

DRAFT
**Subject to change. Full
syllabus available in Canvas
the week of May 19th.**

**Loyola Institute for Ministry
Loyola University New Orleans**

Universe as Divine Manifestation LIM G813-Y01

Summer 2025

Instructor: Michelle Murray, Ph.D. Can. **Office Hours:** By appointment, email me
Email: mamurray@loyno.edu to set up a meeting

Important! You will be notified by email when your course is available (normally the week before class begins). Please check your *Loyola email* account for instructions. ***Please reply*** to the instructor's email when you receive it.

Course Description

Our Catholic tradition teaches that we come to know the Maker through the Creator's works. Here is God's primary and universal revelation. Available to all whether or not literate or formally educated! Such is the inspiration and focus for this course. We will seek to discern and interpret what the Creation discloses about its Creator.

Our Catholic faith teaches that we live in a sacred, sacramental world. Such an orientation has been present throughout human history and is foundational to all existing religious traditions — Catholicism included. While all of the world's religious traditions acknowledge the significance and revelatory aspect of Creation, Catholicism emerged as a unique expression of this awareness, emphasizing nature's numinous or sacred dimension and offering the human community a rich repository of Creation spirituality — a treasure we will explore in depth in the course.

Our approach to this study will balance a deductive theological orientation with an inductive theological process that is the foundation of the scientific method, beginning with our experience of life, observing its form and dynamics, proposing what it suggests (if not proclaims) about its sacred origins, and its Creator. Here is where mysticism meets nature.

We welcome your participation in the course as we together set out to do theology from below, from our experience, from within its deepest roots in Creation.

Course Goal

By the end of this course, participants will have refined the practice of a spiritual discipline that prompts and enables them to more faithfully and appreciatively apprehend/experience, respond, and bear witness to the presence and activity of the Divine within Creation.

Key Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- perceive and experience the presence and activity of the divine within the natural world and relate this manifestation to the teachings of the Catholic/Christian tradition, extending and deepening its meaning and significance.
- articulate your own experience and interpretation of the revelation mediated throughout the natural world and its implications for Catholic theology, faith, and the future of life.
- identify five models of Christian spirituality that are rooted in an appreciation of and response to Creation that inspire and empower contemporary humans to care for and celebrate Creation's gift of life.
- identify and utilize significant contributions of contemporary scientific investigations of the natural world for theology, spirituality, religion, and other disciplines.
- appreciate the contribution of the Nature Writers whose literary and audio-visual works evoke a sense of the sacred within Creation as guides to how we might grow in our appreciation of the miracles of life and grace that sustain us.
- appreciate and integrate the social and ecological consciousness (analytical activism and commitment and artistic) emerging in our time that evokes a sense of the urgency that confronts us in caring for Creation.

Required Readings

Please order the required texts as soon as possible from the bookstore of your choice.

Berry, Thomas, et al. *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*. Twenty-Third Publications, 1992. ISBN-13: 978-0896224711. This text is available to read online at the [Internet Archive](#) after creating a free account.

Edwards, Denis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. Orbis Books, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-15707-5665-8. This text is available to read online at the [OAPEN Project](#).

Taylor, Sarah McFarland. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Harvard University Press, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0-6740-3495-2 This text is available as an ebook in the Canvas course through Loyola's Monroe Library.

Required Texts Available in the Course

Additional readings, articles, and videos are available in Canvas in the appropriate weekly sessions.

Evaluation and Course Requirements

Sequence of Topics/Calendar of Assignments

Session	Topic	Assignments
Week 1 May 27– June 2	Introducing Ourselves and Establishing the Foundational Perspectives (Wisdom) Informing the Course	Introduce self, complete readings, videos, discussion questions
Week 2 June 3–9	Locating Ourselves and Exploring the Macrophase Universe	Complete readings, videos, discussion questions
Week 3 June 10–16	“All Creation Rightly Gives You Praise!” (Eucharistic Prayer 4)	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 4 June 17–23	Returning to Earth: Our Home Planet (June 19, Juneteenth holiday)	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 5 June 24–30	Discerning What Makes Earth Unique and Vulnerable	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 6 July 1–7	Celebrating Our North American Continental Home (July 4, Independence Day holiday)	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 7 July 8–14	Re-Discovering the Mystique of Our Bioregion and Our Own Backyards: Reverencing Our Local Landscapes	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 8 July 15–21	Re-Dedicating Ourselves to Our Earthly Life Community	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 9 July 22–28	Working Break	Complete readings, audios, discussion questions
Week 10 July 29–31	Final Assignment and Course Evaluation	Final assignment due

Due date for posting final grades: Wednesday, August 6, 11:59 pm CT

Week One Assignments

- 1) Read overview in Canvas
- 2) Participate in a Discussion on Canvas by introducing yourself and greeting your fellow students

3) Indicate your preferences for synchronous class meetings (attendance is optional).

4) Read

- Anne M. Clifford, “Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God.” “*And God Saw That It Was Good*,” edited by Drew Christiansen, S.J., and Walter Glazer, United States Catholic Conference, 1996. (in Canvas; this text is also available to read online at the [Internet Archive](#) after creating a free account.)
- Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth*, chapter 1, pp. 3-28 This text is available to read online at the [Internet Archive](#) after creating a free account.
- Thomas Berry, “The Meadow across the Creek” (in Canvas)

5) Answer Discussion Questions 1 and 2

Assessment

Each student’s final grade will include the following parts:

		Percentage of Grade	
		Graduate	CEU
1	Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings	70%	100%
2	Final Project (developed in consultation with instructor)	30%	—

1) Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings (70% graduate / 100% CEU)

Your participation represents the heaviest time and response commitment—it is the opportunity to learn, converse and contribute to the learning process for all, and to demonstrate your effort and achievement in the course. It is expected that you will devote from 4 to 6 hours in your participation each week.

Participation includes giving evidence of reading and accessing audio and video presentations and understanding their import and relevance to the goal of the course. Your understanding and integration of course material will be reflected primarily though not limited to your posts on Discussion Board. Your responses throughout the course will be judged to the extent that they are intentional, substantive, flawless in form, and concrete, referencing what you have read, heard, and seen in the 8 sessions, interpreting your responses in light of Catholic theology, ecclesiology, and ministry. Given the amount of effort asked of course participants it constitutes 70% of those enrolled in the course for graduate credit and 100% of what is expected of CEU participants.

Each week of the course includes assignments for reading, audio and video presentations, and discussion questions. These tasks are prescribed in each of our Weekly Modules.

You are asked to read **all** posts and respond *substantively* to at least **three** of your colleagues' postings (i.e., more than “I agree” or “I like your ideas”—say why and include your own reflections on the specific question being addressed, drawing from course materials and

experience). One of the most helpful and substantive responses you can offer a post is to pose a thoughtful question for the “author” of the post to consider, that prompts further thought and conversation, that brings new perspective to the post. Ideally, each discussion “thread” of the course will become a conversation. Be sure to check responses to your own postings and respond to any questions that others may have posed for you.

Discussion Board responses will be assessed each week: 0-8 point on your responses to the assigned questions and tasks.

2. Reflection / Response / Applications (30% of Course Grade)

The balance of your grade (30%) is yours to choose, craft, and develop as you are inspired by the subject of the course material. Given the creative dynamics that find expression in the Natural World that speak so profoundly of their Maker, it seems appropriate to offer course participants (both credit-seeking and non-credit) the opportunity to express your insight and response in your own voice and manner. Midway through the course, you will be asked to submit a proposal for this component of our course evaluation.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82.9	D+	67-69.9
A-	90-92.9	C+	77-79.9	D	60-66.9
B+	87-89.9	C	73-76.9	F	0-59.9
B	83-86.9	C-	70-72.9		

Overall Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Quality Points	Characteristics of Student Work
A	4.0	Work done with distinction. An outstanding use of all four evaluation criteria as a catalyst for critical reflection.
A-	3.7	Work done with distinction, with a few minor corrections needed.
B+	3.3	Work of very good quality. The assignment is addressed in an exceptional manner with a good balance of personal insight and academic documentation.
B	3.0	The standard for the master’s degree. The assignment is adequately addressed in a clear and concise manner with appropriate documentation. If subsequent work meets this standard of quality, the degree will be awarded.
B-	2.7	The work is slightly below the standard for master’s level work. The assignment is addressed, but a number of corrections is needed to address the assignment in a clear and concise manner. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C+	2.3	Substandard graduate work. Evaluation criteria are not adequately met in the assignment. Moderate improvement is needed. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C	2	Less than graduate-level work. Evaluation criteria are not met. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.

C-	1.7	Below average, grade does not count towards graduation.
D+	1.3	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
D	1	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
F	0	Assignment not addressed at all, incomplete assignment, or not submitted on time.

Please note that the LIM grading scale uses B as the standard for graduate-quality work. A and B+ indicate graduate work done with distinction, with B- and below signifying levels below graduate standards.

Course Policies

Incomplete Grade Policy

Students are subject to the university policy regarding incomplete grades with the following additions to university policy. Grades of Incomplete are given at the instructor's discretion. Students must complete LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources » Policies, Forms, & Services section of their Canvas course. Students should first inquire of their instructor whether or not they are eligible for an incomplete; this must occur with sufficient time to complete the process explained here. To be eligible, students may not have received an Incomplete in the previous semester, must have completed at least 75% of the course work to date, and must have at least a C or above in the course. After the instructor makes an initial assessment of eligibility, including checking with the LIM Office to ensure there was no Incomplete in the previous semester and finds the student eligible, by the due date of the course's final assignment, a student must complete and obtain all signatures for LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources section of their Canvas course and submit it to their instructor, who will forward a copy to the LIM Director. LIM graduate students may not receive Incompletes in LIM courses in consecutive semesters.

Attendance & Participation

Students are subject to the university policy regarding attendance found online in the Bulletin. Students in online courses communicate their presence by active participation in weekly discussions. Each course's instructor sets requirements for how many times students must post on the Discussion Board in Canvas. Failing to post during the first week of class may result in removal from the course. If you foresee that you will be unable to post in a given week, please contact the instructor ahead of time. Extensions for posting are given at the instructor's discretion and for a valid reason may be granted if arranged ahead of time. In extraordinary circumstances, students may arrange with their instructor to post up to two weeks after a deadline, though this may entail a grade reduction. Posts and other assignments submitted more than two weeks late may be subject to a grade of zero. If students do not post in a given week, they are considered absent. Absence for more than one week without contacting the instructor may result in removal from and failure of the course.

University Policies

Please read Part 2 of the syllabus (located on LORA and in Canvas) for university policies on plagiarism, accessible education, and more.