

THEO 250: *Theology of Suffering*
SPRING 2026
Course #

Santa Clara University, Graduate Program in Pastoral Ministries

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Preliminary Syllabus

Course description *In our lives and pastoral practice, suffering, in its manifold forms, presents great challenges to Christian faith and practice. This course explores theological dimensions of the problem and the questions that arise with suffering: How deeply can God be said to be involved in suffering in light of revelation? How can the mystery of suffering help inform an integral spirituality? How can we effectively minister to those who are in the midst of physical, psychological or spiritual suffering in an effective and helpful manner?*

Students will be asked to reflect on one's own personal experience of suffering and that of those you have encountered along the path of life. We will look at suffering via multiple lenses including that of gender, poverty, mental health, migration, and race, etc. We shall reflect on how our questions and insights provided by human experience and divine revelation, particularly in the Hebrew and New Testament Scriptures, can inform a spirituality that addresses our path of discipleship and ministerial service to others. How do the insights of theologians and the Tradition speak to these dynamics of suffering and inform a helpful spirituality and effective pastoral ministry?

Schedule:

Spring 2026: April 6 through June 8

Online: Mondays 6:00 pm – 9:00pm: April 6, April 13, April 20, April 27, May 4, May 11, May 18, **Wednesday** May 27, **Mondays** June 1, June 8

Office Hours Online by Appointment

Required Texts:

- Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *Why do we suffer? A scriptural approach to the human condition* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2000)
- Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002)
- Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press 1998) [booklet of 52 pages]

Recommended (Optional) Books: Possible reading resources for reflection and exploration in your assignments.

Theological Considerations

- Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973.
- Richard W. Miller, Ed., *Suffering and the Christian Life*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013.
- Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.
- James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Maryknoll, NY: 1997
- Johann Baptist Metz, Translated and edited by J. Matthew Ashley, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2015.

Spirituality and Suffering

- Sarah Bachelard, *Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis*, Miami Florida: Convivium Press, 2012.
- L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament*, Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2012
- Paul G. Crowley, S.J., *Unwanted Wisdom, Suffering, the Cross, and Hope*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2005.
- Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God, The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Patrick J. Hartin, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011.
- Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral, Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013.

Pastoral Topics and Struggles related to Suffering

- Gustavo Gutierrez and Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Muller, *On The Side of the Poor, The Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015.
- John Neafsey, *Crucified People, The Suffering of the Tortured in Today's World*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014.
- James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Maryknoll, NY: 2011.
- Ronald Rolheiser, *Bruised and Wounded, Struggling to Understand Suicide*, Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2018.
- Richard Rohr, *Job and the Mystery of Suffering, Spiritual Reflections*, New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2016
- Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese, editors, *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey, Theological Perspectives on Migration*, Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.

Student Learning Goals and Objectives:

Goal 3: Students will become competent leaders dedicated to serving the Church and to creating community in parish and other pastoral settings. (leadership skill)

Objective A: Students will employ historically informed knowledge of the tradition to assess theological positions and pastoral issues.

Goal 4: Students will demonstrate a critically informed approach to faith that promotes social justice for the common good, especially for the benefit of those in greatest need. (justice commitment)

Objective A: Students will address issues of inequity and injustice in light of the Christian witness.

Other Texts and Assigned Articles for class reading: Will be provided via *Camino*

Academic Plan with reading assignments by class meeting/Integration of Learning Goals:

FOR FIRST CLASS: Please Read: Prologue, Chapter 1 and 2 of *Why Do We Suffer* (Harrington). (pp. vii through twenty-nine)

Class 1 **Engaging Suffering from a Theological Perspective**

Class 2 **Multiple Theologies of Scripture with respect to human suffering**
 Addressing the Text: Academic/Pastoral -Theological Reflection
 Papers

- Class 3 **Theology after Auschwitz – reflecting on Theodicy**
- Class 4 **Theology’s Addressing of Massive Poverty: Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff: The insights of Liberation Theology**
- Class 5 **The Suffering of Women: Theological and Spirituality insights into Suffering – Dorothy Soelle.**
- Class 6 **Reimagining God’s Presence and Help: Insights of Feminist Biblical Theology.
Recovery of the Language and Practice of Lament: Lamentations and the Suffering of the World/A Challenge to 1st World Culture.**
- Class 7 **Theological Approach of Johann Baptist Metz: Memory, Narrative and Solidarity.**
- Class 8 **Johann Baptist Metz: Anamnesis as ‘Dangerous Memory’**
- Class 9 **Suffering Through the Lens of Race: James H. Cone**
- Class 10 **Suffering of the Earth and of the Poor: Leonardo Boff**
- Final Class/11 **Responses of Spirituality and Suffering:**
- **How do we become human: Johannes Baptist Metz**
 - **Finding God in a time of Crisis: Sarah Bachelard**
 - **Elements in Exploring Personal Suffering in Lives of those we know and love: Paul Crowley, S.J.**

ASSIGNMENTS/INTEGRATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES/ Focus of Evaluation:

- **Attendance, active & informed discussion of readings, prayer session (30% grade)**

+Students would accomplish the reading with a growing understanding of the history of our faith Tradition and a sensitivity to what the sufferings of the world would pose as questions of a pastoral nature. They would be capable and willing to discuss their growing insights and questions into the Tradition and how they, as pastoral leaders would assess, accompany and minister to the suffering. **(Goal-Objective, 3-A)**

+Students will reflect a critically informed ‘faith that promotes justice,’ and assess the reality of suffering in its many forms such as to exhibit a developing sensitivity to the component of injustice, and ministry that addresses it in the common good – especially with a view to those in greatest need. **(Goal-Objective, 4-A)**

- **Weekly reflection papers on required and any other reading (30% of grade)**

+Students will bring growing insights as well as share questions in their weekly reflection papers, addressing both learning goals in mind. **(Goal-Objective, 3-A and 4-A)**

- **Submit a Final ten-to fifteen-page Reflection/Research paper.** (40% of grade)

The Final Paper is to include address both Learning Objectives:

+How the study of our Tradition and the theologies of suffering has assisted them in becoming more competent and compassionate ministers contributing to a sense of community in parish and other ecclesial settings **(Goal-Objective, 3-A)**

+How their growing study of a Tradition embodying a “faith that does justice” assists the students in addressing issues of inequity and injustice among the suffering in their ministry and service to God’s People **(Goal-Objective, 4-A)**

+In addition to the above, the students will address the same two learning objectives in their exploration and integration of one’s personal suffering into the greater effectiveness and more compassionate ministry to others, gained from such reflection on the personal sufferings they will share in the paper. **(Goal-Objective, 3-A, 4-A)**

Your Final Paper should include:

- + a synthesis of learning from the theological and spiritual insights of the course.
- + a focus on two particular pastoral challenges of suffering you have encountered:
 1. Focus on suffering you have discovered in the people to which you minister
 2. Focus on a suffering in which you’ve encountered in your personal life



Professional Conduct Expectations

Attendance & Punctuality

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. [Specific attendance requirements (including consequences for absences, and being allowed to zoom into a class) are set by the faculty member in the course syllabus and are binding.] Whether or not the assignments were announced during an absence, students are accountable for all course assignments.

Participation [Specific participation requirements or instructor policies]

Communication

Email using our SCU email address will be our primary means of communication outside of class. You must check your SCU email and our course's Camino site every day to ensure you maintain a connection with the course content, your classmates, and your instructor.

Academic Integrity

The Academic Integrity pledge is an expression of the University's commitment to fostering an understanding of—and commitment to—a culture of integrity at Santa Clara University. The Academic Integrity pledge, which applies to all students, states:

I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code.

Academic integrity is part of your intellectual, ethical, and professional development. I expect you to uphold the principles of this pledge for all work in this class. I will clarify expectations on academic integrity -- including the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and course sharing sites for all assignments and exams in this course. If you have questions about what is appropriate on any assignment, please let me know before you hand in work. For more resources about ensuring academic integrity in your work, see this [LibGuide on Academic Integrity](#).

Policies, Resources & Accommodations

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct (Title IX)

Santa Clara University is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free of all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

Please know that as a faculty member, California law SB 493 requires me to report any information brought to my attention about incidents of sexual harassment or misconduct to the SCU [Equal Opportunity and Title IX Office](#) (408) 551-3043. This includes, but is not limited to, disclosures in writing assignments, class discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

Should you need support, SCU has dedicated staff trained to assist you in navigating campus resources, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing

accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and filing a formal complaint with the University or with law enforcement. Please see the [Student Resources](#) page for more information about reporting options and resources.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence and wishes to speak to a confidential resource who is not required to report, please contact one of the following SCU resources for support:

- [SCU Wellness Center](#)
- [CAPS](#)
- Any individual (clergy, counselors) acting in a professional capacity for which confidentiality is mandated by law

I am happy to help connect you with any of these resources.

Accommodations for Pregnant and Parenting Students

Santa Clara University is committed to creating and maintaining a non-discriminatory learning environment for all students, including students who are pregnant or parenting. Absences due to medical conditions relating to pregnancy and childbirth will be excused for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student's doctor, and students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work. Students needing accommodations can often arrange accommodations by working directly with their instructors, supervisors, or departments. Students needing accommodations can also seek assistance with accommodations from the [Office of Accessible Education](#) (OAE) or from the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#). This [resource page](#) from the Title IX Office provides information regarding support for students and employees who are pregnant or parenting.

Office of Accessible Education

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact the Office of Accessible Education oea@scu.edu, <https://www.scu.edu/oea> as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodations with the University. If you have already arranged accommodations through OAE, please be sure to request your accommodations through your my OAE portal and discuss them with me during my office hours within the first two weeks of class. To ensure fairness and consistency, individual faculty members are required to receive verification from the Office of Accessible Education before providing accommodations. OAE will work with students and faculty to arrange proctored exams for students whose accommodations include double time for exams and/or assistive technology.

Students with approved accommodations of time and a half should talk with me as soon as possible. The Office of Accessible Education must be contacted in advance (at least two weeks' notice recommended) to schedule proctored examinations or to arrange other accommodations. Students should continue to reach out to OAE (oea@scu.edu) regarding access barriers related to this course or content.

Academic Freedom

The University is dedicated to an uncompromising standard of academic excellence and a commitment to [academic freedom](#), freedom of inquiry, and freedom of expression in the search for truth. We are here to engage a set of ideas and research findings that often have long and complicated histories. Scholars may disagree on the topics we will be discussing. Assignment of and references to sources (readings, films, websites, etc.) are not an endorsement of the opinions or content contained in those materials. Students are expected and required to become familiar with the literature relevant to the topic of this course regardless of whether the professor, the University, or the students find this content agreeable. You are invited to introduce additional challenges in a serious and open-minded manner.

Safety Measures

In order to meet our learning objectives, we will adhere to the highest standards for safety and mutual respect. University policy allows faculty to require the use of face coverings in their classrooms. I may request that students wear face coverings occasionally or throughout the academic term. Failure to comply with my request is a violation of the [Student Conduct Code](#), which I will need to report.

Use of Classroom Recordings

Depending on the learning objectives and pedagogical approaches used in a lesson, some classes may be recorded and made available on Camino. However, in line with item 12 of the [Student Conduct Code](#), dissemination or sharing of any classroom recording without the permission of the instructor would be considered "misuse" and, therefore, prohibited. Violations of these policies may result in disciplinary action by the University. At the instructor's discretion, violations may also have an adverse effect on the student's grade.

Copyright Statement

Materials in this course are protected by the United States copyright laws. I am the copyright holder of the materials I create, including notes, handouts, slides, and videos. You may make copies of course materials for your own use and you may share the materials with other students enrolled in this course. You may not publicly distribute the course materials without my written permission.

Technology Support

Course materials and online activities will be available on SCU's Canvas learning management system (also known as Camino). Course reminders, readings, and assignments will be available through Camino.

SCU can provide you with technical assistance, and you can also reach out to our providers directly for questions. For Camino support, contact caminosupport@scu.edu or call 408-551-

3572. You can also find support resources via the help button within the Camino platform (on the left-hand navigation) to access after-hours support via email, chat, or phone.

For Zoom assistance, contact Media Services at mediaservices@scu.edu or 408-554-4520. You can also get support from the [SCU website](#) or the [Zoom Help Center](#) website.

For SCU network and computing support, contact the SCU Technology Help Desk at techdesk@scu.edu or 408-554-5700. They can provide support for MySCU Portal, Eduroam, Duo, hardware and software issues, and more.

Respect for All

It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students of all backgrounds bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of all identities and perspectives. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

Wellness

I know you will do the best you can in this class (and all of your classes); however, it should never be at the expense of your own mental and physical health and your overall well-being. Jesuit education is grounded in *cura personalis*, concern for the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. What does this mean for you? Be kind to others, and more importantly, be kind to yourself. Attend to your sleep (quantity and quality); drink lots of water; move; get outside; and pay attention to beauty that isn't coming to you on a screen. Eat good food, laugh, enjoy friends and family, look for opportunities to connect with others in new ways, pray, meditate, or otherwise attend to your spirit. And ask for help, even if you don't think you need it. Lots of folks, including me, are here to support you. It's never too late to reach out, and I am committed to helping you.

SCU has many resources and programs to support you. These resources may be especially helpful:

Wellness Center

The Wellness center provides resources to aid and promote student well-being across the eight dimensions of wellness, including student peer groups for healthful living, violence prevention, and recovery.

CAPS

Santa Clara students are provided confidential counseling sessions at no cost through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Students have access to clinically appropriate, short-term

therapy; group therapy; and other resources for care. A new 24/7 support line is also available: 408-554-5220.

SCU Culture of Care

If you are concerned for the mental or physical welfare of one of your peers, the Office of Student Life Culture of Care website provides resources for recognizing and helping someone in distress.

Academic Concerns

If you are concerned with your progress in this class, please contact me so that we can find solutions together.

- [The HUB Writing Center](#) (Writing and Public Speaking)

Grief Resources and Support

An important part of healing from loss is the support of others. The SCU community is committed to supporting you during this difficult time. If you need to miss class or foresee being late on upcoming deliverables due to bereavement, please let me know immediately so we can make appropriate arrangements. If you need additional support, you can contact the Dean of Student's Office at (408) 554-4583 or email dso@scu.edu. Staff in DSO can notify other faculty and/or campus supervisors on your behalf and connect you with helpful campus resources.

Gender Inclusive Language

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you go by a name different from what is on the class roster, please let me know. Using correct gender pronouns is important to me, so I encourage you to share your pronouns with me and correct me if I make a mistake. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. For more on personal pronouns see www.mypronouns.org

Land Acknowledgement

Santa Clara University occupies the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ohlone and Muwekma Ohlone people.