

**Theology and Cosmology (2 credit elective)**  
**Spring Semester**

**Course Overview**

This course will explore the significance of developing a properly theological interpretation of modern cosmology. The starting point will be to consider the ancient patristic theme of the link between God, humanity, and cosmos, particularly evident in the writings of some of the Cappadocian Church Fathers and later in Saint Maximus the Confessor, although the theme is present in the Western tradition as well. I shall argue that this theme can be recovered in the modern age with due attention to the phenomenology of science, thinking science in relationship to consciousness as an achievement of culture ordered by the unifying telos of the Church in Christ and the Holy Spirit. This in no way detracts from developing the philosophy or theology of nature. To the contrary, as John Henry Newman argued, nature and culture should not be set apart in natural theology. In thinking science as human achievement, one is doing an integrated philosophy of nature. I shall argue that science itself, especially in the field of quantum physics, encourages us to overcome the old modern, objectivist, dualist type of epistemology that resists the sort of integrated understanding to be proposed in this course. A phenomenological attention to science as achievement of the human race enables us to recover in a modern context the ancient “theoanthropocosmic synthesis” for which humanity is a microcosm (or even “macrocosm”!) and mediator of creation. Human history recapitulated in Christ gives meaning to physical nature.

We shall begin with a consideration of humanity as “frontier being,” through a direct, Christocentric encounter with the theme in one of Saint Maximus the Confessor’s most commented-upon writings, “Difficulty 41.” We shall see how this theme can be appropriated in the modern age through a critical look at the work of Russian Orthodox theologian, philosopher, and astrophysicist, Alexei Nesteruk, who develops the thematic through a sophisticated phenomenology of modern scientific cosmology. In order to understand phenomenology better, we shall set the table for reading Nesteruk by looking at Robert Sokolowski’s *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Both Nesteruk and Sokolowski help us to think about the nesting of science and its achievements in the “life-world” of intentional consciousness in its social embeddedness. We shall turn next to Louis Bouyer’s *Cosmos: the World and the Glory of God*, where an intertwining theological phenomenology and metaphysics of scientific cosmology opens us to a Trinitarian perception of creation. In the context of this discussion, we shall have opportunity to consider specific implication of both quantum physics and evolutionary theory, drawing on the writings of John Polkinghorne and Christoph Schönborn.

## Grades

This course has two main components for the grade. The first is a final paper. You are required to write a 12-15 page research paper. Each student is required to consult with me on the topic. Set up an office visit at your convenience. The research paper is worth 50 percent of your final course grade. The other 50 percent of the course grade is classroom participation. This means showing up in timely fashion for class, demonstrating engagement with the material through questions and comments, and being attentive in class. If participation is lacking, weekly assignments will be given.

## Course Outcomes

- To complete successfully this course, must demonstrate that he/she can:
  - Define “phenomenology” and “Life-world” in a conversational setting
  - Find at least five sources of scholarly writing on the topic of theology and cosmology pertaining to a single topic
  - Organize a 12-15 page research paper that explores the issue of theology and cosmology
  - Find key topics for questioning and inquiry in reading scholarly literature on theology and cosmology; present them in a classroom setting

## Required Texts:

Brague, Rémi. *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Bouyer, Louis. *The World and the Glory of God*. Fordham University Press, 1988.

Louth, Andrew. *Maximus the Confessor (The Early Church Fathers)*. Routledge: 1996.

Nesteruk, Alexei. *The Universe as Communion: Towards a Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Theology and Science*. T & T Clark, 2008.

Polkinghorne, John. *Quantum Physics and Theology: An Unexpected Kinship*. Yale University Press, 2008.

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si: On the Care for Our Common Home*. Available at:

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

Schönborn, Christoph. *Chance or Purpose: Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith*. Ignatius Press, 2007.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

## Schedule

January 27: Microcosm/ Macrocosm I (read William Norris Clarke, “Living on the Edge,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 36 (2): 1996, pp. 183-99, and Clarke, “The Great Circle of Being and Our Place in It: The Universe as Meaningful Journey,” in *The One and the Many* (Notre Dame, 2001), pp. 303-313.

## **Part One: A Phenomenological Approach**

February 3: Christ and the Microcosm/ Macrocosm (read Saint Maximus the Confessor, "Difficulty 41," in pp. 3-32, pp. 155-162)

February 10: Theology, cosmology, and the Life-world (read: Sokolowski, pp. 146-155; pp. 185-227)

February 17: Theology, cosmology, and phenomenology (read: Nesteruk, pp. 1-105)

February 24: Theology, cosmology, and phenomenology (read: Nesteruk, pp. 154-219)

March 3: Theology, cosmology, and phenomenology (read: Nesteruk, pp. 220-266)

## **Part Two: History and Particulars**

March 10: Person, Cosmos, Science (read: Bouyer, pp. 3-36, Brague, pp. 10-25)

March 17: Cosmic, Biblical and Philosophical Words (read: Bouyer, pp. 37-107, Brague, pp. 29-70, pp. 154-82)

March 24: The Advent of Modern Science (read: Bouyer, 97-129, Brague, 186-200)

April 7: Theology and Quantum Physics (read: Polkinghorne, 1-47, Bouyer, 130-42)

April 14: Theology and Quantum Physics (read: Polkinghorne, 48-110, Bouyer, 143-51)

April 21: Trinitarian Cosmology (read: Bouyer, pp. 82-205, *Laudato si*, chapter 2 and chapter 6)

April 28: Theology and Evolution (read: Bouyer, pp. 206-33; Schönborn, pp. 1-90)

May 5: Theology and Evolution (read: Schönborn, pp. 91-184)