

Syllabus

SSNT 424 The Johannine Tradition (3)

The Gospels and Letters of John have been very influential in the shaping of Christian theology. A close reading of the texts will provide an examination of the Johannine corpus within its theological, social, and historical context.

Introduction

In January 2020, the Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary received a grant for the study of science and theology from the Templeton Foundation to design and implement courses addressing the exceedingly important interface between contemporary science, Sacred Scripture, and theology. This course on the Gospel of John is one of the beneficiaries of that grant.

Direction of the course

If we use classic, exegetical terms in use from the mid-19th century, our frame of interpretation can be classified as *Rezeptionsgeschichte* or *reception history*, that is, the narrative of how believers have received and understood a biblical passage in a particular period of time. The idea is that at different times in history, the Church has understood certain words and stories differently. For example, how people heard the story of the *Wedding at Cana* (Jn 2:1-11) 500 years ago is quite different from how we might interpret it today, the influence of all previous interpretations upon reading of the biblical text today notwithstanding.

For example, by stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1 NAB), the evangelist, John, intentionally echoes the first words of Genesis in the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. Yet, by employing the Greek term, *Logos* (Word), it immediately becomes apparent that the universe about which the Evangelist writes takes on the vocabulary of Greek Stoicism. Why is this so? John wants to make the Jewish biblical narrative comprehensible to gentiles in Asia Minor, and the Evangelist does so by employing *Logos*, a word representing, on the one hand, the rational, organizing principle inherent in the Greek understanding of creation, and on the other, the *Word of God* for Jews and Christians.

Our conception of the universe is much different from the Evangelist's. John was dealing with a finite, geocentric view of the **cosmos**, whereas people in our time have gone beyond **Copernicus** and **Galileo** to **Einstein** and **Lemaître**. How does the biblical text resonate with people in the pews today if we view the Big Bang as John's "beginning" sparked by the Logos? Moreover, cosmological questions are wedded inextricably to questions arising from Darwin and evolutionary biology; the laws of the cosmos form the conditions under which evolution occurs. But, how do sin and salvation enter the picture when confronted with physics and biology? Do these two sciences allow for human, free agency?

Iliia Delio, in her *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*, demonstrates convincingly that evolution is not only compatible with biblical revelation, but it also advances ongoing evolution as the means by which the promises of revelation are fulfilled. Delio builds on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's theological concept of *Omega Point*, as the ultimate union of creation with the

Creator, thus melding the laws of cosmology and biology. Neither Teilhard nor Delio sufficiently addresses sin and evil, however, which are component and inescapable parts of the biblical narrative, salvation history, and indeed, the human condition. For this discussion, we turn to Christopher Southgate and his *Theology in a Suffering World: Glory and Longing*.

With scientific explanation of the origins of the universe as well as Darwinian evolution as a foundation, Southgate utilizes semiotics along with art and Christian mysticism to explain a Johannine (and Pauline) understanding of evil and redemption. The result is a revitalization of the ancient concept of *theosis* or human divinization, a concept first understood by a number of the patristic and monastic theologians and writers.

All Christian theology tries to explain how God, through Jesus Christ, interfaces with the world. Writers of all the biblical books, under divine inspiration, have used references and vocabulary that the people of their times could understand, an exercise which includes the science and philosophical speculation of the day. The situation is no different now.

Although the Gospel of John and its related literature (1,2,3 John) speak about creation and salvation in a way reflecting, if not specifically citing, the science and philosophy of the Greco-Roman world, the Good News endures to this day. Our lives as believers here in the 21st century are proof that the efforts of John the Evangelist, indeed all the evangelists, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit have worked very well.

We no longer live in the Greco-Roman world, however. An overriding question for biblical research, indeed for all theology, is how to understand in God's revelation today within the framework of astrophysics and evolutionary biology, when the writers who recorded that revelation did so within the worldview existing 2500 years ago. Can we mine John's Gospel for a theology that arises from the Christian Tradition that is still able to nourish our contemporary understanding of the human person and evolutionary creation? To answer the question, I refer to St Augustine, who says, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you".

Goals, aims, objectives:

- To do a synchronic reading of John's Gospel
- To undertake a historical-critical examination of John's Gospel and Letters
- To examine the ancient *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine corpus
- To situate John's Gospel within the world of astrophysics and biological evolution
- To employ art and culture as a means of addressing the pastoral implications of John's Gospel

Learning outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will

- Describe the history of the Johannine text
- Explain the historical use of science in interpretations of John's Gospel

- Employ a hermeneutic based on the theology of evolution, including the scientific origins of the universe, as they use the historical-critical method in their study of Johannine Tradition
- Analyze the impact of John's Gospel and on Christian mysticism and art
- Apply passages from the John's Gospel to pastoral issues

Required Texts:

The complete Bible, either the *New American (NAB)*, *New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)*, or *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*. If the *NRSV*, the student must have the Catholic edition, i.e., includes the Apocryphal and Deuterocanonical books.

Any commentary of your choosing. Consult bibliography for suggestions.

Aland, Kurt. *Synopsis of the Four Gospels, Greek-English Edition* OR English Edition, United Bible Societies, 1993. ISBN 3 438 05405 1 = **SFG**

Brown, Raymond. *Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979. ISBN 0 8091 2174 3

Delio, Ilia. *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2013.

Saint John's Bible: The Gospels and Acts. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press.

978-0-8146-9051-2 = **TSJB**

Southgate, Christopher. *Theology in a Suffering World: Glory and Longing*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Bibliography

The titles of additional books and articles are listed on Canvas and may be updated as the class progresses.

Requirements:

- According to university policy, **class attendance** is a student obligation. In this class, it is paired with class participation. Since discussion implies that one will be present in class, students are reminded that even one absence can seriously lower the final grade. After two absences, students should seriously consider dropping the class.
- Class participation, whether in person or by distance. Since discussion implies that one will be present in class, students are reminded that absences can seriously lower the final grade. Completion of specific class assignments will be computed under participation.
- Two summary statements after Units I and II
 - Monday, 28 Sept. 9:00am Unit I summary statement
 - Monday, 12 Oct. 9:00am Unit II summary statement
- Four papers of extended length.
 - Monday, 7 Sept. 9:00 am Crux interpretem (3-4 pages)
 - Monday, 21 Sept. 9:00am Historical-critical exegesis (4-5 pages)
 - Monday, 19 Oct. 9:00am Homiletical exegesis (3-4 pages)
 - Monday, 16 Nov. 9:00am Word and image exegesis (5-7 pages)
- Final, comprehensive oral exam, Friday 4 December & Monday, 7 December

N.B. Please upload all papers to Canvas by the due date and time. Because assignments are scaffolded, i.e., each assignment builds on the previous one; the grading for papers depends on

completing the task during the time allotted. Early submissions are welcome, but a paper drops a grade each day it is late. If there are problems, please see me *before* the due date and time.

Failure to report for the exam will result in a zero for the grade, and no make-up exam will be allowed. Students who are absent from the exam because of serious illness or family emergency may have the opportunity for a make-up exam. By design, a make-up exam will be more difficult than the one originally scheduled. Details on the individual papers to follow.

Grading

Class attendance and participation		20%
Summary statements	100 points	20%
Papers		40%
First paper	100 points	
Second paper	100 points	
Third paper	100 points	
Fourth paper	100 points	
Final exam	100 points	20%

The final grade is the average of the papers, presentation, and exam.

95-100 = A	75-79 = C
90-94 = A-	70-74 = C-
85-89 = B	65-69 = D
80-84 = B-	64 and below = F

Rating scale for evaluating student writing on the papers

- Score (100): Excellent A paper earning this highest score adds a unity of tone, a point of view as well as a good sense of audience to the features of a (90) paper. The writer selects and uses sufficient evidence to argue fully for the thesis. Essays at this level may reveal a creative approach to the topic. Sentences in a (100) paper will show more variety in form, with more sophisticated use of vocabulary, transitions, and connecting words than will be evident in a (90) essay.
- Score (90): Good The (90) essay responds to all requirements of the assignment, offering a clear thesis well-supported by evidence, descriptions, and examples that explain the thesis and its persuasiveness. Papers at this level demonstrated the ability to write direct, clear sentences formed into coherent, fluent paragraphs. A (90) paper, while not error free, does not distract the reader with poorly chosen words, grammatical errors, or spelling mistakes.
- Score (80): Acceptable A minimally acceptable paper presents a clear statement of thesis but may offer insufficient support for some part of it. The writer may offer evidence, yet fail to explain why such evidence is significant, thereby not convincing the reader of its importance. The argument may be uneven, with some evidence/descriptions/examples offering only weak or partial support of the essay's thesis. A (80) paper includes errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and or word choice, but they are not frequent.

- **Score (65): Unacceptable** The (65) paper may reveal an incomplete response, or may lack coherence, direction, or focus. A paper at this level may wander off the topic or employ circular reasoning. While a (65) paper may include descriptions or explanation, some or all of those may not be relevant to the author's main point. Restatement may appear in place of explanation. The reader is distracted by numerous errors in word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, or other mechanics of the paper.

Credit for the course

- All requirements must be fulfilled by the last day of the semester to receive credit for the course.

Web

Canvas is the online platform for both classroom organization and instruction. All assignments are turned in through Canvas, and students can access their corrected assignments from it as well. All other important information will be posted on Canvas as well. *Canvas* is a user-friendly system, but sometimes problems arise. If you need assistance, please contact the IT **help desk** or call 320-363-2228.

Bibliography

A bibliography will be posted on Canvas.

Class management

- There will be a five-minute break at 9:15 and 10:15. Please be punctual in returning to the room
- **Covid-19 Policy:** Everyone in the classroom must mask at all times. According to university policy, beverages are allowed in class (while still masking between sips). Food is not allowed in class. If health and dietary issues necessitate snacking, please do so during the breaks.
- The class has a synchronous online component. Students attending online *must* use a headset with an attached microphone instead of relying on their computer's microphone and speaker system. You will be better able to hear the Collegeville class, and we will be better able to hear you. This is a requirement.
- **Electronics**
 - Please turn-off all cell phones during class
 - I treat surfing the web and checking email as an absence and lack of participation

Students with Disabilities

Your experience in this course is important to me. I am dedicated to removing barriers and creating a more accessible classroom environment. If you registered with Student Accessibility Services and have been determined eligible to receive academic accommodations, I encourage you 1) email me a copy of your accommodation letter and 2) schedule a time for us to meet, in person, to discuss your needs in this course. Be advised that while I am committed to honoring approved accommodations, students are responsible for requesting them in a timely manner.

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on a documented medical condition, mental health condition or learning disability (or suspects they may have one), is encouraged to contact **Student Accessibility Services** (320-363-5160 or sas@csbsju.edu). Student Accessibility Services is located in room 105 of the Henrita Academic Building at CSB. You are welcome to contact me if you have additional questions regarding Student Accessibility Services and classroom accommodations.

Copyright

Materials in this course, including the syllabus, lecture notes, discussion guides, assignments, and tests, are the intellectual property of the instructor and are protected by US copyright law. Course materials, including recordings of instructional material made by or for students with accommodations, are for the educational use of the student and may not be shared or distributed without permission of the instructor.

Students may not make audio or video recordings of any class sessions unless the student has an approved accommodation from Student Accessibility Services, has requested permission of the instructor, and has signed a recording agreement. Recording or distribution of any course content without permission of the instructor is a violation of copyright and educational privacy law.

Most class sessions but not all will be recorded on Zoom and will be made available through the course Canvas for all students until the end of the semester. Recordings are for personal academic use only, where personal academic use is restricted to the personal study use by an individual. The recording may not be shared, replicated, or published, in whole or in part, or used for any other purpose. Recordings will be deleted 30 days after the end of the semester. You may contact me or the Academic Dean, Barb May, with any questions or concerns.

Academic misconduct

Academic misconduct involves cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information, intentionally damaging the coursework of other, assisting in academic misconduct, or actions indicating a general disregard of institutional policies regarding academic honesty and misconduct.

Sexual misconduct

As institutions which espouse Catholic and Benedictine values, every community member's awareness of and respect for the rights and human dignity of all persons undergirds community life. These values demand that we strive to create an environment where the sacredness of each person is honored. Sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other sexual misconduct violate the sacredness of the person, weaken the health of the community, and are antithetical to the missions of our institutions.

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University will investigate and promptly seek the equitable resolution of all allegations of sexual misconduct, take steps to prevent the recurrence of sexual misconduct, and to correct its effects on victims and others.

Title IX

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University prohibit any and all discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation including gender identity, marital status, civil union status, age, physical or mental disability, military status, or unfavorable discharge from military service in regard to the administration of educational programs, admission of students, employment action, athletics or other sponsored activities.

Unit I Reading the narrative: a synchronic approach

In this unit we set the foundation for our study by identifying the important markers of John's Gospel.

2 September

Preparatory readings

John 1-5

TSJB John 1, 2, Matt 1, Mark 1, Luke 1

SFG 141

Focus for reading: Students are asked to pay particular attention to Johannine vocabulary: advocate, blood, born, bread, Cana, darkness, devil, flesh, glory, hour, Jew(s), life, light, Moses, Pharisee(s), Sadducee(s), Satan, shepherd, water, word, world. If any other word of phrase strikes you, make sure you record it as well.

Monday, 7 September, 9:00 am Crux interpretem due

9 September

Preparatory readings

John 6-13

TSJB John 6, 8, 11

SFG 146, 147, 148, 149

SFG 238-249, 259

Focus for reading: Students are asked to pay particular attention to Johannine vocabulary: advocate, blood, born, bread, Cana, darkness, devil, flesh, glory, hour, Jew(s), life, light, Moses, Pharisee(s), Sadducee(s), Satan, shepherd, water, word, world. If any other word of phrase strikes you, make sure you record it as well.

16 September

John 14-17

SFG 267-269, 302-304, 309-310, 314-315, 324-329

Genesis 48-50

Focus for reading: Students are asked to pay particular attention to Johannine vocabulary: advocate, blood, born, bread, Cana, darkness, devil, flesh, glory, hour, Jew(s), life, light, Moses, Pharisee(s), Sadducee(s), Satan, shepherd, water, word, world. If any other word of phrase strikes you, make sure you record it as well.

Monday, 21 September, 9:00am Historical-critical exegesis due

23 September

John 18-21

TSJB John 20

SFG 330-367

Focus for reading: Students are asked to pay particular attention to Johannine vocabulary: advocate, blood, born, bread, Cana, darkness, devil, flesh, glory, hour, Jew(s), life, light, Moses, Pharisee(s), Satan, shepherd, water, word, world.

Monday, 28 September, 9:00am, Unit I summary statement due

Unit II Reading the narrative: a diachronic approach

30 September

Preparatory readings

Brown John's Gospel: A sectarian foundation

Brown, Phase I *Community of the Beloved Disciple* (=Brown) pp 13-24 & 166-67

Focus for reading

- Brown: Community of the Beloved Disciple "in its relationship to other Christian communities the end of the first century"
- Story of Jesus and story of believers
- Four phases in this development

Brown, Phase I pp. 25- 58; Phase II pp. 59-92

Focus for reading:

- Phase I [=pre-Gospel period, late 50s-80s]
- Phase II _when the gospel was written
 - Seven groups in the development of the 4th gospel.

7 October *Preparatory readings*

Brown, Phase II concl'd

Phase III, pp 93-144 & 166-67

Brown, Phase III concl'd; Phase IV Phase IV 145-164; 183-198

Focus for reading

- The story of the Johannine community continues in the Epistles.
- Dramatis Personae (= important people mentioned in John's writings)
 - Presbyter (Elder in NRSV): author of II and III John
 - Elect Lady and her children (II John): a church other than that of Presbyter's
 - Gaius (mentioned in III John vv. 1.5.8) seemingly a good church leader

- Demetrius (mentioned in III John v 12) a good missionary
- Diotrephes (3 Jn v 9) bogus and bad church leader
- Johannine Community
- Intra-Johannine Schism
- Areas of dispute: Christology, ethics, eschatology, pneumatology

Focus for Phase Four

- Johannine Dissolution. Early Christianity, boundaries
- The split between the secessionists and the adherents was indeed the “Last Hour”
- Merger with great Church
- Gnosticism
- The Author's adherents and the Great Church

Monday, 12 October, 9:00am, Unit II summary statement due

Unit III Scripture and science, both ancient and modern

There will be a study guide provided for the readings in this unit.

14 October Ancient science: Logos theology and Origins of the Cosmos

Preparatory readings

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Plato's *Timaeus*
- Niehoff, Maren. *Philo of Alexandria: an intellectual biography*. SJU Alcuin General Collection. eBook. Part Two: Philo's Exposition in a Roman Context. Creation Theology and Monotheism, pp. 93-108.
- Patella, Michael. *Lord of the Cosmos: Mithras, Paul, and the Gospel of Mark*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2006. Pp. 9-23. PDF in Canvas.
- Xeravits, Géza G. and József Zsengellér. Eds. *Studies in the Book of Wisdom*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2010. SJU Alcuin General Collection. eBook.
- Luca Mazzinghi, “Law of Nature and Light of the Law in the Book of Wisdom (Wis 18:4c),” pp 37-59.

Monday, 19 October, 9:00am Homiletical exegesis due

21 October Building a theology of astrophysics and evolution

Preparatory readings

Delia, pp xiii-xxvi; 1-113

28 October God, Divine Love, and Telos

Preparatory readings

Delia, pp. 115-208

4 November What is biblical *Glory*?

Preparatory readings

Southgate pp 1-95

11 November Reading Day

Monday, 16 November, 9:00am Text and image exegesis due

18 November Glory in nature, arts, and mysticism

Preparatory readings

Southgate pp 96-199

The Saint John's Bible

25 November Glory and telos: the melding of Scripture and science (Thanksgiving Week)

Preparatory readings

Southgate pp 200-259

2 December Synthesis and review

4 and 7 December Final oral exams