

THEO-68803-01  
MA CAPSTONE COURSE  
Summer, 2017

Course Purpose and Overall Structure

The capstone course is the final requirement for the MA degree and is intended to give students the opportunity to show the extent to which they have attained the goals of the degree. A capstone course, then, is not focused per se on one particular area or theme in theology, as are the other courses, but on the cumulative result of the students' study over the course of the degree program.

As I just indicated, a capstone course is oriented by the goals of the MA Degree. Here are these goals, as listed on our website:

- 1) *Students will be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the discipline of Theology*
- 2) *Students will be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the continuity and development of the Catholic theological tradition.*
- 3) *Students will have a capacity for graduate level writing.*
- 4) *Students will have the capacity to articulate their knowledge of theology with clarity and fluency.*
- 5) *Students will demonstrate the ability to integrate their knowledge for various educational purposes.*

This capstone course will require students to demonstrate the degree to which they have mastered these goals. We will do this in two stages: one that is on-line (June 7- July 23), and the second in residence here at Notre Dame (July 24-27).

1. *On-line portion of course*

We will follow one important theme in theology: the theme of mercy. We will use Walter Kasper's book, *Mercy*,<sup>1</sup> to give us our basic structure, partly because Kasper argues that mercy is one of the most important themes for theology to consider today (and Pope Francis agrees). But we also use his book because it will help us consider together how the different sub-fields of theology (biblical studies, historical theology, liturgical studies, moral theology, systematic theology, spirituality studies) work together. While we will certainly consider together some targeted readings from each of these disciplinary sub-fields, students will also be expected to show the general knowledge of these fields that they have gained with their specific courses over the past few years. In sum, what I will be looking for you to do is to show that you have an *integrated* view of an important theme that draws on the whole of theology and also takes into account the development of the tradition (goals 1 & 2).

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to the Christian Life*, translated by William Madges (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014).

## 2. Residential portion of course

In the second part of the course you will demonstrate your ability to synthesize and present theological material. Each of you will write an essay that gives one detailed perspective on the theme of mercy, approximately ten pages in length. You should feel free to frame your essay for a particular educational purpose that is meaningful to you: as an adult education presentation; classroom lecture; academic paper, etc. (goal 5). You will present a version of this work during our time together (July 24 - July 27) in a twenty to twenty-five minute oral presentation, followed by a ten to fifteen minute Q/A period (goal 4). A list of possible themes and/or books is given below.

### Detailed Course Structure:

Each of the first seven weeks will be structured with two units, each of which will require approximately 1 ½ hours of student engagement on-line. These material will center on a close reading of Kasper's *Mercy*, along with some additional supporting readings. One of the units will conclude on the Thursday of the week (that is, the readings should have been completed by then, the on-line lectures viewed and any written responses submitted), while the other will conclude on the Sunday of the week. On the Sakai website's "resources" page the materials for each unit will be under the "resources" tab, in folders labeled "week 1a," "week 1b," and so on.

While you are working through this material you will also be preparing your ten-page paper which will be turned in at the end of the seventh week and will be the basis of a presentation you will give during the last week of class. You will first prepare a rough draft: thus, you will five weeks to do the research (the equivalent of reading one additional book) and write a rough draft and a week to revise it based on feedback you get from other class participants.

For this purpose, you will be broken into groups of three or, in one case, four participants. You will distribute your rough draft to the other members of your group, who will give you feedback so that you can improve it during the seventh, and penultimate week. Then you will give a presentation based on your paper.

### Evaluation Components:

- *Elements and Weights toward final grade:*

- ◆ complete all assigned readings and view all video lectures
- ◆ 10% – course responses to readings for each class. There will be twelve of them spread over the first six weeks of the class. The response could be a short reflection paragraph or a worksheet or online sharing with other members of the class. The last two weeks will be taken up by polishing off your final presentation and then preparing a presentation to give during the final week.
- ◆ 10% – Rough draft of your paper. You will complete a rough draft of your paper by the end of week six and submit it to your group.
- ◆ 10% – constructively critical reading of two of your group members' papers, done during week 6, and submitted to me and to the author by the end of week 6.
- ◆ 30% – final draft of paper: written during week 7

- ◆ 30% – oral presentation to class
- ◆ 10% – quality of your discussion of the presentations.

- *Assessment procedures*

Course reading responses:

During the first six weeks (“on line”) students will be required to respond to readings and lectures. There will be twelve of these. A thoughtful response that shows that the student has read the material will receive 1 point. An inadequate response or late response will receive a 0. The grade for this component will be recorded as follows: A = 11 or 12 points; A- = 10 points; B+ = 9 points; B = 8 points; B- = 7 points; C = 6 points or less.

Rough Draft

You should choose and approve a topic with me by the end of the second week of the course (June 16). You should write a rough draft for distribution to members of your group by the end of the fifth week (July 7). This draft will be graded based on how it demonstrates knowledge (by you) of the primary source material (usually a book), the presence of a guiding idea (or “thesis”) for your paper and basic organization around that thesis.

Constructive Advice on papers in your group

Each of you will read *two* of the papers of the other members of your group (I will let you know which papers those will be) and send the authors constructive feedback. This includes indicating what parts of the paper you think work well and are persuasive, any parts that are confusing, and any parts that could be improved to make them more persuasive and make them fit in more cleanly with the flow of the paper as a whole. It also means pointing out typos, grammar errors and awkward sentences. Your feedback will be evaluated by me based on how helpful it is.

Final Draft:

Your final draft must be submitted to me by Sunday, July 23 and will be graded in the standard way.

Oral Presentation

You will give an oral presentation that draws on the work you did for your written paper. This should *not* be just reading all or part of the paper, but an original work that takes the principal points you made in your written paper and presents them in a form that is easy to understand. A detailed rubric on how the presentation will be graded will be made available on the Sakai site.

Participation/Discussion

If you are not giving a presentation you will be expected to be an active and constructive participant in the discussion afterwards. Other members of the group to

whom the presenter belongs should take the lead, since at least two of them will already have some familiarity with the materials being presented because they read the rough drafts.

### Possible Topics for your Paper/Presentation

The paper should enrich our understanding of the theme of mercy in the Christian tradition. It need not be an exhaustive research paper, although it might end up being that. One source of ideas would be themes that Kasper treats (briefly) and for which he gives further possible material in the endnotes. For example, in Chapter Five (“Systematic Reflections”), Kasper talks about how the doctrine of the Trinity helps us understand God’s mercy, and vice versa. In the endnotes section (pp. 240-241) Kasper gives a number of other books and articles that deal with this (notes 37-49). You could use this material.

Other possible ideas:

- ◆ Write on another theologian who focuses on the theme of mercy: for example, Johann Baptist Metz or Jon Sobrino.
- ◆ Augustine on mercy
- ◆ Thomas Aquinas on mercy
- ◆ Another major theologian
- ◆ Comparison of St. John Paul II on mercy (*Dives in misericordia*) and Pope Francis (*The Name of God is Mercy* has both the bull declaring the year of mercy and an extensive interview with the Pope).
- ◆ Mercy in the spirituality of Julian of Norwich (*Showings*), or another spiritual teacher (Sr. Faustina Kowalska, for instance).
- ◆ Mercy and the sacrament of reconciliation (or one of the other sacraments, such as the anointing of the sick)
- ◆ Mercy in the Bible (you could use one or the other of Professor Gary Anderson’s books: *Sin* or *Charity* – or see footnotes from Kasper’s chapter). Many other possibilities here: consider the parable of the prodigal son or the good samaritan. Look at the Beatitudes (“Blessed are those who show mercy . . . .”)
- ◆ mercy in one of the other world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.)
- ◆ criticisms of mercy (see footnotes from Kasper’s second chapter).

Topics will be accepted and approved on a first come, first served basis, and we will not have duplication of topics.

Required Books:

The only two required books for the course are

- 1) *Mercy*, by Walter Kasper, which you can get either as an ebook or print edition.
- 2) *The Name of God is Mercy*, by Pope Francis (Random House, 2016) – which, once again you

can get either as an ebook (kindle, nook, etc.) or a “paper” book. This book has both the bull, *Misericordiae vultus*, which declared the year of mercy, and an interview with Pope Francis on the meaning of mercy for him.

FAQ's:

- ◆ Will we have on-line discussions? No, at least not directly, because it is too difficult to arrange a common time for us, since we are in very different time zones (I will be in Europe for one week of our on-line sessions). However, I will be sharing parts of your twice-weekly posts and commenting on them. Also, I encourage you to email me questions you have, either about the readings or about lectures you view. I will take time to respond to them in lecture format from time to time as the weeks progress.
- ◆ Will your “marked up” presentations and notes be made available? Yes, they will be available on Sakai after I finish my lecture.

Send me other questions you have and I will add to this list!!

A detailed schedule for the course with readings and so on posted, will be available by the end of this week. . . .