

THEO 2952
Fall, 2023
Thursdays, 2-4:15
Mark Massa, S.J.

U.S. CATHOLICS: THE OLD FAITH IN A NEW LAND

This is an introductory seminar in historical theology/church history, presuming no previous knowledge of religion or Catholicism in the United States.

Reading:

Everyone will be expected to have read the assigned texts before our meetings together (about 100-150 pages per week), as our meetings will operate on the Socratic method (more about this later). These texts include Finke and Stark's *Churching of America*; Robert Orsi's *Madonna of 115th Street*; John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*; and my own (deathless prose) *Catholics and American Culture*

Requirements:

- 1) Attendance at all seminar meetings (not an elective) at which you will show your brilliance and wit (a much-appreciated Massa virtue) during the Socratic dialogues on the text(s) assigned. Near death experiences, of course, constitute a valid excuse for absence from class, but precious few other experiences fall into that category.
- 2) Four essay "exercises" (1000-1250 words) covering both readings and class notes. Questions for these exercises will be passed out one week before they are due; everyone is most welcome to show drafts of these to me before submission. Everyone will be given one "bad hair day" on these (i.e., the lowest of the four exercises will be dropped, and the three highest exercises will be averaged together for the final grade).
- 3) A final historiographic essay of 16-20 pages (due on Wednesday December 6 by 5pm) on a topic to be worked out in conjunction with me. These papers will address an issue/person/theme raised by one of our common texts, and investigate it more thoroughly (e.g., "outsiderhood" as a theological category; the faith lives of North American teenagers/twenty-somethings; Catholic attempts to find a successful model of "Christ and Culture" in the U.S., etc.). We will discuss this at much great length a month into the course.

Evaluation:

The three highest grades on the exercises, averaged together and minus the "bad hair day," will count for 50% of the final grade; the final essay will count for 50%. Participation in the seminar is expected of everyone, and thus will not be graded.

Office Hours:

Office hours for the fall term will be on Mondays from 1-5, or by arrangement with me. If you need to set up a meeting with me at the Boisi Center (24 Quincy Rd) please email my admin, Ms. Suzie Richard at susan.richard@bc.edu.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND READINGS

I. THE CHURCHING (AND UNCHURCHING?) OF AMERICA

Week 1:

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Week 5: September 28: “Otherness” as Theological Category:

The Irish and German Stories

Reading: Orsi, *Madonna*, chaps. 6, 7 and 8

Week 6: October 5: Discussion of the Orsi’s “Theology of the Streets”

The “Big” and “Little” Traditions of Christianity

*Exercise Number 2 due

III. AMERICAN AND CATHOLIC: THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION*

(*Dense Reading Alert)

Week 7: October 19: Americanism and Natural Law

Reading: John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, Intro and Essay I

*Monday October 23: 6pm: *Voluntary* reading of Murray, WHTT

Week 8: October 26: “I Was a Teenage Thomist” I: Murray and the American Consensus:

Reading: Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, Essays 2 (“Articles of Peace”) and 4 (“The Growing End”)

Week 9: November 2: “I was a Teenage Thomist” II: The Problem of Humanae Vitae

*Exercise No. 3 due

IV. PARADIGM REVOLUTIONS IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Week 10: November 9: Paradigm Revolutions in the Catholic Tradition

Reading: Massa, *Structures*, Intro and chapters 1 and 2

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Week 11: November 16: Paradigm Revolutions 2

Reading: Massa, *Structures*, chapters 3 and 7

*Monday November 13: 6pm: *Voluntary* reading of Massa, *Structure*

Week 12: November 30: Individual meetings with Massa

Exercise Number 4 due

***Historiographic Essay due by 5pm on Monday December 11.