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344-01 The Challenge of Peace

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THEO 345/POLI 344  
The Challenge of Peace  
Fall 2016  

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meet with you at a time that fits  
your schedule  

Course Description  
This course will explore “the challenge of peace” in our contemporary world. The concept of  
"peace" will be viewed holistically, encompassing social justice and ecological sustainability as  
well as the absence of violent conflict. The interconnections of inner peace, interpersonal peace,  
and societal peace will be highlighted. Specific topics that will be covered in the course include  
analysis of current global conflicts and their historical backgrounds, religious perspectives on  
peacemaking and violence, the history and theory of nonviolent action as a source of social  
change, ecological issues (especially climate change), various social justice issues (such as  
hunger, poverty, racism, inequality) both in the U.S. and internationally, and food ethics  
(exploring the impacts of our food choices on animals, ecology, world hunger, etc.) Much  
attention is given to exploring constructive actions that we can take in addressing these issues. We  
will also explore the potential role of spirituality, including meditation and mindfulness practices,  
in the building of peace. The issues that we examine will be based in part on feedback from the  
class and the topics chosen for student papers and oral presentations.  

Peace & Justice Studies, Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS), Latin American Studies  
In addition to being the required seminar for Peace & Justice Studies minors (the minor  
consists of this course plus four electives), this class also fulfills the Ethics/Religion and Society  
4th course elective requirement and fulfills a requirement for the Latin American Studies minor if  
your final project is related to Latin America.  

Ethics/Religion and Society description:  
“Consistent with the mission of Xavier University as a Jesuit, Catholic university rooted in the  
liberal arts tradition, the Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) sequence of courses provides a basis  
for you to become intellectually, morally and spiritually educated individuals capable of critical  
reflection on ethical and religious questions of social significance from the perspective of multiple  
disciplines with unique methods.”  

Student Learning Outcomes  
This course seeks to foster many of the desired learning outcomes of the core curriculum.  
A few of these include:  
- becoming skilled in oral and written communication  
- exploring fundamental questions of the human condition  
- fostering critical thought, particularly in relation to issues of religious faith and social justice  
- engaging constructively with issues of peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability  
- becoming responsible global citizens
Required Texts
3) Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)

Recommended Text
This text is not required, but is available for purchase in the bookstore if you are interested: Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler, and Brett Johnson, *The Better World Handbook: Small Changes that Make a Big Difference* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2007)

Electronic readings on Canvas
There will also be numerous required readings placed on the Canvas page for this course at https://canvas.xavier.edu

Course Requirements
Attendance, careful reading of the texts, and active participation in the classroom are the fundamental course requirements, forming the basis for all others. Final grades will be determined as follows:

1. **Class participation (10%)**
   Class participation includes attendance, contribution to discussion, occasional quizzes and short writing assignments in preparation for class, and participation in various in-class activities.
   Excessive absences (4 or more) will result in a lowering of one’s grade. For each absence beginning with the 4th the maximum participation grade that one can get (out of a total of 10) will be lowered by 1 1/2 points. Eight or more absences (except in case of serious illness, etc.) may result in a failing grade for the course.

2. **Two exams (25% each) OR two exams (20% each) plus a shorter final exam (10%)**
   The exams will consist primarily of essay and short answer questions. A study guide will be provided for each exam. If you are content with your grades on the first two exams, you will not need to do the final exam. You will have the option of doing a take-home final exam, however, and if you choose to do so the exams will be weighted according to the second set of percentages listed.

3. **Final Project and Oral Presentation (15%)**
   You are expected to do a final project for the course. Normally this will consist of individual research papers of a minimum of eight (8) pages on a topic related to the themes of the class. Other types of projects, however, are both possible and encouraged. These could include projects that involve active community engagement, group projects, the creation of artistic works related to the themes of the class, etc. If you have an idea that you would like to propose for a final project, feel free to speak with me about it.
   You will also be asked to consider doing a short oral presentation (15 minutes or so) on the topic of your project. Those who choose not to do an oral presentation are expected to write a slightly longer paper (minimum 10-11 pages). We will discuss these options further in class. A partial list of possible topics will be distributed in the first couple weeks of the semester. Your
paper (or alternative final project) will be due at our final meeting during exam week (they will not be due at the time of your oral presentation, if any).

4. Reflection essays/online discussions (15%)

Over the course of the semester each student is expected to write a **series of at least five brief reflections** (each 1½ pages or greater in length) in dialogue with the course material. Three of these will be specifically assigned (a reflection that will be due during our second class meeting, a website based assignment later in the semester, and a final overall reflection on the course), while the other two can be written on any course-related topic of your choice. You may, for example, reflect upon things learned, relate the course material to other coursework or experiences, express agreement or disagreement with the material (giving reasons), or note questions that the material raises for you. These reflections will be evaluated not on the basis of agreement with any particular position but rather according to the degree of active, thoughtful engagement with the course material that they demonstrate. You should **be sure to make reference to specifics from the readings or other class material in your reflections.** These reflections can be either handwritten or typed. With regard to the two reflection essays for which specific topics are not assigned, one will be due around mid-term (though it can be turned in sooner). The other can be handed in at any time before the end of the semester. In addition, you may also be asked occasionally to participate in on-line discussion boards related to specific course topics.

5. Songs for a Better World (5%)

You are asked to put together a collection of at least 3 songs (more if you wish) that address issues that you think are crucial for the creation of a better world. You can either provide me with YouTube links for the songs or copy the songs to a CD or other storage device to hand in. The songs should be accompanied by a brief reflection of at least 2 pages (total, not on each song) explaining why you chose these songs, relating them to the themes/material of the course, sharing why the songs are especially meaningful to you personally (if they indeed are), etc. This can be handed in at any time after the first few weeks of the semester, but should be handed in by Thursday, November 17th.

6. Out-of-class experiences (5%)

You are asked to attend/watch **two (2) out-of-class lectures or videos** and write a brief **reflection paper (at least 1½-2 pages) on each.** These papers should include both a brief summary of the video/lecture and your reaction to it. Information concerning possible events to attend will be announced throughout the semester. A list of suggested videos that can be borrowed from the XU library or, in some cases, directly from me, as well as a listing of some possible on-line videos, will be posted on Canvas. These essays on out-of-class experiences can be turned in at any time during the semester.

There may also be some out-of-class experience options that require a larger time commitment (e.g. attending a meditation retreat, etc.) that would count for both of your required experiences. I will let you know what experiences meet this criterion when I announce them.

**Grading Scale** (as determined by Theology Department grading guidelines)

A = 94-100, A- = 92-93, B+ = 90-91, B = 87-89, B- = 84-86, C+ = 82-83, C = 79-81, C- = 76-78, D+ = 74-75  D = 71-73, D- = 68-70, F=67 or below

Papers, essays, etc. will be graded on the following basis:

A = exceptional. You not only complete the assignment well but do so in a way that demonstrates a significantly above average degree of thoughtfulness, effort, and clarity.
B = good. You complete the assignment well, without any major weaknesses.
C = fair. You complete the assignment adequately, though some significant weaknesses exist.
D = poor. You fail to adequately complete some major aspects of the assignment.
F = you fail to complete the assignment at all or do so in a way that does not demonstrate that you have read or seriously thought about the relevant course material.
Additional details concerning grading can be found on the Theology Department website at http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm

Technology Policy
Unless you have a documented need, the use of laptop computers, tablets, phones or other electronic devices is not permitted during class. Exceptions can be made if there is a need to look up something online as part of a class discussion, if permission is requested/given prior to use.

CALENDAR, COURSE TOPICS
The topics that we cover in the course will be influenced by your feedback at the start of the course and your choices of topics for papers/oral presentations. Readings/topics for upcoming classes will be distributed by email and will be posted on Canvas. Dates for exams and due dates for assignments will be announced well in advance both in class and by email.

The final meeting of this class (during exam week) will be Thursday, December 15th, 10:30-12:20

Some of the topics that we will be exploring in the course, in their approximate order, include (but are not limited to):

- What is peace? What are obstacles to peace? What are some of the primary challenges/crises that our world currently faces? What are some of your hopes/fears concerning the future?
- Case study: Guatemala
- Broader issues in Latin America and globally, including climate change and other ecological/social justice crises
- Thich Nhat Hanh and introduction to meditation and mindfulness practices
- Gandhi
- Martin Luther King, Jr., focusing especially on the last few years of King’s life
- Case studies: history of the use of nonviolent action to overthrow repressive regimes
- Current nonviolent struggles
- Case studies: war and conflict in the Middle East; just war theory
- Catholic social teaching
- Various issues related to current forms of economic globalization (global hunger and poverty, free trade, sweatshops, child labor, contemporary forms of slavery, etc.) and constructive responses
- Shane Claiborne book, The Irresistible Revolution
- Various social justice issues in the United States, such as poverty, hunger, homelessness, racism, mass incarceration, etc.
- Food ethics: an exploration of how our dietary choices impact many of the above issues