



THEO 759: Theology Specialty
"Behold the Beauty of the Lord": Theological Aesthetics
Fall 2025

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Course Dates: December 8—12, 2025
Course Delivery Method: In-Person Modular

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces theological aesthetics as a way of exploring how beauty, imagination, and the arts reveal and reflect the divine. Engaging Scripture, historical sources, and contemporary voices, students will examine how beauty shapes faith, illuminates truth, and invites deeper encounter with God. Special attention is given to artistic practice, worship, and the theological significance of creation, incarnation, and human creativity.

COURSE INTEGRATION

Theological aesthetics invites students to recover the formative power of beauty for both the mind and the soul. In academic theology, it opens a space where reason and imagination meet, offering fresh insight into doctrines like creation, incarnation, and eschatology. For those preparing for pastoral ministry, spiritual direction, or counselling, this course fosters attentiveness to the symbolic, affective, and artistic dimensions of human experience—vital for nurturing spiritual health and communicating the gospel in a fragmented world. More broadly, theological aesthetics cultivates the eyes to see and ears to hear—to discern God's presence not only in texts, but in music, architecture, silence, and suffering. Students will be encouraged to see beauty not as ornament but as witness: a summons to worship, a pathway to truth, and a vital resource for discipleship in a culture often starved of wonder.

COURSE TEXTS

Begbie, Jeremy. *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

Fujimura, Makoto. *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

Nanay, Bence. *Aesthetics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

SEMINARY-WIDE OUTCOMES

Students will graduate:

1. Describing and demonstrating evangelical faith and values.
2. Preparing to serve God's kingdom in its diversity. Describe God, God's kingdom, and your calling (vocational sensitivity) within it, including the types of contexts and people you feel best prepared to serve.
3. Participating in the action of our Triune God through formation of the soul (i.e., virtue and spiritual integrity), mind (academic rigour), and strength (vocation).

MATS PROGRAM SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

Students will:

1. Demonstrate both depth and breadth of scholarship in chosen area of concentration.
2. Give evidence of their capacity to implement theological scholarship in a teaching and/or ministry context.
3. Articulate a spirituality of scholarship that describes their approach to integrating academic learning into personal formation.

COURSE OUTCOMES

1. **Articulate a theological understanding of beauty and the arts**

Students will be able to explain how theological aesthetics engages core doctrines—such as creation, incarnation, and the Trinity—with particular attention to the role of beauty in divine revelation and human response.

(Seminary Outcomes 1, 3 | MATS Outcomes 1, 3)

This outcome fosters a rigorous grasp of theological content (academic depth), reflects evangelical commitments to divine self-revelation, and cultivates theological imagination as a spiritual and intellectual discipline.

2. **Engage critically with major perspectives in aesthetic theory**

Drawing on both philosophical and theological sources, students will evaluate key ideas in aesthetic thought, such as the nature of beauty, the role of the imagination, and the meaning of artistic experience.

(Seminary Outcome 3 | MATS Outcomes 1, 3)

This outcome demonstrates scholarly breadth by bridging disciplines, invites integration of faith and intellect, and nurtures a thoughtful, discerning spirituality of scholarship.

3. **Reflect on the significance of the arts for Christian worship, vocation, and mission**

Students will explore how artistic practice and aesthetic sensibility contribute to pastoral ministry, spiritual formation, and cultural engagement within an evangelical context.

(Seminary Outcomes 1, 2, 3 | MATS Outcomes 2, 3)

This outcome emphasizes the practical application of theology in diverse ministry settings, linking beauty with pastoral care, mission, and the call to serve God's kingdom in its diversity.

4. **Develop theological discernment in encountering works of art**

Students will practice interpreting art theologically—identifying how artworks may convey, distort, or provoke theological meaning—and respond with informed and faithful engagement.

(Seminary Outcome 3 | MATS Outcomes 1, 2, 3)

This outcome equips students with tools for critical theological engagement in cultural contexts, enhancing their ability to serve both the Church and the world with spiritual and intellectual integrity.

5. **Integrate theological aesthetics into their own life and calling**

Students will reflect on how beauty, creativity, and imagination shape their personal discipleship and professional identity, whether in scholarship, pastoral work, or artistic practice.

(Seminary Outcomes 2, 3 | MATS Outcomes 2, 3)

This outcome bridges theological understanding with vocational sensitivity, encouraging students to embrace beauty as formative for their ministry and identity as scholars, pastors, and artists.

ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit all written assignments to Canvas.

Pre-Course Assignments:

Title: Beauty and the Doctrine of God: A Theological Reflection

Due: December 8, 2025 (first day of class)

Length: 1,500–2,000 words

Value: 20% of final grade

Assignment Description:

Before the course begins, students are asked to write a theological reflection essay that explores the relationship between beauty and one major Christian doctrine. This is a chance to begin considering how aesthetics is not merely decoration for theology, but essential to how we understand and encounter God.

Choose one of the following doctrines to explore:

- Creation
- Incarnation
- Trinity
- Eschatology
- Revelation (general or special)
- Ecclesiology (the Church)

In your essay, you should:

1. Introduce the doctrine in theological terms, referencing at least one biblical passage and one classical or contemporary theologian.
2. Discuss how beauty relates to or emerges from this doctrine. Consider both conceptual and experiential dimensions—how does beauty express, disclose, or challenge theological understanding?
3. Engage at least two course texts, one of which must be either Begbie's 'Redeeming

Transcendence' or Fujimura's 'Art and Faith'. Show how their insights help you think more deeply about beauty and theology.

4. Include one artwork or artistic medium (visual art, film, music, literature, etc.) that helps you reflect theologically on your chosen doctrine. Describe and interpret the artwork in conversation with your theological claims.

5. Conclude with a brief personal reflection (150–300 words) on how this exercise impacts your view of theology, beauty, and your own vocation.

Connection to Learning Outcomes

Seminary-Wide: 1 (faith and values), 3 (soul, mind, vocation)

MATS Program-Specific: 1 (scholarship), 3 (spirituality of scholarship)

Course Outcomes: 1 (theological understanding), 2 (aesthetic theory), 5 (integration)

Narrative Rubric: What Makes a Strong Assignment

- Excellent (A-range)
 - Demonstrates theological depth and clarity in describing the doctrine.
 - Integrates course texts thoughtfully and with critical engagement.
 - Connects theological content with beauty in original and insightful ways.
 - Art/artwork is described with attentiveness and theological relevance.
 - Writing is clear, structured, and demonstrates spiritual and intellectual maturity.
 - Personal reflection is honest, theologically grounded, and vocationally aware.
- Good (B-range)
 - Clearly explains the doctrine and makes relevant theological points.
 - Uses course texts appropriately but may rely too heavily on summary.
 - Makes some meaningful connections between beauty and theology.
 - Artwork is relevant but not deeply integrated into the argument.
 - Writing is generally clear but could use stronger structure or transitions.
 - Reflection is present but lacks depth or personal integration.
- Satisfactory (C-range)
 - Basic understanding of the doctrine is evident, but theological depth is limited.
 - Minimal or superficial use of required readings.
 - Weak or unclear connection between theology and beauty.
 - Artwork choice is tangential or under-analyzed.
 - Writing may be unfocused or contain significant stylistic issues.
 - Reflection is shallow or disconnected from essay content.
- Unsatisfactory (D–F)
 - Doctrine is misunderstood or misrepresented.
 - Required texts are not used or are used incorrectly.

- Little or no connection between aesthetics and theology.
- Artwork is absent or completely unrelated.
- Writing is unclear, disorganized, or unedited.
- No meaningful reflection is included.

Mid-Course Assignments:

Assignment 1: Theology in Form – An Aesthetic Field Report

Due: Final day of class (December 12, 2025)

Length: 750–1,000 words

Value: 20% of final grade

Assignment Description

During the course week, students will engage a work of art or an aesthetic environment as a site for theological reflection. This could include a visual artwork, musical performance, liturgical setting, sacred architecture, film scene, dance, or even a moment in nature. Your goal is to treat the aesthetic experience as a kind of theological text—something that invites interpretation, provokes questions, and points toward (or away from) the divine.

Your field report should include:

1. A brief description of the work or experience, including your initial impressions.
2. A theological interpretation: What theological themes, tensions, or insights does this aesthetic moment evoke? Reference course texts and class discussions.
3. Reflection on its significance: How does this experience shape your understanding of beauty, theology, and vocation? Could this work be used in a ministry or teaching context?

This assignment encourages you to cultivate attentiveness, theological imagination, and vocational awareness.

Connection to Learning Outcomes

Seminary-Wide: 1 (faith and values), 2 (vocation), 3 (formation of soul, mind, and strength)

MATS Program-Specific: 2 (theological implementation), 3 (spirituality of scholarship)

Course Outcomes: 3 (arts and vocation), 4 (discernment), 5 (integration)

Narrative Rubric: What Makes a Strong Assignment

- Excellent (A-range)
 - Chooses a compelling, well-described artwork or aesthetic experience.
 - Theological interpretation is rich, coherent, and well-supported by course materials.
 - Reflection shows depth of insight, vocational resonance, and spiritual engagement.
 - Writing is clear, evocative, and well-organized.
 - Shows attentiveness to both form and content of the artistic medium.
- Good (B-range)
 - Artwork or experience is appropriate and clearly described.

- Theological engagement is sound but may lack nuance or depth.
- Reflection connects to vocation but may be more general than personal.
- Writing is mostly clear with minor stylistic or structural issues.
- Demonstrates basic attentiveness to form, but may lack depth in analysis.
- Satisfactory (C-range)
 - Describes an artwork but without much depth or context.
 - Theological reflection is present but underdeveloped or too general.
 - Reflection lacks clarity on vocational or personal implications.
 - Writing has significant style or grammar issues.
 - Minimal integration of course texts or classroom ideas.
- Unsatisfactory (D-F)
 - Inadequate or unclear description of the aesthetic experience.
 - Little or no theological engagement.
 - Fails to reflect meaningfully on vocation or personal formation.
 - Writing is disorganized or difficult to follow.
 - No use of course materials or references.

Assignment 2: Beauty and the Church – A Theological Case Study

Due: Assigned presentation slot during the course week (December 8–12, 2025)

Format: 10-minute presentation + 1-page handout

Value: 20% of final grade

Assignment Description

Students will prepare a short seminar presentation exploring a real-world case where beauty or the arts intersect with theology in a ministry, worship, or cultural context. The goal is to examine how theological aesthetics applies to lived faith and practice.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Sacred architecture or iconography
- Artistic expressions in trauma or healing ministries
- The use of beauty in evangelism or worship
- Public art and theological witness in urban spaces
- Liturgical music and its theological implications

Your presentation should include:

1. A brief background or description of the case.
2. The theological issues or themes at stake.
3. Analysis of how beauty functions theologically in this context.
4. A concluding reflection on practical implications for ministry, education, or personal vocation.

Prepare a one-page handout summarizing key points and including one discussion question for class engagement.

Connection to Learning Outcomes

Seminary-Wide: 1 (faith and values), 2 (vocation), 3 (formation of mind and strength)

MATS Program-Specific: 1 (scholarship), 2 (implementation)

Course Outcomes: 3 (arts and vocation), 4 (discernment)

Narrative Rubric: What Makes a Strong Assignment

- Excellent (A-range)
 - Chooses a clear and compelling case that is well-contextualized.
 - Engages theological themes deeply and clearly connects them to aesthetic dimensions.
 - Presentation is well-organized, creative, and delivered with clarity and confidence.
 - Handout is succinct, visually clear, and facilitates discussion effectively.
 - Reflection includes thoughtful ministry and vocational implications.
- Good (B-range)
 - Case is appropriate and relevant with adequate background provided.
 - Demonstrates sound theological engagement, though some ideas may lack depth.
 - Presentation is clear, if somewhat less polished or organized.
 - Handout is present and helpful, if a bit text-heavy or sparse.
 - Some reflection on ministry or vocation is included.
- Satisfactory (C-range)
 - Case is loosely connected to the topic or lacks sufficient context.
 - Theological analysis is general or underdeveloped.
 - Presentation lacks structure or clarity.
 - Handout may be confusing, overly dense, or lacking visual clarity.
 - Minimal or unclear connection to ministry or vocational application.
- Unsatisfactory (D-F)
 - Presentation lacks clarity or relevance to course themes.
 - Fails to address theological or aesthetic issues meaningfully.
 - Disorganized or poorly delivered presentation.
 - No handout provided or handout lacks meaningful content.
 - Little or no reflection on theological or vocational implications.

Post-Course Assignment:

Title: Final Project – Theological Aesthetics and the Beauty of God

Due: February 6, 2026 (8 weeks after course ends)

Length: 3,000–3,500 words (Option A) or 1,500 words + project (Option B)

Value: 40% of final grade

Assignment Description

This final assignment gives students the opportunity to synthesize their learning and apply theological aesthetics to a scholarly or creative context.

Choose one of the following two options:

► Option A – Scholarly Paper

Write a research paper exploring a key theme, doctrine, or theologian related to theological aesthetics. Your paper should engage course texts and at least three additional scholarly sources. Topics may include the theology of beauty, imagination in doctrine, the aesthetic dimensions of liturgy, the role of art in eschatology, or the work of figures such as von Balthasar, Fujimura, or Begbie.

► Option B – Creative or Integrative Project

Develop an original creative or ministry-focused project that integrates theological aesthetics. This may take the form of a liturgical resource, visual artwork, musical composition, educational module, or pastoral initiative. Include a 1,500-word theological reflection that explains the project's intent, theological grounding, and vocational relevance. Use at least two course texts and one external source.

In both options, students must demonstrate clarity of thought, theological integration, and awareness of how beauty shapes Christian life, worship, or vocation.

Connection to Learning Outcomes

Seminary-Wide: 1 (faith and values), 2 (vocation), 3 (soul, mind, and strength)

MATS Program-Specific: 1 (scholarship), 2 (implementation), 3 (spirituality of scholarship)

Course Outcomes: All course outcomes are addressed in this capstone assignment

Narrative Rubric: What Makes a Strong Assignment

- Excellent (A-range)
 - Demonstrates theological depth, clarity, and originality.
 - Uses course texts and external sources effectively and critically.
 - Creative or scholarly work is insightful, well-crafted, and vocationally grounded.
 - Shows strong integration of aesthetics with theology, doctrine, and formation.
 - Writing is clear, well-structured, and compelling throughout.
- Good (B-range)
 - Theological engagement is solid, with good use of sources.
 - Project or paper is clearly presented and thematically relevant.
 - Shows some integration of aesthetics and theology, though depth may vary.
 - Writing is generally clear with minor stylistic or structural issues.
 - Demonstrates vocational awareness, though not fully developed.
- Satisfactory (C-range)

- Theological content is basic or somewhat underdeveloped.
 - Sources are used but may lack integration or depth.
 - Project or paper is uneven in clarity or execution.
 - Connections between theology and aesthetics are weak or general.
 - Writing may include structural or grammatical issues.
- Unsatisfactory (D–F)
 - Lacks clear theological focus or argument.
 - Little or no integration of course texts or relevant scholarship.
 - Project or paper is disorganized or thematically disconnected.
 - Fails to engage aesthetic or vocational dimensions meaningfully.
 - Writing is unclear or significantly below graduate-level expectations.

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Modular Course Schedules

Modular classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the

syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI without instructor authorization violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately.

Generative AI is an umbrella term for a type of machine learning and a group of algorithms that can create new content, such as text, code, images, videos, music, or a combination of all these formats. Generative AI produces output in response to a query or prompt using generative models such as Large Language Models (LLMs) that rely on large datasets. Generative AI features are also often embedded within tools such as Grammarly, allowing these tools to generate new content, such as the rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarizing of existing text. The generated responses of these tools are probabilistic, which can result in errors and biases in responses.

The use of generative AI to create audio or visual media, to produce outlines, to generate partial or complete drafts of assignments, to answer questions on quizzes or exams, or to edit the grammar of assignment drafts is considered unauthorized unless it is explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. All use of generative AI tools must be properly documented.

Students are responsible for ensuring they are using their sources and completing their assignments with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#) and the Briercrest Format Guide. In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Full Bibliography will be posted to Canvas