



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

ARTS & LETTERS



2020

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

Study everything. Do anything.SM

**Stephen Anderson**

- Majors: English and Theology
- Minor: Business Economics
- Adviser: Steve Tomasula

Dewfall

Israel means “wrestles with God.” My project, a portion of a spiritual and apocalyptic novel, embodies this sentiment, dramatizing and scrutinizing issues of belief, institution, power, and inspiration. Zach, a young seminarian, becomes a reluctant spiritual leader for a remnant of believers. Unordained and inexperienced, his role as prophet and leader leads to deep personal struggle as well as public conflict that might just decide the fate of Christianity in a new world.

I focused on the topics of eschatology, apocalypse (which means “unmasking”), and the prophetic life as a way to explore human nature and the instinct for religious meaning. Considering these topics challenged me to write about how the public nature of religion is performed and institutionalized, as well as the intensely personal inner dimension of religion — the desire and doubt it can engender all at once.

**Luisa Andrade**

- Major: Joint Major in Philosophy and Theology
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Alexis Torrance

The Icon of Christ — the Image of God in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor

My thesis attempts to understand creation in its relation to God, according to the Byzantine theologian St. Maximus the Confessor. My goal is to explain how the meaning of creation can only be unveiled under the light of God, while affirming that creation is substantially different from Him. In the end, the world and mankind can only be understood as an image of God when we behold God becoming His own image in Christ.

This project provided me with an opportunity to delve into the thought of this great theologian in a more comprehensive way, exploring areas as diverse as matter and spirit, incarnation and creation, nature and grace, person and substance, and so on. My foremost desire was to be more deeply familiarized with the thought of St. Maximus.

**Kevin Angell**

- Majors: Political Science and Economics (Concentration in Financial Economics and Econometrics)
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Kellogg International Scholar
- Sorin Fellow
- Advisers: Jeff Harden and Ethan Lieber

Professional Innovation? An Analysis of Legislative Professionalism and Legislative Innovation

Are more professional legislatures more innovative? For decades, one common criticism is that U.S. legislatures are too slow to innovate to address new issues. Many suggest that professionalizing legislatures, that is, making legislating a full-time job and providing greater resources, leads to greater innovation. In this thesis, I use a novel 40-year panel dataset to assess whether or not professionalization improves legislative innovation overall and in specific policy areas.

This topic lies at the intersection of my interests in American legislative politics and quantitative analysis. The number of American state legislatures and their diversity in professionalization provide a valuable way to obtain insight into the impact of professionalization. Additionally, the recent growth in publicly available data about state governments has enabled the use of more advanced methods and more detailed analysis.



Joshua Anthony

- Majors: Classics and Theology
- Adviser: Aldo Tagliabue

Warrior Wisdom: Paideia as Power in the Medieval Greek Alexander Romance

Late Antique educators and philosophers use the figure of Alexander the Great as an example of the ideal philosophical life and a demonstration of perfection through education. The medieval Greek work *Alexander Romance*, however, uses educational tropes in order to rehabilitate Alexander not primarily as a philosopher but as an embodied example of why Greeks deserve to rule the world.

Education as an institution and a concept has been deeply complicit in structural inequality throughout modern history. With this project, I wanted to explore what may well be the genesis of education as a mechanism for systemic discrimination against a culturally distinct group.

**Brennan Buhr**

- Majors: Political Science and Theology
- Minor: History
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Daniel Philpott

Hesburgh Between Two Worlds: The Idea of a Catholic University at Notre Dame

In this project, I write about the purpose and mission of a Catholic university, considered in theory and practice. Using the works of authors such as St. John Henry Newman, Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., and Christopher Dawson, I argue that Catholic universities, and Notre Dame in particular, must offer a distinctively Catholic form of liberal education to their students — one in which the discipline of theology is granted pre-eminent status.

I chose this topic after three long years of gradual reflection on the challenges that Notre Dame faces today in strengthening its Catholic identity and its commitment to offering all students a genuine liberal education. In many ways, I sense that Notre Dame as a whole has mostly failed at these two related tasks since the mid-20th century, and I wanted to understand the historical background that explains our University's present condition.



McKenna Cassidy

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies (PLS)
- Minor: Theology
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Francesca Bordogna

Meaning in Mealtimes: Carving Knives, Princes, and 'Dances' at the Renaissance Italian Table

My project analyzes the material culture of the Renaissance Italian feast and describes how ritual performances at the table reinforced political and social ideas. Through the interactions between objects and people in the dining space, mealtimes were made meaningful because mealtimes were a vital opportunity for people to construct their identities in the company of elite society.

I am passionate about mealtimes, and I wanted to defend its meaning in an academic context.

Traveled to London, Rome, and Florence with funding from the Flatley Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture.



Joseph Cook

- Majors: Theology and Mechanical Engineering
- Adviser: Paulinus Odozor

A Case Study of Participation in the Roman Catholic Liturgy in Abuja

My thesis shows how participation in the Roman Catholic mass, as laid out by the Second Vatican Council, is being lived out in Abuja, Nigeria. It looks at what people do during the liturgy, how their actions are informed by local contexts, and how greater participation might be achieved.

I have taken a particular interest in studying liturgy while at Notre Dame, and I was interested in exploring why the Catholic Church in Africa seems to be so much more vibrant than in the West.

Traveled to Abuja, Nigeria, with funding from the McGrath Institute for Church Life.

**Devin Dettman**

- Major: Joint Major in Philosophy and Theology
- Advisers: Meghan Sullivan and Neil Arner

Gaming and Goodness: The Road to Moral and Religious Virtue Through Video Games

My project examines the nature of video games by employing Aristotle's theory of virtue ethics to frame the act of gameplay as affecting moral formation in a kind of other self. I argue that understanding this relationship reveals how the structure of games allows them to form the moral understanding of their players in a unique way.

I've heard people accuse theology and, especially, philosophy of hopeless detachment from everyday experience, and I think a large part of this sentiment comes from the intellectual elitism that some perceive academics to embody. I wanted to defy this perception and help bridge the apparent gap between academic reflection and everyday experience by using academic philosophy and theology to articulate support for an experience sometimes viewed with undue moral suspicion.

**Abigail Dommert**

- Major: English
- Minor: Theology
- Adviser: Declan Kiberd

Catholicism in 'The Fisherman and His Soul'

This project examines the paradoxical role that Catholic theology plays in Oscar Wilde's fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Soul." By viewing the story through the lens of the "logic of the Incarnation," some of these paradoxes are illuminated and clarified.

While studying abroad at Oxford, I did a final project on fairy tales. The project focused on four Victorian authors, one of whom was Oscar Wilde. I found that I wanted to dive deeper into his stories, particularly one of his most convoluted and ambiguous — "The Fisherman and His Soul." My adviser, Declan Kiberd, encouraged this interest and has helped me connect it to my interests in Irish literature and culture.

**Christopher Enabnit**

- Major: Joint Major in Philosophy and Theology
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Sorin Fellow
- Advisers: John Betz and Mark Roche

'Towards the Historical Gethsemane': The Twin Mysteries of Art and History in the Thought of Konrad Weiß

German Catholic poet and critic Konrad Weiß remains largely obscure despite his significant influence on figures such as philosopher Josef Pieper, jurist Carl Schmitt, and translator Friedhelm Kemp, who wrote that Weiß's literature comprises "the most meaningful birth from the womb of the German language since Hölderlin." My thesis acts as an exposition of Weiß's thought on the meaning and relation of art and history and traces how his contributions have influenced the aforementioned thinkers.

I was introduced to Weiß's poetry through a number of philosophical works by Josef Pieper. Whenever Pieper referenced Weiß, I encountered a rare depth of thought. Having since learned that Weiß maintains a unique position in 20th-century intellectual history, both known and unknown in academic and popular discourse, I decided it would be a worthwhile endeavor to present him to a new audience through my senior thesis.



Zachary Hamar

- Majors: Philosophy and Program of Liberal Studies (PLS)
- Minor: Theology
- Adviser: Christopher Shields

The Theory of Universals of St. Thomas Aquinas

My thesis states that St. Thomas Aquinas' account of human intellection provides a solution to the problem of universals. I argue that his account of intellection, which includes an explanation of universals, is true to the world. Given that this is the case, the problem of universals is solved.

The denial of universals brings problematic consequences. I chose this topic because I wanted to argue against this denial to avoid these problems. This led me to a consideration of Aquinas' account of universals, which is part of his account of human intellection.

**Sarah Harper**

- Major: Art History
- Supplementary Major: French
- Minor: Theology
- CUSE Sorin Scholar
- Adviser: Elyse Speaks

Kader Attia: The Museum of Emotion

Kader Attia's exhibition "The Museum of Emotion" chronicles the entirety of his artistic career. A French Algerian artist, his work delves into French colonization. In particular, this exhibition demonstrates how there is a French control over former colonial populations. Attia is trying to demonstrate that relinquishing this control is necessary for the world to recover from the wounds of colonization.

Attia is becoming more important on the world stage, so I wanted to be ahead of the curve and write about the important work he is making. I also wanted to ensure that I used my French language skills in my thesis, so he was the perfect artist to study.

Traveled to London and New York with funding from the Flatley Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement.

**Noelle Johnson**

- Major: Theology
- Supplementary Major: Physics
- Minor: Philosophy
- Glynn Family Honors Program
- Sorin Fellow
- Advisers: Anthony Pagliarini and Gary Anderson

The Spirit of the Lord God is Upon Me: Methods in Interpretation of Luke 4's Reception of Isaiah 61

My thesis analyzes the commentary of three figures in the history of Scriptural interpretation on Isaiah 61, the chapter Jesus reads and declares fulfilled in the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4. The development of commentary on these passages through history illustrates the impact of Enlightenment-era philosophy on Scriptural interpretation and the unique character of sacred Scripture which accounts for the inextricable relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

My studies in theology and physics piqued my interest not just in the contemporary relationship of the two disciplines, but also in the history of their development and the principles which underlie the natural and human sciences in general. Sacred Scripture is key for understanding the proper relationship between human reason and divine revelation, as we approach its study with both scientific methods and deference to God's Word.

Received funding from the Suzanne and Walter Scott Scholars Program.

**Raechel Kiesel**

- Major: Sociology
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Minor: Business Economics
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Kraig Beyerlein

Virtual Religion and Offline Networks of Emerging Adults

Emerging adults today are engaged online all of the time. Their activities online are not limited to social media and email, but extend into other factors of life, including religion. Religion has made its way online in the form of websites, social media groups, videos, podcasts, and more. This study explores how emerging adults are interacting with their religion online and how that affects their offline religious social networks.

As a lay minister in my dorm and beyond, I am interested in the implications these results have on ministry for emerging adults and future generations. As emerging adults are known for leaving religion, I was curious to find out whether online or offline communities would be likely to keep them involved and which is more important to them.

Traveled to Chicago, Illinois, with funding from the Center for the Study of Religion and Society.

**Hugo Kostelni**

- Major: Theology
- Adviser: Margaret Pfeil

Humanity and Globalized Markets

French philosopher René Girard's Mimetic Theory provides an effective conceptual framework for applying Catholic social teaching to the globalized economy in order to model structures of injustice in market valuation.

My thesis was inspired by a desire to combine my personal experience interning in the financial sector with a theological exploration of Catholic teaching on the economy, in order to develop a deeper personal and professional understanding of the Catholic businessperson's place in the globalized world.

**Joseph Larson**

- Major: Film, Television, and Theatre (FTT)
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Adviser: Anne García-Romero

Compassion Cries the Moon King

For my thesis, I have written a play about the life of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, exploring his relationships with his family and with his Catholic faith, as well as his lifelong struggle and secret life as a closeted homosexual in the 19th century.

I chose this topic to explore the internal and external struggles, triumphs, tragedies, and blessings of LGBT+ individuals, especially those within the Catholic Church. As a queer man and a practicing Catholic, I found Ludwig's story deeply personal, resonant, and relevant, and I wanted to share it with all its highs and lows, comedies and tragedies.

Traveled to Munich, Germany, with funding from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program.

**Molly Light**

- Major: Psychology
- Minor: Theology
- Adviser: Dawn Gondoli

Impact of Mothers' Interoceptive Awareness on Daughters' Bulimia Symptoms and Body Dissatisfaction

Interoceptive awareness (IA) — the processing of the body's internal cues, sensations, and feelings — has been connected to eating disorder pathology, and signs of significant impairment in IA in bulimic individuals can persist even after recovery. This study examines whether interoceptive deficits in mothers can serve as a predictor of the outcome of bulimic symptoms and body dissatisfaction in daughters. It will offer insights on whether IA has a potential biological underpinning.

Having personally witnessed the severity of eating disorders on those suffering and their effects on patients' loved ones, I knew I wanted to research eating disorder pathology. Last summer, I worked as a research assistant at Trinity College Dublin, examining social media's effect on body image in Irish youth. This experience helped me become more familiar with eating disorder and body image-related research and methods. In my efforts to make a meaningful and beneficial contribution to this field, I chose to examine interoceptive awareness — a pertinent component within eating disorders I had not studied extensively.

**Whitney Lim**

- Major: Theology
- Minors: Sustainability and Business Economics
- Adviser: Sam Miller

Developing a Strategic Plan for Notre Dame's Student Garden

Starting with research on dozens of higher education institutions' sustainable agriculture programs, including six site visits and in-person interviews, my project works toward establishing a sustainable farm and garden at Notre Dame.

I chose this topic because everyone needs to eat and because it beautifully integrates my major and minors. Stewardship of God's creation, accessible provision of healthy produce, and a feasible business model are all key to sustainable food systems.

Traveled in Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois with funding from the Otterbeck Family Endowment for Excellence in Undergraduate Sustainability Studies.

**Madeline Link**

- Majors: History and Theology
- Minor: Italian
- Adviser: Daniel Hobbins

Rediscovering the Early Theological Thought on Joan of Arc

My research sheds fresh light on the earliest documents written about Joan of Arc by eminent theologians of her day. These works are often overlooked by scholars and artists intrigued by the drama of Joan's trial, but I believe the work of these theologians can reveal more about who Joan really was, because of both their position in the chronology of her story and their innate quest for objective truth.

This topic combines my interests in medieval history and theology, women in the Church, and the ways in which people and events are remembered and re-contextualized throughout history. This research has given me the chance to analyze theological documents that bear important historical significance, explore the life of one of the most famous and controversial women in the Church, and provide a way to reclaim the historical figure of Joan and her mission.

**Connor Mulvena**

- Major: English
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Adviser: Susannah Monta

An Analysis of Matrimonial Law in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*

My project is an exploration of *Measure for Measure's* commentary on the motivations underlying Elizabethan marital statutes. I focus particularly on the play's female characters and how the play figures the role of the woman in marriage under Elizabethan law. I intend my analysis to shed light on the play's attitude towards the significance of marriage as a societal institution in Elizabethan England.

In my course of study in theology, I've developed a special interest in the institution of marriage within the church. Plus, my electives within my English major have been largely geared toward Reformation-era British literature, so this project seemed a perfect marriage of the two interests.

**Thomas Naatz**

- Major: Political Science
- Supplementary Major: Spanish
- Minor: Theology
- Adviser: Andy Gould

'Generalissimo Francisco Franco Is Still Dead' But His Legacy Reappears During Election Season: The Timing of Spain's Historical Memory Debates

I studied the three most important episodes in Spain's ongoing debate over historical memory, particularly their connection with Spanish elections and electoral campaigns.

I have always had an interest in Spain and the Spanish Civil War, and I studied abroad in Toledo, Spain, last spring. Both in my classes and my daily life there, I learned a lot about how the civil war and subsequent dictatorship of Francisco Franco continue to divide Spaniards, even 40 years after democracy was re-established. I also observed a general election campaign during my time in Spain and even accompanied my host father when he went to vote. While it was fascinating to watch an election campaign unfold in another country, I was particularly struck by how the past continues to influence Spain's present-day politics. I hope my thesis can contribute to this important area of research.

Traveled to Toledo, Madrid, Seville, Valencia, Granada, and San Sebastian, Spain.



Anja Renkes

- Major: Theology
- Minors: Irish Studies and Studio Art
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Timothy O'Malley

Catholic Popular Piety at Holy Wells in Ireland

My theology thesis is the culmination of a creative research project I conducted in summer 2019 while I served as a research intern at the Dublin Global Gateway. I travelled around Ireland photographing and researching Irish holy wells, planning to paint them. For my thesis, I approached these pilgrimage sites of Catholic popular piety with special attention to the role of divine presence in devotional practice, seeking to demonstrate a visually accessible human longing for God and communion.

As I traveled, I spent a lot of time reflecting on the theological significance of Catholic prayer at these sites. I longed to explore these humble demonstrations of hope in Christ in theological, incarnational terms. My theological exploration of these sites lays the theoretical groundwork for my paintings. An exhibition of 14 of my paintings will be on display at the Dublin Global Gateway and Kylemore Abbey this summer.

Received funding from the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture.

**Theresa Rice**

- Majors: Program of Liberal Studies (PLS) and Theology
- Minor: Liturgical Music Ministry
- Adviser: Tim O'Malley

'A Heap of Broken Images': The Human Search for Identity in Poetry

My project seeks to illuminate the role of poetry in humanity's search for meaning and the innate desire for God. Using G.M. Hopkins to illustrate how poetry offers an incarnational encounter, I attempt to demonstrate the same formational project in the hopeful surrender in Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* as a response to the despairing fragmentation in *The Waste Land*. Ultimately, I argue that poetry enables a return of the reader to a cohesive and fundamental identity.

As a Program of Liberal Studies and theology major, I've become fascinated with the relationship of theology and literature, and poetry provided the perfect intersection. Eliot's *The Waste Land* captured my imagination sophomore year, and the questions of human fragmentation and despair it raises seem to find a compelling answer in the work of Hopkins and in Eliot's conversion poem *Ash Wednesday*.

**Bennett Rogers**

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies (PLS)
- Supplementary Major: Theology
- Sorin Fellow
- Adviser: Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

The Historical and Pastoral Readings of St. Paul

My project considers how St. Paul has been read throughout history. Starting with Martin Luther, people have used Paul as a guide for the Christian's everyday life. Then, in the 18th century, theologians began to apply a historical reading to Paul, distancing their world from his. But today, scholars realize that this historical narrative was quite broken and, frankly, anti-Semitic. My thesis considers how the historical and pastoral can coexist in the realm of faith.

I chose this topic because I have always seen St. Paul as an inspiration in my life, both as a writer and as a person of faith. The problem was, I had a difficult time interpreting his texts. I wanted to see how others have read Paul to better my faith and scholarly experience.

**Brady Stiller**

- Majors: Theology and Biology
- Advisers: David Fagerberg and Leonard DeLorenzo

Vocation as Romance Story: A Vocational Reading of G.K. Chesterton

My thesis makes the case that G.K. Chesterton's written works can be read and understood vocationally. Chesterton views life as both a romance and a story. In my opinion, the language he uses to convey life as a romantic story is vocational — that is, it conveys the truth that God calls individuals to live into the grand story He has prepared for them.

This thesis is a beautiful synthesis of two of my greatest interests: vocation and Chesterton. For the past five years, I have been daily discerning my vocation, and I have gained much vocational awareness over time. Chesterton, whom I had already admired as a grand figure, offered the proper language for understanding God's activity in our lives.

Traveled to the G. K. Chesterton Archive at the Notre Dame London Global Gateway with funding from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies.