

Catholic Studies Colloquium

Open to all students, preference given to Catholic Studies minors, this seminar explores what is often called "Catholic imagination." By this is meant a Catholic world-view, a conceptual framework that arises from sacramental practice and theological stance, that structures a way of experiencing and ordering reality, intuiting and making meaning, arriving at and realizing choices. As do participants in other religious traditions, Catholics engage themselves in family life, friendships, workplace, leisure activities, aesthetic enjoyment, and political engagement from a religiously influenced perspective.

A Catholic imagination receives the world as gift, as grace, as creation. The "world is charged with the grandeur of God," as Hopkins said: blessed, filled with grace and beauty and meaning – though it takes eyes of faith to see this beauty, and this beauty is also always in stark contrast to the ugliness of sin that is also present throughout creation. A Catholic imagination admits the reality of evil and sees this as a counterforce, already defeated by Christ, yet still lingering in the world, such that, even as we live in "salvation history," so too are we living (as Dorothy Day put it) in "damnation history."

A Catholic imagination is analogical; it gives a person and a community the power to invest simple gestures with profound meaning, so that an embrace can signify reconciliation, a lit candle can signal a sincere prayer, fasting can sharpen a desire for purification, a ring can symbolize steadfast love and lasting fidelity, a long walk can become a pilgrimage and a life can be lived as a vocation.

A Catholic imagination is sacramental; it senses that God is present in the world and in life's most significant events, revealing them to be sacred. God is the horizon of meaning that gives relief and meaning to all of reality. God has spoken to us in the past (Scripture and tradition); God continues to speak to us today (in our personal prayer and in the prayer of the Church). God calls us to an absolutely good future (salvation). Catholic imagination seeks and finds God in all things; it senses that everything is a venue for the encounter of faith and grace; and it knows that creation has an innate velocity – "everything that rises must converge," as Flannery O'Connor put it.

A study of Catholic imagination reveals a Catholic anthropology – an experience of ourselves not as isolated individuals but as human persons in relationship, radically social in our very being. A Catholic imagination is communal. It is alive in myriad Catholic cultures around the world; it sees unity in diversity and appreciates the manifold richness of the many human ways of being, the many ways of arriving at a just, humane and sustainable society.

The colloquium itself will seek to emulate that which it studies: it will be an exercise in communal search for understanding. Everyone's insights are valuable, every question is

legitimate. One need not be Catholic to participate fruitfully in the colloquium; indeed, oftentimes the view from a distance reveals the true proportions of an object.

April 2. Is there such a thing as a Catholic Analogical Imagination?

April 9. Seeing Creation as Revelation of the One, the True, the Good and the Beautiful

April 15/16? Catholicism and its cultures.

April 23. U.S. Catholics, the American Experiment and the presidential election.

April 30. In God's image and likeness: Catholicism and the construction of gender.

May 7. Catholicism at the movies: Bagdad Café.

May 14. Catholicism and the poetic word.

May 21. Catholics young and old. Is there a generation gap among American Catholics?

May 28. God or mammon?: Catholicism and Economic Systems.

June 2/3/? Final gathering, projects due.

Requirements:

Attendance and participation in the weekly meetings, occasional reading or other remote preparation for various class sessions, and a project. The amount of work for the course is commensurate with its 2 unit status; the expected level of sophistication of the final project is commensurate with its status as an upper division, capstone seminar.

The project can either be an in-class presentation or a project turned in by the final class meeting. Projects should further develop the exploration of Catholic imagination through one of the media touched upon in class or, with the instructor's approval, another medium of the student's choice.