic Readings*. Wiley Blackwell. This book is available at no cost using your Loyola ID [HERE](#).

Russell, Mary Doria. 1996. *The Sparrow*. Ballantine Books. (Any print or electronic edition)

Course description

With nearly one in three people identifying as Christian throughout the world, Christianity remains the world's largest religion. In the United States, about two in three people identify as Christian (at least nominally). There are countless aspects of world art, music, literature, history, philosophy, and even politics that cannot be fully understood or appreciated without a fundamental knowledge of the central teachings of Christianity.

This course offers an introduction to the practice of theology, and to basic Christian beliefs that have emerged through theological thought, with a focus on topics expressed in the central statement of faith professed by virtually all Christians, the Apostles' Creed. In the earlier part of the course, we will examine some of these topics as they have been developed from the days of Jesus to the present day. In the later part of the course, we will revisit many of these ideas as they are lived and expressed through a late-twentieth century novel. In this way, we will try to move Christian theology out of the realm of the abstract and into our lived experiences, whether they be explicitly religious or not.

Learning outcomes

- Identify, articulate, and analyze fundamental Christian beliefs and their underlying theology, especially those that appear in the Apostles' Creed.
- Analyze and engage in theological conversations regarding different theological positions and perspectives, including those across some Christian divisions and across some cultural, social, and personal identities.
- Recognize and describe how some fundamental Christian beliefs are and have been expressed in the arts and sciences, in history, and in the lived experience of Christians through modern times.

Theology vs. personal faith or spirituality

We will approach the study of theology as an academic discipline. As such, it can be studied by all students, regardless of their own diverse viewpoints and backgrounds. You are welcome and even encouraged to disagree with me, with the texts, or with one another, as long as you do so in a manner that respects and cares for all concerned. Any expressed personal opinions, however, should always be *informed opinions*, that is, offered with good explanations and supporting evidence or experience, as possible.

Education is a social activity

Working together, both with me and with one another, will be encouraged (and at times required) in this class. Working with others has the (sometimes uncomfortable) effect of “stretching” us—sometimes to articulate ourselves better, sometimes to realize the limits of our understandings, and sometimes to understand how someone else may think about things very differently.

Course administration and communication

Most course materials will be posted on the course website at Loyola Sakai Learning Management System (Sakai). I will also send email to you as a class. It will be important for you to check your Loyola email and the course website regularly. Unless the JFRC itself experiences a system crash, there will be no excuse for not having up-to-date knowledge of course announcements, assignments, etc.

Reading & Written Assignments

All assignments in this course will be graded using the same system. Each assignment will receive one of the following evaluations:

- ✓+ The assignment has been completed particularly well, presented professionally, with at least some responses and insights showing notable thoughtfulness and creativity.
- ✓ The assignment has been completed satisfactorily, reasonably professionally, and with all the minimum expectations met.
- ✓− The assignment is minimally acceptable, but shows flaws in understanding, lack of professionalism, or omitting some of the minimum expectations.
- 0 The assignment was not turned in, or it was turned in but unacceptable in its quality, errors, or omissions.

These four evaluative categories will be assigned point values, weighted according to the assignment. See assignment descriptions below.

Reading assignment questions: To encourage reading and reading comprehension, prior to each class a small number (1-3) questions will be posed on Sakai. Each question can be reasonably answered in no more than a few sentences. Responses to these questions will be made on Sakai, and they will be due before class begins. (✓+, ✓, ✓−, 0) = (3, 2, 1, 0)

Mini-Theology assignments: There will be two “mini-theology assignments” during the semester. Students will read a *brief* published excerpt of a work in Christian theology and write a brief analysis and personal critique of it. Each assignment will be submitted as a written paper, possibly with an accompanying audio-paper. (✓+, ✓, ✓−, 0) = (30, 20, 10, 0)

Creative Theology assignments: There will be two “creative theology assignments” during the semester. These will require theological reflection, but in a more creative context. Each assignment will be submitted as a written paper, possibly with an accompanying audio-paper. (✓+, ✓, ✓−, 0) = (30, 20, 10, 0)

Final exam essay: In class on the final exam day, students will respond to several essay questions related to their theological interpretations and insights into the novel *The Sparrow*. (✓+, ✓, ✓−, 0) = (30, 20, 10, 0)

Classroom participation: Classroom participation is expected by all, though it is understood that each of us has better days than others. Overall participation will be evaluated by the instructor on the usual basis. (✓+, ✓, ✓−, 0) = (30, 20, 10, 0)

Grading

Your final grade will be based on the following point-distribution, totalling 255 points:

Reading assignment questions (≈ 25)	75 points
Mini-Theology assignments (2)	60 points
Creative assignments (2)	60 points
Final exam essay	30 points
Class participation	30 points

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale: A/A- (215-255 pts), B/B \pm (175-214 pts), C/C \pm (135-174 pts), D (85-134 pts), F (< 85 pts). I reserve the right to make it easier—but not more difficult—to earn a particular grade. Plus/minus grades reflect *approximately* the top and bottom 3% of each the above ranges, respectively. I do not intend to use the grade of D+.

Academic integrity

Loyola University Chicago takes seriously the issues of plagiarism and academic integrity. Below is an excerpt from the university's statement on academic integrity:

The faculty and administration of Loyola University Chicago wish to make it clear that the following acts are regarded as serious violations of personal honesty and the academic ideal that binds the university into a learning community:

Submitting as one's own:

1. Material copied from a published source: print, internet, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc. [*This includes the use of AI in all its forms.*]
2. Another person's unpublished work or examination material.
3. Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit.
4. Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The critical issue is to give proper recognition to other sources. To do so is both an act of personal and professional courtesy, and of intellectual honesty.

You are encouraged to work and study with other students in class and to learn from one another as opportunities provide. However, turning in the work of another, collaborating on assignments when prohibited, or providing your work to someone else will be considered academically dishonest. It is my practice to handle such cases with the severest penalties possible.

Attendance policy

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy.

Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office.

Twice-a-week classes: After 2 absences, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class. Missing 6 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).

Title IX

The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#) and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

Misuse of technology

Computers and any other electronic devices in our classroom are intended to be used ONLY to support our classroom activities. They are NOT to be used for any other purpose (email, messaging, social media, other assignments, etc.) during class time. Anyone found using the computer or *any other phone/messaging device* during class for purposes unrelated to the course will be given a warning as a first-offense. Anyone found violating this policy again will receive a 2-point course grade reduction for every additional offense.

The use of any electronic devices other than those explicitly permitted during an exam is strictly prohibited. If you use any such device during an exam *for any reason whatsoever* you may be awarded a grade of "0" for that exam.

Unless otherwise instructed, the use of any AI technologies or software to assist with or complete any work submitted for a grade is strictly prohibited.

Academic accommodations

Loyola University provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Student Accessibility Center (SAC) on the Lakeshore campus. Professors receive the accommodation notification from SAC. Students are encouraged to meet with their professor individually in order to discuss their accommodations. All information will remain confidential. Rome Center students who request such accommodations should meet with Ms. Carla Mollica as soon as possible. Accommodations cannot be made at the last minute nor retroactively.

Sharing, posting, or recording class materials

With the exception of informal personal discussions about this class and its topics, the written materials from this course may not be shared outside the course without the instructor's prior written permission. In no cases may any of these materials be posted electronically in any format without prior written permission. In addition, only students with formal written SAC approval will be permitted to record class discussion. Please be aware that without this permission, you are not only violating the course requirements, but you may also be violating the legal right to privacy of individuals present in class. It is expected ***and legally required*** that all such personal recordings of class meetings will be deleted after this course has ended.

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students with written permission of all who are registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered.

Anticipated course schedule

Light Blue = Clickable Link

Week	Dates	Monday	Wednesday*
1	TBD	Introduction: What is Theology? What are theologies?	Read: <i>Basics</i> , xxvi-xli
2	TBD	Read: David Foster Wallace, “This is Water”	Faith: Read <i>Basics</i> , Ch 1
3	TBD	Read Brooks, “The Shock of Faith”	Scripture: Read Mizen, A History of the Bible (Friday*)
4	TBD	Scripture: Read PBS Frontline, What are the Gospels?; The Gospel of John	God: Read <i>Basics</i> , Ch 2 Mini-Theology Assignment 1 due
5	TBD	God: Read Boyle, <i>Tattoos on the Heart</i> , Ch. 1 Creation: Read Genesis, 1-2	Creation: Read <i>Basics</i> , Ch 3
6	TBD	Jesus: Read <i>Basics</i> , Ch 4	Jesus [continued]
	TBD	<i>Fall Break</i>	<i>Fall Break</i>
7	TBD	Incarnation: Read Mt 1-2; Mk 1:1-11; Lk 1:1-38, 2:1-20; Jn 1:1-18 ; Wright, “God’s Way of Acting”; Borg, “Light in the Darkness”	The Reign of God: Read Snyder, “Models of the Kingdom”; Knowles, “God’s Reign” Creative Assignment 1 due
8	TBD	Salvation: Read <i>Basics</i> , Ch. 5	Christian Anthropology: Read Chathanatt and Mangai, “Christian Anthropology”
9	TBD	Christian Anthropology [continued]	Liberation Theology: Read Hartnett, “Remembering the poor” Feminist Theology: Read Reuther, “Liberation Mariology”
10	TBD	Black Theology: Read Cone, “Black Theology in American Religion” Queer Theology: Read Cheng, “What is Queer Theology?”	Read <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 1-6 TBD Mini-Theology Assignment 2 due
11	TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 7-12 TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 13-17 TBD
12	TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 18-21 TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 22-25 TBD
13	TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 26-28 TBD	Read: <i>The Sparrow</i> , Chs. 29-32 Creative Assignment 2 due

*Note that there is no class on Wednesday, **TBD**, but the class will meet that week on **TBD**. This accommodates the Papal Audience on Wednesday.

Disclaimer

This class may deviate from the schedule outlined above. The instructor reserves the right to make corrections or minor adjustments to the course syllabus as needed.