THEO 111-26A Theological Foundations

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Course Description: In this course the aim is not so much to gain knowledge of what theology ‘is’ but rather, to learn how to think theologically. Theology is thus imagined as a mutually critical dialogue between human experience, culture, historical context, religion, and the traditions that unfold from them. While we will make our way through many readings, ideas, themes, and historical periods, the course is grounded in a continual consideration of “Faith and Doubt.” Not only will we seek to understand the ways in which social and cultural location, and historical context shaped concepts of the divine in the past, we will also ask this of the present. Some questions that will guide us throughout the course are: What does it mean that notions and experiences of God and scripture—often associated with the eternal, the infinite, the unchanging, etc.—are influenced by particular historical and contextual circumstances? What does it mean to have ‘faith’ today in light of modern and postmodern doubt? Is doubt a necessary component of faith? What can the practice of theology learn from the very suspicion many people have about theology—and God—itself?

Course Objectives:
- Identify common misconceptions of faith that are prevalent in our own culture.
- Express your thoughts on what faith is in light of Terrence Tilley’s definition of faith.
- Explain the ways in which theological concerns and concepts arise from specific contextual concerns of the time.
- Identify the varying historical factors that influenced the ancient biblical authors.
- Discuss ways that scripture might still speak to us today even or especially when its historical context is considered.
- Describe the modern/secular responses to religion that arose in light of historical critical approaches to scripture and other scientific discoveries.
- Discuss what ‘faith’ might mean today in light of modern and post-modern doubt.
- Describe the differences between skepticism and suspicion.
- Evaluate the effects that race, class, gender and oppression have on ones theological imagination.
- Apply what you have learned about the way personal and historical factors shape theological concerns to your own life and context.

Requirements:

Active participation is especially vital to your success in this course. You should enter each discussion prepared and ready to discuss the material from that days assigned readings. Discussions also show me how well you have engaged and understood the readings. Thus, 30% of your grade relies on, preparation, and active participation in discussions. (Please note, discussions post will not be visible to students until they have posted their own.)
For each discussion, I will get involved and ask a few of you questions about your post. If I ask you a question, you are required to respond to it as part of your grade.

All students will be required to meet with me for at least a ½ hour online via video. Skype or Google video are preferred. I will post a sign up sheet with times available on pages. Please sign up with your contact info for the meeting. Meetings will be first come first serve. Please be signed up by the end of the first week.

In multiple cases, you will be asked to write an analytic response to a question I ask about the readings. While I encourage you to express your opinion and develop your own voice, all two-page papers should be in direct conversation with the material we have read for that week. In other words, it should be clear from your paper that you have read, and understood to the best of your ability, the readings. You will find the grading rubric for analytic responses under the assignments tab. 40 of your grade depends on your analytical responses. Because these papers will show me how well you have prepared, these will also influence your participation grade. (In these assignments, quotes should be limited to 1 or 2, and no quote used should be longer than a 2-3 double-spaced lines. Excessive quotes or excessively long quotes will affect your grade negatively.)

Group Presentation: Groups of 3-4 people will be responsible for a 15-30 minute presentation on a religious tradition other than their own. For this presentation, you will be required to visit, at least twice, a religious service from the tradition that you have chosen. If possible, try to organize the visits with your groups and go together. If that is not possible, that is fine, and you may go on your own. If you are unable to go at all for medical reasons, please email me. The presentations may be in varying formats, but should be able to be uploaded to canvas for all to see. Videos, prezis, and power points are all acceptable, as is any other sort of multi-media so long as it can be accessed by students online. Feel free to be creative as possible. Students will also be responsible for providing the class with a 20-40 page reading that introduces the religious tradition they are covering, as well as developing a discussion question for the class. There is a pages tab on canvas where you can go sign up for a tradition. I will post guidelines for the project as well as a list of sacred spaces you can attend in the Cincinnati area in module 6. (If you are not in Cincy, you can find one in your area via google).

This project will be due the fifth week of class, and presentations and discussions will provide the content for our final week together (module 6). Though these are due in five weeks, you should start working on them now. 30% of your grade depends on the group presentation and reflection paper.

Grade Breakdown:
Discussion: 30%
Analytical Response: 40%
According to Theology Department standards, the grade of “A” does not mean “average” or “good” work or “strong effort”, but is reserved for exceptional academic performance. Students who seriously engage this class - the readings, discussions, papers, exams - should do well, and of course will get the most from the experience. Students, who do not stay on top of the reading assignments, take poor notes, or regularly drift from discussions will do poorly in this class. The kinds of questions raised here will necessitate close attention to the reading material.

Grade Equivalents (see http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm)
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 = 0-67

Other Matters:

Academic Honesty:

This class will require very strict standards of honesty regarding the work that you put your name to for the class. In this class, questionable academic honesty will mainly relate to cheating, as well as any quotation of someone’s words or ideas without giving them direct credit in your papers. I will adhere closely to Xavier’s policy for academic honesty, a policy that states in part:

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record, including letters of recommendation. All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own. Penalties for violations of this policy may include a zero for that assignment or test, an “F” in the course and expulsion from the University.

Writing:
We are, all of us, always learning to write. Theology is a reading and writing heavy discipline, and part of the goal of this course is to develop writing skills. This means putting thoughts of your own, and from others, into coherent sentences that you have formed on the page. In order to develop this skill, please refrain from using excessive quotes, and excessively long quotes, in your writing assignments. Doing so will be penalized. Furthermore, editing is the key to good writing.
Edit, edit, edit! Be sure to utilize the writing center—located at room 400 in the Conaton Learning Center—if you need assistance in this area. The learning center website is http://www.xavier.edu/writingcenter/
I say from experience that turning in a first draft is NEVER a good idea.

All documents that are turned in should be labeled as, students lastname, first initial, assignment with the document open to the reviewing tool bar. If I were to turn in a paper the document it would be named prewittdavise.week1response.docx If documents are not labeled correctly the assignment will be graded without comments or feedback.

Discussion boards:

It is my hope that we can make the discussion boards a community. Theological conversation takes place at the intersection of faith and reason, of personal experience and public expression. As such, it requires both adherence to the standards of academic rigor and sensitivity to questions of a very personal nature. It requires an open mind and also an open heart; intellectual integrity and mutual respect.

Required Books:

Marcus Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*
Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*
James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

Schedule:

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