

Fall 2022: ITAL-UA 861

Topics in Italian-American Culture:
**“The Ruin of Souls.” A New History of Italian
Religious Life in the United States**

Tiro a Segno Visiting Prof. Massimo Di Gioacchino

Mon. & Wed.: 11-12.15; Auditorium of Casa Italiana



Originating from the most updated and groundbreaking scholarship on the matter, this course explores the religious life of Italian immigrants in the United States, aiming sometimes to prove true, and other times to repudiate, the general understanding of their experience outlined in the ethnic studies of the 1960s and 1970s. The time covered spans from the first preaching of Alessandro Gavazzi in New York City in 1853 to the present day. Over the course of this journey through nearly 150 years of Italian life in the United States, missionaries will travel from Italy to the US in order to assist or convert immigrants, popes will issue encyclicals to fight the rising apostasy in communities, confraternities will challenge clerical authority in churches, and religious processions will raise condemnation from Protestant white society. Considerable attention will be paid to the settlement of the first communities in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, their religious needs and strategies, their relationship with the religious hierarchies in Italy, their devotional and ecclesial practices. The course will also attempt to explore how Italian Americans have influenced and still influence religious discourse in America.

In order to answer these and other questions, the course will examine religious and political materials produced by Italian communities, trying to shed light on the historic tensions and conflicts in religious history between the religious canon (the set of laws and norms produced by hierarchies at the time), and the actual practices and beliefs of the people.

The course will host contributions from notable scholars. Students will be invited to give presentations, comment on the readings, and be actively engaged all the time. Attention will be paid to the original Italian documents or their translation. Students with no knowledge of the Italian language are welcome to join.