practicalmatters

Faith in Music:
Attempting a Free, Public, Online Course in Practical Theology

Tom Beaudoin

Fordham University

Abstract

The author reviews a free, open, online course on popular music that he taught from a practical theological perspective. By considering several dimensions of the structure and content of the course, and with continual reference to literature in practical theology and cultural studies, he attempts to identify its practical theological significance and to detail a critique opening onto a reconstruction for future iterations of such a course.

Around the time I was defending my dissertation at Boston College, Thomas Groome handed me an article titled "Music and Practical Theology" by Bernard Reymond from the *International Journal of Practical Theology*.[1] Having been introduced by Groome to practical theology several years earlier, this was the first work interrelating practical theology and music I had read. Nearly two decades later, I taught a course trying to bring practical theology and music to bear on each other.

Having taught the course two years ago, I have spent time reviewing the experience, in its practical theological significance, as I prepare to refine the course for future purposes, including teaching it as a for-credit course, offering it for free in other community contexts, and writing it up as a book. As I reviewed the course, I sorted my learning into several categories. On the one hand are structural and process elements that are theologically saturated: launching the course, motivations for teaching, structure and content, diversity and access; on the other hand are conceptual markers that are theologically saturated: sound theology, God, and faith in music. In what follows, I consider these each in turn and conclude with considerations for the future.

Launching the Course

My teaching is always an experiment in working out my intention that students go deeper in understanding and acting in their situation, wherever they are. On the "presenting" level, the curriculum is about our studies (topics, themes, readings, lectures, questions), but in depth, the curriculum is about the desires and powers circulating in our situations. I felt these stakes keenly during the four years of preparation and the ten weeks of teaching "Faith in Music: Sound Theology from the Blues to Beyoncé." Designed as a free, public, and online course, I was trying to utilize digital educational technology to experiment with practices of and purposes for theological education in my context at Fordham University.[2] "Faith in Music" was envisioned as a modest version of the "massive online open courses"[3] that had captured educators' imaginations. This one would be more modest than massive, and Fordham did not have a proven infrastructure for producing such courses, but was committed to making it available to anyone who could access it. From the beginning, I partnered with WFUV (90.7 FM), a venerable New York City "rock and roots" radio station housed at Fordham.[4] The project enjoyed the support of leadership at WFUV, the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education (GSRRE), and the wider university.[5]

I taught the course over ten weeks in spring 2017 on Course Sites, a digital teaching and learning platform produced by Blackboard, an online vendor with which Fordham contracts for its online and hybrid courses. As an asynchronous online course (we did not meet "live," and students could access the Course Site at any time while it was open), I put together all the course materials beforehand, leaving me free to interact with students (on the discussion board and occasionally over email). I made available ten modules, one week at a time.

Motivations for Teaching

Why did I want to get into free online open theological education? One track of my academic career has been about making insights generated in academic theology and religious studies accessible to the larger world, particularly religious communities and the educated public. Practical theology has historically placed itself in service to Christian faith communities, and in its "rebirth" in recent decades has turned more toward service of the world. I also grew up among Midwestern white lower middle-class and working-class kids, many of whom had no access to elite education. Decades later, I am still "that kid" amidst "those kids." Rock music for me still has the tang of class pushback, even as it also substantiates the middle-class whiteness that was also part of my world. As I have grappled with what to do with this personal heritage of two domains of whiteness (working-class/middle-class) that were both deeply imbricated in rock music, and entangled with what was possible in gender, sexuality and religion, I have often found my way to involvement in projects that redistribute academic knowledge. On the one hand, it is a way of saying I have not forgotten my struggling public-housing peers (and this dimension of myself), and on the other hand it is a way of disposing of social and epistemic advantage accumulated amidst white suburban peers (and this dimension of myself).[6] That I teach in a relatively well-off Catholic- and Jesuit-heritage university is also an impetus. Part of this heritage is the social mission of the university.[7] I look around me at Fordham and see a university

that can "afford" to give away some of what we do where we can make a difference. The goal of individual and social transformation has become so frequently invoked in contemporary practical theology that it is in danger of becoming commonplace, yet as a practical theologian in a Jesuit-heritage university I am keen to emphasize the overlap between the university's ideals and the investments of practical theology in reconstructed practice, faithful action, noble change, and at the limit revolution. These all stand behind my desire to publicize Fordham's theological education through a free, online, open course.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

These commitments not only informed my desire for such a course, but the choices of what to include, of how to structure the topics we would study, and the imagined experiential route through which students would proceed as the course unfolded. I was aware from the beginning that I meant for the course to show what a practical theology could do with popular music for an educated public audience. More specifically, I taught the course as an exercise in practice-minded theology. "Practice-minded" is my way of holding together and holding open the gifts, potentials, and stakes of self-identified practical theologies as well as other cognate discourses on religion and theology (and more) that form the practice-nexus described by terms like: practice, praxis, experience, performance, action. Practice-minded theology includes the self-designated professional realm of practical theologies and any other forms of academic inquiry that seem useful for practical theology's purposes. These purposes are never only formulated from "within" formal practical theological discourse, but are continually revised "within" and at the "edges" by practical theological discourses' interactions with, dependence on, and at times resistance to and exclusion of, cognate forms of academic inquiry. It is this broad sense of practice-minded theology that I try to instantiate in all my teaching and in "Faith in Music" in particular.

The course featured a number of elements that were meant to create a kind of playspace within each "unit." The first and last weeks were an introduction and summation, and the middle eight weeks were given to the study of eight musicians and their musical catalogues: Robert Johnson, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Elvis Presley, George Harrison, Carlos Santana, Lauryn Hill, Björk, and Beyoncé. Each week with the artists included a suite of materials that I created for students to explore at their own pace and order. For each artist, students had access to an audio lecture I had recorded (typically 30-45 minutes) in mp3 format, a lecture transcription in Microsoft Word, a bibliography of sources that informed the lecture, a list of songs referenced in the lecture, a YouTube playlist of videos that tracked the songs mentioned in the lecture, a list of Internet links to resources related to the artist (interviews, performances, talks), and audio interviews from the WFUV archives related to the artist. In addition, I conducted five audio interviews that I interspersed throughout the course, two with WFUV disc jockeys, two with a theologian and a religious educator with experience in music, and one with the Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Sam Phillips.[8] Students could read, watch, or listen to these materials online or download them to their own devices. They could turn to the class discussion board to discuss with other students and with me what they were learning, to share their questions, and to offer a variety of recommendations of music and other resources.

How did I choose these eight artists? I wanted to prioritize African-American influence in popular music

and white reconstructions of that influence with some complexity, while also registering the international character of US popular music. I wanted to underscore the Christian specificity of this musical tradition but also its broader religious/spiritual conditions. I wanted to craft a century-long narrative that took up blues in the American South and addressed Hip Hop and pop music in the present. I was concerned about tokenism and essentialism in selecting artists, aware that my role as a white and male creator of this narrative substantially prespecified what I might see, feel, and select in that narrative. My experience as a musician predisposed me toward valuing accomplished musicianship in popular music artistry. As a result, the guitar and its changing fortunes (and theological significance) were central, but the singing voice was crucial as well.

I found I could meet some of my goals for equitable attention by how I told the story of the life and music of the artists. For example, Robert Johnson's music allowed me to learn and teach about Hawaiian backgrounds to Southern slide guitar, and George Harrison's music invited attention to the Indian spiritual and musical influences central to his life and work. Including Björk permitted consideration of a modern secular artist claiming no religious affiliation and opened the question of what counts as contemporary secular tradition. Lauryn Hill showed how music can simultaneously embody an inherited Christian background and a newly chosen religious foreground like Rastafarianism. During the long planning process, I realized I needed to try to select artists as much for what they could let us explore as for what role the artists themselves play or played in popular music. Carlos Santana's life and catalogue exemplify an accessible artist working over the course of a long and productive career across cultures (Mexican, US, global), genres (blues, jazz, Latin, rock), and religions and spiritualities (Catholicism, Sri Chinmoy, and energetic, eclectic spiritual seeking), exhibiting a restless search for faith in music.[9]

I was not sure how New York-centric to make the course. (How much should such an online course be "rooted" in the geography of its "creators"?) I settled on thinking that the Fordham origins, the WFUV partnership, the use of the WFUV archives, and my inclusion of Lauryn Hill (from across the Hudson River in New Jersey) were enough to register New York-ness. I also felt a certain ragged cosmopolitan spirit about the course symbolized its New York home base, and I had seen several of these artists in concert in the city in the years leading up to the course. (I had also recorded dozens of video segments of these concerts that I ended up not using in the course.) In other words, I felt I was *doing* some degree of New York in the course. By the conclusion of "Faith in Music," I was satisfied with the arc of the artists, but I also knew how much of a partial construction it was. During the teaching, I felt regret at leaving out obvious musicians who deserved to be there, famous and not-so-famous. Students would often say, "So-and-so should be in this course!" They were right.

Diversity and Access

One hundred and eight students were enrolled. While the course did not survey demographic information, most students seemed to live in the United States. My impression is that slightly more than half of the participants identified as women. Of statements that revealed age or generation, we had a small cohort of 20-30-somethings and over-70s, with probably a majority aged 40-65. Most of those enrolled

seemed to have at least passing familiarity with Christianity. Some shared their religious affiliation, church commitments, or backgrounds. Several mentioned their lack of religious affiliation. A few were affiliated with religious or spiritual traditions other than Christianity.

I noticed that whereas a few students claimed an Asian-American perspective in discussions (in one case occasioned by a section on Hawaiian backgrounds of blues guitar), no one was claiming African-American or Latinx perspectives. I then wondered how white the atmosphere effectively was for those participating on the discussion board. This realization was "feedback" for me on who was actually accessing the course, and who would consider Fordham's offering of such a course interesting. It was also a revelation of my inadequacy in conceptualizing the discussion board pedagogically in racially and ethnically inclusive terms. Although I was gratified by participation in discussions, I was troubled as well. By the end, I wondered who this learning was "for."

In the planning, I had had a sense of wanting to make the course as "open" as possible to people to come and go as they pleased, without making demands on registrants. I thought it important for this experiment to keep the bar for entry low.[10] I realized I did not think well about how to invite specific constituencies, and about how to submit my ideas about course accessibility to critical feedback from other scholars.[11] Replicating longstanding racial legacies at Fordham and in my School in particular, I did not effectively intervene in the closed loop of relatively privileged white men, with me at the center, who were crucial to this course development. My goals for theological equity were focused on the "curriculum," not on advertising, outreach, or recruitment for the course.

Even so, given the understanding of "curriculum" above to which I am ostensibly committed (a course of study subtended by plumbing desires and powers that condition our situations), I can see now that I did not adequately conceptualize or sufficiently advocate diverse access as central to "Faith in Music." There were some questions along the way about who should underwrite advertising for the course (the School, the radio station) and how much advertising, and where, was enough. In retrospect, I did not see the question of advertising and publicizing as something that was my responsibility, and this is one place where administrative and faculty duties are a blurry zone. I understand better now that these questions of outreach and advertising are ways of talking about what and whom the course is "for."[12] They are practical theological matters.

Questions of access to theological education matter for practical theology because one of practical theology's constitutive rhetorics is that of a practice-nexus distinct from a concept-nexus or an object-nexus. By concept-nexus, I mean theology that takes itself to be grounded in concepts and concept-like material, such as ideas, speculations, systems, assertions, propositions, and beliefs. By object-nexus, I mean theology that takes itself to be grounded in objects and object-like material like texts (including scriptures), manuscripts, artwork, buildings, and what is often called "material culture." By practice-nexus, I mean that practical theology functions as a protest or contrast genre in relation to the "others" of practice (such as concept or object). This practice-nexus is driven by the conviction that what counts as theology is grounded in practice and a constellation of practice-adjacent notions, such as action, performance, praxis, and experience. Practical theology as the rhetoric of a practice-nexus is typically taken to be a protest toward, a contrast to, or meaningfully distinct from the concept-nexus and the object-nexus.[13]

The practice-nexus constitutive of practical theology is entangled in an ambiguous history that has invented new freedoms as well as marginalizations.[14] Those of us who traffic in practical theology take up with that history. For practical theologians with influence to take up with it in a way that reproduces its exclusions is a misuse or abuse of the heritage we aim to direct in service of others. Practical theology remains a potentially radical project for Christian experience—and because its history and present situations are entangled with other-than-Christian experience, it remains open for that to be its project as well.[15]

It is consistent with the brokenness I inherited through (but not only through) practical theology that "Faith in Music" fell short of the community it could have welcomed. Indeed, the course was positioned to discourage that fuller welcome. It is also consistent with the forms of attention I have garnered through (but not only through) practical theology that I can articulate this vision anew, work on the "epistemologies of ignorance" informing my teaching,[16] the practice of separating teaching duties from outreach and recruitment, and intend a different future, integrating questions about audience, outreach and access into what "Faith in Music" is "about" in its future iterations.

Sound Theology

In accord with the course title, my central concern for the study of each artist was to notice and cultivate a "faith in music" that could be part of a "sound theology." By "sound theology," I set myself as an advocate in the class for generating theology of and from the "sounds" we studied. This phrase also felicitously suggests that theology be "sound," which I take to mean striving for public persuasiveness, justifying itself in the measure of truth, beauty, and goodness that it furthers. Practical theological persuasion is itself not only a matter of how sounds become theologically significant, but of how theology sounds—and sounds to—its hearers.[17]

I teach on the presumption that we have to have good reasons and just rhetorics for practical theological work. By good reasons, I mean reasons that stand up to scrutiny as good argument among those who value good argument inside and outside of theology. By just rhetorics, I mean to recognize that we are persuaded not only by good reasons but by persuasive, poetic, even beautiful writing and other forms of theological presentation; further, that these persuasive rhetorics ought to be ultimately in service of justice toward ourselves and all others in our (local and global) society, as tested by the world it contributes to creating for those with least access to the necessities of a noble life. Good reasons can never be separated cleanly from justly persuasive rhetorics. I consider good reasons, good argument, and justly persuasive rhetoric not as stable descriptors with durable content, but as pragmatic pointers toward a way of managing unavoidable disputes in theology. In other words, I presume good reasons, good argument, and justly persuasive rhetoric to be radically historically contingent, and even my specification of them as an index of my cultural-historical specificity.[18]

Thus, the course was meant to ride the question: What are good reasons and justly persuasive rhetorics for having this engagement between theology and music happen? Why do we think our theological traditions might have something significant to say here, and how do we convey that with care, style, and beauty? No less important is the moment in theological work where we ask why this theological engagement with

music matters for us and for those affected by this conversation. Do we see that we or others might become different, gain knowledge, insight, wisdom, or virtue, might simply grow or change, as a result? And will this engagement, which is both ever new and ever rooted in our past, make us reconsider both this music and theological traditions?

The point is that despite theology's historical tendencies to see itself as the protector of divine (private) property known as "revelation," neither sounds nor theology can stay the same in this kind of engagement, and we will only retrospectively come up with reasons for that novelty.

To pursue a sound theology is to find ways to bring together musical culture and theological culture and to find out why and how it matters that that happens, using that knowledge to make wiser future discernments. These discernments are not ultimately for producing specialized knowledge alone, but for learning how to live more fully in such a way that others may also elect life with agency. Theological research must conform to the best standards of research, and at the same time offer the potential for living wisely and well.[19]

God

To take the approach I wish to take in "Faith in Music" raises the question of the understanding of God—usually taken to be the most important matter in theology—to which popular music may be related. Is it possible to maintain a multireligious and multisecular form of attention when teaching a practice-minded course on popular music that is still "theological," that still deals with "God"? Theology is often defined as "words" (*logia*) about "God" (*theos*), or "God-talk." Many practical theologians will agree that Western theologies inherit two deficiencies in this definition. First, such speech can easily be divided off from action, from practice, from doing. Theologians often characterize such speech as essentially ruminative or speculative: theories for getting closer to the nature of divine things.[20] But if speech is also action, then ways of referring to God can be construed not as detached ruminations but as ways of doing something, cutting a path. Speaking about God, in other words, is always effective or ineffective in and for a situation—an action that comes out of our lives and makes a difference in life. Theology's cutting of a path also shapes the pathmaker, the person doing the "speaking." In other words, *logia* about God changes the speaker and all who are affected by their *logia*. (Of course, that change may be in the form of "maintaining" a situation.)

Second, this inherited speech called "theology" typically assumes security in its object, a presumption that speech about God basically knows what it is talking about. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine teaching theology today, especially in seminary or theological-school settings, without this working presumption. *Theo-logia* tells us that the intended "object" of the *logia*, the speech, is *theos*. Religious traditions for whom a God has been central, including Christianities influential for practical theology, tend to make "theology" into "speech about God" in the sense of "speech about *our* God, speech about the God whose essential character we already know." This is not "incorrect," but it is performatively in-group speech.

In-group speech can be an effective mechanism for cementing affiliation to a community or tradition. Such language voices ways that religious or other communities talk about ultimate reality, about the God already basically known, as "our God," as the "God of our people," and "we the people of God." It speaks about

the God who is thought to be, in essential and effectively unchangeable ways, known before theology shows up. Such speech helps build up communities and induces shared habits, which are essential to continuity in any community.[21]

What that confidence about the "object" of theology lacks, however, is everything excluded by the in-group appeal: the voices and experiences of those for whom this account of God, this God, does not make sense, the voices and experiences of those who do not experience these repetitions of speech as the kind of adherence that helps.[22]

Theology and theologians often come from academic and religious communities that charge us with maintaining the group's borders, with repeating essential authorized claims about the group's God. The kind of theology I needed to do in "Faith in Music" was to try to unseal the border, a border between religion and nonreligion that was not effectively sealed anyway. In a course that was trying to take responsibility for exclusions in the theological history of popular music, I had to ask about that *theos*, that "God" so essential to theology. I found it helpful to use the language of "God" less and to return to the language of *theos* more. Calling theology "speech" about *theos* can throw off our step a bit, put us slightly off guard, make things helpfully strange, encourage us to wonder once again what this speech-path is for.

Theos is the Greek term that different religious communities adopted from ancient philosophical traditions, traditions that already had their own theologies. *Theos* was the term that, among other functions and effects, came to describe efforts to account for a community's claiming reality with which one had to contend, for the power of powers as understood by authorizers of a specific community. *Theos*, this power-rich term, traffics in life-stakes.[23] The term's power cannot be separated from its danger or its possibility.

Even though *theos* is the term Christianities have tended to translate "God," the critical referents *theos* and God are not simply interchangeable, despite long centuries of traditions working diligently to equate the word *theos* to their concept of God, to claim *theos* for God. I prefer to keep that space open instead of closing it off. I prefer to do so in order to practice hospitality and seek truth beyond the religious or nonreligious in-group—to discipline my attention toward the popular musical world that has so substantially formed me and shapes the society of which I am a part.

Theos can be handled (with care) not as a resting place or a secure space, but a provocation. Theology builds paths and persons referred to *theos*, where *theos* is itself a concept that is also an activity, a perpetual opening. Thus held, theology can consolidate attention in the direction of claiming power, of becoming more. That claiming power can be called God, Goddess, gods, love, sacred, divinity, and—more.

When I do theology, then, in "Faith in Music," I practice speech about *theos*. I put into play ways of making sense of a claimed "greater" power. This sense-making can include what in-groups call God. Most important for my teaching was to try to analyze diverse artists' voices in terms of what *theos* might be, taking responsibility for what such speech makes possible in their (and our) songs, lives, communities, and world.[24] I operationalize this *theos* through how I present faith in music.

Faith in Music

The title phrase, "faith in music," is a deep theme of the course. By "faith in music," I mean two things

at once. On the one hand, "faith in music" means how confidence in what matters most to artists—this is what I mean by their "faith"—gets into their music. We study how values and practices that matter from the artists' personal or cultural backgrounds end up in the music. On the other hand, "faith in music" means how music itself becomes central to what matters most, how music *is* that in which the artist (and others) come to entrust their confidence, their hope, their life. They show what a faith in music itself looks like.

By "faith in music," I mean popular music as that in which musicians and fans can have faith, and popular music as an influential way in which religious/secular traditions are articulated and reconstructed. Faith in music is about music being enough to hold or register what matters for individuals and communities, whether or not musicians or fans have an institutionally recognizable religious identity. For such persons, faith in music seems particularly effective at consolidating ways of life, at making certain kinds of people through what music means to those who take refuge in it. In other words, musical experience serves as a kind of spiritual exercise, a force for shaping what matters most, for what we most may be. Music reaches us in deeply holding and motivating ways. We are different for our faith in music.[25]

I ask students to keep this notion of faith in music in mind as they go from artist to artist. I also invite them to think about what faith in music means for them: *How do your commitments and practices get into the music that you make or that you treasure? And how is music itself sufficient for you? When is it enough that you have music? What music can be the most—or even all—that you need? What is your faith in music?*

By preparing and teaching the course, what I came to see about faith in music is that each of these artists was heir to complex religio-secular heritages that were figured in sound and that they refigured those heritages in the creation and performance of songs. I realized I was trying to help the students and myself appreciate how songs reflect where the artist came from "spiritually," while the songs are also novel displays, new creations of faith in music. To take this approach is not to short-circuit the commercial/ideological conditions for the production of music or to romanticize the role of a singular artistic genius in music-making, especially in the consumer capitalist music business, and the ensemble settings, in which most of the musicians we studied were operating. (That said, I realize in retrospect that I selected musicians who exercise a singular creative force in their work and usually stood out from their bands, so I privileged George Harrison's solo work over his membership in The Beatles, Lauryn Hill's over The Fugees, and Beyoncé's over Destiny's Child.) We can try to learn what is distinctive about the faith in music of each artist while seeing that faith and that music as inseparable from commercial, ideological conditions. The notion of "God" that I invoke above suggests that the ambiguities of material armature of what comes to be called theological or musical material are always a part of the work. No faith, no music, no faith in music gets to count as pure. At the same time, it is this very "impure" faith in music that goes so far in making artists what they are and making music fans what they are.

Looking Ahead

While I had written about music and theology before, the process of creating and teaching "Faith in Music" was my most intensive learning experience since my dissertation, which was the time Thomas Groome handed me that article on practical theology and music. Preparing this course helped me realize

that I chose these artists not just because they help me teach about music and theology; I chose them because I need them as I work in and out of something like an alternative spiritual tradition that wends its way through popular music, a theological path called faith in music. In teaching this course, I created something like a new pantheon of theology teachers for myself and others. I read, watch, or listened to their interviews, viewed their performances, studied scholarship on their music, and listened to each artist's entire catalogue on vinyl. I wanted to share with students, and learn more for myself, the prospects for faith in music as a living practice today.

The material has proven continually useful after the course ended, and I have continued to share it when the theme of faith and music comes up in conversation. A minister friend used the Rosetta Tharpe material for preaching. I shared the Elvis Presley material with an undergraduate who loved Elvis and spirituality. A campus minister used the George Harrison material in her own spiritual direction. Talking about the course on campus and in the city (and online) spawned its own alternative curriculum as I learned of others' favorite artists or songs, and religiously or spiritually or otherwise motivating experiences with music. All these "records" exist in everyday life, and I would like to find a way to bring them into theological education. I did keep a record of email exchanges that occurred during the course.

I am now thinking about future versions of the course online and on campus. Which artists should be added? How do I improve connecting the material to the range of audiences (public, academic, religious) that might find it helpful? I have begun considering seeking grants for these purposes and will write a book based on the course.

The existential, political and professional stakes for me in this work have come increasingly clear. I sense more clearly how practical theology is both a home and not a home for me—because of my faith in music. I have been a practicing rock musician for thirty-five years, and I am at home in the world of bands and live music, a world of now casual, now intentional spiritual exploration. My experience of musicianship is that learning—with others—musical forms of attention is also training in hearing, feeling, and playing what matters. Living substantially with music puts in place a kind of faith. Such attention and exploration is grounded in the rehearsal room, the concert venue, the recording studio, the privacy of the headphone experience and the publicness of the pub. I taught "Faith in Music" aware of that formation. I can only hear and feel practical theology as part of my faith in music. What I tried to show about artists—that their songs pull forward their faith heritages and make something new out of a faith in music—has been true of my experience teaching this course: my new song was the course. It has been a way of living from what I inherited theologically and, through my own faith in music, what I can make of that now for a yes to life in a way that supports the yeses of others to their own lives.

Notes

1 Bernard Reymond, "Music and Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 5, no. 1 (2001).

2 The Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education (GSRRE) at Fordham has been engaged in online education since 2007, and I have been teaching online and hybrid courses since 2014.

3 Popular "massive online open courses" (MOOCS) have been created by contract between companies, such as Coursera, edX, and Udacity, and higher education institutions. Some colleges and universities have made their own freestanding massive online open courses. Among the most popular have been courses in computer science, artificial intelligence, and mathematics.

4 In a theologically evocative example of the semiotics of university facilities management, for many years WFUV resided on the top (third) floor of Keating Hall, the Gothic-style centerpiece of Fordham's Bronx campus, and the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education in the basement. In 2005, WFUV and GSRRE changed places. A symbology of "foundations" and "heights" entertained my imagination all along, as I considered music and religion/spirituality/faith in a commutative relationship grounded in sounds evoking elevation and depth. I mused that long before "Faith and Music" joined cellar and attic, underground and overlook, faith and music occupied both places at Fordham.

5 Encouragement and material support for the course was initially provided by Dean Colt Anderson of the GSRRE and WFUV General Manager Chuck Singleton, and I learned considerably from the creative support of WFUV Director of Communications John Platt, who helped me shape the structure of the course and facilitated access to WFUV archives. I also benefited from technical assistance from Fordham Instructional Technologist Nicole Zeidan and research assistance from GSRRE graduate student Jasmine Gomez. Fordham University Provost Stephen Freedman was instrumental in encouraging the project.

6 On "epistemic advantage" for practical theology, see Courtney T. Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 202-205.

7 Jesuit philosopher Ignacio Ellacuría, in his 1982 commencement address at Santa Clara University, stated that "There are two aspects to every university. The first and most evident is that it deals with culture, with knowledge, the use of the intellect. The second, and not so evident, is that it must be concerned with the social reality--precisely because a university is inescapably a social force: it must transform and enlighten the society in which it lives... [T]he university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those without science; to provide skills for those without skills; to be a voice for those without voices; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to make their rights legitimate." See Ellacuria, "Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J.'s June 1982 Commencement Address," Santa Clara University, Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education, accessed 24 May 2019, https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-tradition-offerings/stories/ignacio-ellacuria-sjs-june-1982-commencement-address-santa-clara-university.html

8 The WFUV disc jockeys included John Platt and Alisa Ali. The theologian was Michael Lee of Fordham University,

who is also a guitarist, and the religious educator was Tamara Henry of New York Theological Seminary, whose research focuses on Hip Hop and religious education.

9 I owe the inclusion of Carlos Santana to a suggestion by Colt Anderson, who was then the Dean of the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education.

10 I was surprised that 156 people had registered to receive information about the course, but the number of people who actually got into the website was 108. I did not know if this was typical, but I wondered how we could have made it easier to get in from the beginning without the added step of registering in the Course Site, which involved registrants creating their own username and password.

11 I should have applied to my online course planning the research collected in Eleazar S. Fernandez, ed., *Teaching for a Culturally Diverse and Racially Just World* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014). In that book, a number of theologians and educators discuss the politics of access to theological education. For example, Archie Smith, Jr., asks "Who is our student and who ought to be?" See Smith's chapter, "You Cannot Teach What You Do Not Know," at 93.

12 The above reflections are embedded in a constellation of work on practical theology on racial-ethnic diversity and hospitality as a generator of or hindrance to theological production, and a critique of white-centrism and white racism in practical theology. See Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology*; Anthony G. Reddie, "Now You See Me, Now You Don't: Subjectivity, Blackness and Difference in Practical Theology in Britain Post Brexit," *Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2018); Phillis Isabella Sheppard, "Building Communities of Embodied Beauty," in *Black Practical Theology*, eds. Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith, Jr. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015); Gordon E. Dames, "A Multicultural Theology of Difference: A Practical Theological Perspective," in *Churches, Blackness, and Contested Multiculturalism: Europe, Africa, and North America*, eds. R. Drew Smith, William Ackah, and Anthony G. Reddie (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin, "White Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, eds. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

13 In this paragraph, I am informed by Gerben Heitink's description of practical theology in the Dutch context as emerging out of a twentieth century "crisis of faith" answered by a "theory of action" such that practical theology can be understood in that context as a "theory of crisis." While I leave the particulars of the Dutch history to Heitink's analysis, I treat the notion of crisis (and its attempted transformation) as a provisionally salutary bridge across a range of discourses that self-identify as practical theology beyond the Dutch context. See Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3. Obviously, materials denominated "practice," "object," and "text" are interwoven with each other depending on what the theologian takes to be the significant matter for situating or grounding theology. "Practice" is famously, and necessarily, contested in the field, which is what gives rise to my prioritizing it as the distinctive "practice-nexus" focus of practical theology. See the range of entries about practice and practices in Bonnie L. Miller-McLemore, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2012).

14 For example, the field has furthered racialization and disavowed the foundational, formative and ongoing whiteness that funds racist ways of construing theology and of producing theological knowledge through the field's material practices of writing books, arranging conferences, and more. In *Opening the Field*, see Courtney Goto, "Asian American

Practical Theologies"; Ospino, "U.S. Latino/a Practical Theology"; Beaudoin and Turpin, "White Practical Theology." The field has also largely presumed a Christian-centrism in its theology and tasks. See Kathleen J. Greider, "Religious Pluralism and Christian-Centrism," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. These are the case even as the field has been responsible for curating freeing practices in many communities: see for example Don C. Richter's chapter, "Religious Practices in Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field*.

15 One of the promises of practical theology is as a radical project for the study and generation of plural forms of curating "divine" experience. This is so because of the field's longstanding prioritizing of the theological significance of practice, a significance assigned Christian significance but not controlled by Christianity, and assigned personal and ecclesial significance but profoundly social-political. The field has not yet taken the measure of the depth of the abandonment to practice its own navigation portends.

16 Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds., *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (New York: State University of New York, 2007).

17 This approach to practical theology and music has accumulated over my thirty-five years as a practicing musician, and twenty-five years in the study of theology. Some of the most influential literature that has shaped this approach include: the sacred gendered significance of popular musical performance as ritual in Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (New York: Oxford, 2001); the historically and embodied coding of sounds as sacrally meaningful in Christopher Partridge, *The Lyre of Orpheus: Popular Music, the Sacred, and the Profane* (New York: Oxford, 2014); the stakes of color, gender and class in the blues ground of US popular music in Kelly Brown Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church: A Blues Slant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); the sexual significance of theological contestation in ordinary life in Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and the notion that practical theology is an essentially contested discourse of theological significances from different perspectives that I take from the research consortium Action Research Church and Society, including Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, Clare Watkins, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2010).

18 See a text as curiously underappreciated in USA practical theology as is the pragmatic USA philosophical tradition on which it relies: Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000).

19 On practical wisdom, see Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (eds.), *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, Christian B. Scharen, *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). I leave for a future work the question of why recent influential practical theology literature advancing the practical-wisdom perspective remains largely the province of white scholars.

20 See Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Theory-Practice Binary and the Politics of Practical Knowledge," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, eds. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Boston: Brill, 2016).

21 Mi-Rang Kang, *Interpretative Identity and Hermeneutical Community* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2011); Don C. Richter, "Religious Practices in Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*.

22 Heinz Streib, Christopher F. Silver, Rosina-Martha Csöff, Barbara Keller, Ralph W. Hood, Jr., *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009); Joan Hebert Reisinger, *Let Your Voice Be Heard: Conversations on the Margins of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012); Tom Beaudoin, "Secular Catholicism and Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15, no. 1 (2011).

23 For example, a male/masculine imaginary rarely strays far from the *theos* that Christian theology inherited, and debates about the viability of the God-concept continue. See Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2016). On God and/as claiming power with which one contends, see Naomi Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2002); Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti (eds.), *Divine Powers in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Meerten B. ter Borg and Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Powers: Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

24 Evelyn L. Parker, *Between Sisters: Emancipatory Hope Out of Tragic Relationships* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018). See also the prescriptions for the future in Elaine Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present, and Future Tenses," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017).

25 Eric Clarke, Nicola Dibben, Stephanie Pitts, *Music and Mind in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christian B. Scharen, "Rocking: Practical Wisdom at Work in Pop Culture," in *Christian Practical Wisdom*.