2016

111-05 Theological Foundations

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Time: Online August 14 – October 8, 2016  
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**Description:** This course introduces students to the study of theology and human encounters with the sacred with special attention to questions of meaning, hope, justice, and social transformation. What is the meaning of life? How ought we to live? Is God real? Are we really capable of empathy and compassion? In the face of so much human suffering and ecological degradation, what or who is the basis of our hope? In keeping with the Jesuit Catholic mission of Xavier University, our Jesuit core values and an Ignatian “way of proceeding” will serve as a point of entry and framework for critical thought, creative imagination, and dialogue with other traditions as we engage such questions throughout the course.

This course is part of the Ethics, Religion & Society Focus – a core within the Core Curriculum. As such, the course helps to develop students’ abilities to reflect critically on issues of social significance through the lens of theological reflection.

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

Theological Foundations understands theology as a mutually critical dialogue between human experience and religious traditions. Students will begin to engage in this dialogue primarily but not only in the context of the Christian and Ignatian tradition. As they engage in this dialogue, students will

1. Explore a perspective that understands human experience as revelatory of a deeper reality.

2. Engage in respectful reflection on the varieties of personal experience in an environment that is conducive to such reflection.

3. Explore an understanding of faith as a developing response to revelatory experiences.

4. Examine how revelatory experience is incorporated in sacred scriptures and religious traditions.

5. Investigate how revelatory experience is contained and transmitted in story, symbol, myth, doctrine, moral norms, and religious practices.

6. Employ the process of biblical criticism in a selection of texts (for example, Genesis, Job, Mark).
7. Observe the process of theological development from a selection of systematic and moral topics (e.g., Christology, sacraments, war and peace).

8. Analyze the integral connection between religious faith and issues of social significance, and determine what the call to responsible action would suggest.

9. Investigate this connection through the exploration of contemporary ethical issues (e.g., euthanasia, domestic violence, poverty, environmental concerns, consumerism, sexism, racism), or through the investigation of significant individuals whose faith commitment have transformed society.

10. Study the connection between ethics and society, or religion and society (the E/RS focus in the core curriculum).

Texts

Any standard translation of the Bible. (Please avoid the use of a paraphrase such as *The Living Bible*. Examples of acceptable translations are NRSV, RSV, NAB, NIV, NEB, etc. If you are unsure whether your choice is a standard translation, consult the instructor.)

There will be selected additional readings on Canvas.

Course Requirements
1. Library Tutorial. All students are required to receive a passing grade on the quiz associated with the library’s “USE” tutorial. The professor must receive your passing score by Friday, August 19. You can find the “USE” tutorial at [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/xu-tutor-Use.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/xu-tutor-Use.cfm). You are encouraged (but not required) to work through the other tutorials on the XU.tutor page.
2. Course Participation. Since the structure of the course emphasizes class discussion online, it will be especially important for students to post to discussions regularly, accomplish assigned readings, and complete reflection papers in a timely fashion. Excessive lateness in submitting assignments may affect one’s grade. However, if you have encountered some life challenge that makes it difficult to finish the assignment on time, please don’t hesitate to contact the professor. Under most circumstances, there can be some flexibility in due dates.
3. Video Conferences. Students are required to attend three video conferences out of the eight that will be offered. Attendance means joining the session at the allotted time and staying for the duration (length of session varies, but could be as long as 60 minutes).
4. Discussion posts. There will be discussion questions posted weekly with responses required of students. The due dates will be given in the Modules. See the Modules link at the left side of the home page on Canvas.

5. Reflection papers. For every week of the course except the first, students will write a theological reflection paper on the readings and/or discussions. Most of these will be short papers, 2-3 pages double-spaced. Guidelines for the reflection papers will be listed in the Modules.

6. Final Reflection Paper. In the last week of the course, there will be a final reflection paper of 4-5 pages due. This paper will fulfill the requirement of the Final Exam. Guidelines for the Final Reflection Paper will be given in Module Eight.

Contact Information

Email: melcher@xavier.edu. You may also email me within the Canvas course.

Office Phone: (513) 745-2043. You are welcome to leave a message on my office phone. If you leave a phone number for me, I will return your call.

Virtual Office Hours: You are always welcome to contact me by email, but if you want to have a Skype conversation, please email me your Skype address and I will Skype you. In your email, please let me know a convenient time to Skype you. We could also use alternatively the Echo 360 tool or the Big Blue Button tool on Canvas to have a video meeting.

Response Policy: I will respond within 24 hours to your email. You may want to plan ahead for assignments, because if you have questions, it may take me 24 hours to get back to you.

About the Learning Environment

This course is made up of a series of eight modules, all available on the Canvas page. You can access the modules by clicking on the module button, in the column on the left side of the screen. You will then see a list of all of the modules in this course, along with the daily assignments for each module. Modules are made available to you sequentially to create a community of learners among all of the students in the course, and support your interaction with each other as well as the course content. Within each module you will find all of the activities you are responsible for completing, along with due dates, instructions, and links for submitting assignments. Proceed first on each Monday to the Modules section on Canvas, where you will find the Module for the week. This will outline everything that needs to happen during the week including instructions for all assignments and any tests.

The Eight Modules (matching up with the eight weeks for the course)

Module One: Introduction to theology and its methods.

Module Two: Approaches to Scripture.

Module Three: Scripture as a source for theological reflection.

Module Four: Approaches to Tradition.

Module Five: Tradition as a source for theological reflection.
Module Six: Human Experience as a source for theological reflection.

Module Seven: Grappling with current social issues through theological reflection.

Module Eight: Integrating sources for theological reflection.

Each module will become available the Friday before the next week begins. For example, Module Two will be available on Friday, August 19. The Modules will indicate the assignments for the week, listing the expectations for the week.

**Video Conferencing**

There will be at least eight video-conferences available during the eight-week course. Participants are required to attend three of these video conferences. Several alternative dates are possible. In order to find the most convenient dates, please sign up on the Discussion Page.

**Movies**

You will be asked to view two movies as part of the course.

For the first, the movie version of "This Changes Everything," directed by Avi Lewis, can be viewed on amazon.com: [https://www.amazon.com/This-Changes-Everything-Li-Bo/dp/B017JEBHU6/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=This+Changes+Everything](https://www.amazon.com/This-Changes-Everything-Li-Bo/dp/B017JEBHU6/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=This+Changes+Everything). You may also find the movie through I-Tunes.

The second movie that you will be asked to view is "Erin Brockovich," directed by Steven Soderbergh. This movie is available on Netflix streaming, through the Cincinnati Public Library, and can be viewed on Amazon: [https://www.amazon.com/Erin-Brockovich-Julia-Roberts/dp/B000ICXQU6/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Erin+Brockovich](https://www.amazon.com/Erin-Brockovich-Julia-Roberts/dp/B000ICXQU6/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Erin+Brockovich).

**Student Orientation**

Xavier University offers an online orientation for online courses. You are strongly encouraged to take this orientation before beginning your first online course. You will find helpful information, tips, and suggestions for making this a successful and positive experience.

**Getting Technical Help**

If you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a technical problem, contact the HELP Desk at (513) 745-HELP/4357 or visit the [HELP Desk Web site](https://www.xavier.edu/helpdesk).

If you need help with Canvas at any time click on help in the lower left of the screen for a variety of options to get help from Canvas, including 24 hour a day phone and chat support.

**Using the Library**
Students in online courses still have access to Xavier's library and librarians. For information about library support and resources visit the [Xavier Library Website](http://www.xavier.edu/library).

**Discussion:** Introduce Yourself

**Instructions:**

Visit and post to the Ice Breaker thread:

1) Post three adjectives that you think describe the most important aspects of your character.
2) Offer an example of an incident when you displayed one of these characteristics.
3) Then, please explain which of these adjectives have a connection with this course.

**Due Date:** 11:59 p.m. the second day of the course, Monday, August 15.

You may post to the Icebreaker Discussion here.

4) Then, please reply to two of your colleagues, especially in the cases in which you are curious about learning more, or in which you identify with what the student has posted. You are welcome to use illustrating images, if you like.

**Due Date:** 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, August 16.

*Note about discussions:* It is highly recommended that you compose your discussion board posts, and other lengthy text entries, in Microsoft Word or another text editor and then copy and paste your response into the text box in Canvas as the system could time out (log you out) while you're typing, causing you to lose your work.

**Grade Assessment**

The value of the above requirements is: Online participation, Canvas discussions, and video conferencing - 35%; Seven brief reflection papers (2-3 pages each) – 45%; Final reflection paper - 20%. Numerical grades for these three factors will be weighted according to these percentages. The grading scale will be: A = 100-94%; A- = 93-92%; B+ = 91-90%; B = 89-87%; B- = 86-84%; C+ = 83-82%; C = 81-79%; C- = 78-76; D+ = 75-74%; D = 73-71%; D- 70-68%; F = 67-0%.

Click here for the policy on department grading: [http://www.xavier.edu/theology-department/Grading-Policy.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/theology-department/Grading-Policy.cfm)

**Extra Credit Opportunities**

If you are in the Cincinnati area, the instructor will inform you of possible extra-credit opportunities from time-to-time. A student can attend an event, write a 2-page analysis of the event, and receive 5-extra credit points to be applied to your participation grade. You are particularly encouraged to attend the first event listed because it will be closely related to a topic for course-discussion.

1. Dr. Kerry Cronin (Boston College), “The Imperfect Art of Dating,” Monday, November 7th, 7pm in Kennedy Auditorium.

2. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “On Race in America,” September 26, 7:00 p.m. Cintas Center
The instructor will inform students of other extra-credit opportunities as they present themselves. If you live out of the Cincinnati area, please contact the professor if you would like other extra-credit opportunities that can be fulfilled outside the area.

To Begin the Course, proceed to Module 1.