2013

111-32-33 Theological Foundations

Aaron Saari
saaria@xavier.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/theology_syllabi_fall_2013

Recommended Citation
https://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/theology_syllabi_fall_2013/59
Course Description

The Bible has been on the bestseller list for centuries, even before such a classification existed. Most households have a copy, of some fashion, in their possession. Yet, many people do not know the dynamic history of how the Bible came to be what it is today. In this course, students are introduced to the vital history—in terms of sacred events and compilation—that have shaped the disparate texts into the collection that inspires billions of people around the world. We will begin with the Jewish Bible—called the Tanakh by Jews and the Old Testament by Christians—and trace the story of a ragtag group of Hebrew tribes that became a major religious and political power, only to fall under the sword of all the greatest superpowers in the Mesopotamian and Mediterranean worlds. The religious insights of these determined people (first called Hebrews, then Israelites, then Jews) have inspired them to persevere despite oppression, occupation, attempted genocide, and brutal subjugation. From the beginning there have been fundamentalist Jews, those who feel that only absolute and total adherence to the Torah (the first five books of the Tanakh) will win God’s favor. Today, many such Jews are members of an ultraorthodox group known as the Lubavitch Hasids that live in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in New York City. We will examine this particular community by focusing on the lives of young girls who are attempting to forge their own identity amidst expectations that they exist primarily as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. We will ask central questions: How does one exist as a faithful Jew in modern America? What does it mean to be a woman in a free society? Then we move to Christianity, examining the vital aspects of the New Testament. After exploring the contours of specific biblical texts, we turn to Christianity in the United States today by watching a powerful documentary film. Jesus Camp chronicles the religious training of young Evangelical Pentecostals living in mid-America. We ask what this community provides that is positive and beneficial to a holistic spiritual self, and discuss those elements that seem to be stifling, oppressive, and antithetical to a life in our modern pluralistic world. Are the ethics and morals of fundamentalist Christianity opposed to democracy, or is American society, at its core, Judeo-Christian? Finally, we end with a difficult ethical issue: Suicide. Reading a text written by the instructor, we will discover what the Bible does and does not say about the subject, and explore the stance held by the Catholic Church.

Course Objectives and Goals

This course understands theology as a mutually critical dialogue between human experience and religious traditions. In order to carry on this dialogue, this course:

1. Conveys an understanding of human experience as revelatory of a deeper reality.
A. Creates an environment conducive to respectful reflection on the varieties of personal experience.
B. Identifies the kinds of personal and social experiences that are revelatory of deeper realities.
C. Explores an understanding of faith as a developing response to revelatory experiences.

2. Shows how revelatory experience is incorporated in sacred scriptures and religious traditions.
   A. Displays how revelatory experience is contained and transmitted in story, symbol, myth, doctrine, moral norms, and religious practices.
   B. Illustrates the process of literary criticism for a selection of revelatory texts (e.g. Gospel of Mark, Job).
   C. Explains the process of theological development from a selection of systematic and moral topics (e.g., Christology, sacraments, war and peace).

3. Demonstrates the integral connection between religious faith and issues of social significance, and underscores the call to responsible action.
   A. Investigates this connection through the exploration of contemporary ethical issues (e.g., euthanasia, domestic violence, poverty, environmental concerns, consumerism, sexism, racism), and through the investigation of significant individuals whose faith commitment has transformed society.
   B. Encourages service learning and other forms of field experience.
   C. Highlights the connection between ethics and society, or religion and society (the E/RS focus in the core curriculum).

The Purpose of E/RS
The E/RS Focus endeavors to realize Xavier University’s mission and philosophy of education by providing substantive opportunities for the ethical and/or religious analysis of socially significant issues. In keeping with its Catholic and Jesuit tradition, Xavier promotes critical attention to the underlying philosophical and theological implications of issues as well as encourages a worldview that is engaged with issues of peace and justice and oriented toward responsible action. The E/RS Focus of the core curriculum is directed toward this end.

Course Texts


The instructor will provide substantive PowerPoint presentations and handouts to supplement readings.

Documentaries
Course Requirements
Attendance, careful and accurate reading of the texts, and active classroom participation are the fundamental course requirements. Final grades will be determined as follows:

1. Class participation and Quizzes (35%)
In order to participate in class, you must attend. I will treat you as adults; therefore, attendance is expected, but I will not be marking students as “absent.” Not coming to class regularly, though, will directly impact one’s ability to succeed.

Scantron quizzes will be given three times to gauge student development. The questions will be based on class discussion, lecture materials, and homework assignments. Students will need to bring a #2 pencil to class on the days in which quizzes are held.

Students will need to check their e-mail often, as the instructor will send out discussion guides, PowerPoints, and, perhaps, further responses to in-class discussions.

2. Final Exam (30%)
There is a final exam. It will include a multiple choice section (most questions will be taken from quizzes already delivered in class), and essay questions. An exhaustive study guide will be provided one week before the exam is held. The exam is closed-note and closed-book. The final will include a take-home portion.

3. Homework assignments; reading and viewing guides (35%)
A majority of homework assignments are the “For Reflection and Discussion” questions at the end of each chapter in Beginning Biblical Studies. Students will be provided with discussion/reading guides concerning the other assigned readings and the documentaries viewed in-class. The instructor prefers that students type these responses, but handwritten assignment will be accepted; if handwriting is illegible, though, students may see a decrease in the grade.

What Will This Class Be Like?
I love theology. I love studying it, thinking about it, and talking about it. It is my hope that you will feel the same way after taking this course. I am assuming that every student will do the readings, complete the assignments, and come to class. Class sessions will not necessarily be a reiteration of what you have been assigned for that day. Certainly, lectures will cover much of the same material you are being confronted with in the assignments, but the class period is meant to expand upon and expound the larger issues. Therefore, missing a class will put you behind. What happens in the classroom cannot be easily summarized and relayed to an absent student. And class discussions will have an effect on what the exams look like. Class sessions are going to be lively events. We are going to talk about some difficult issues, confront some subjects that are often avoided at the supper table, and tackle head-on questions that are bandied about on the evening news on a regular basis.
**Class Schedule** (subject to change)

**Module I: Biblical Judaism (August 26-September 20)**

*Please note that the assignments are not due until the time of the exam; dates are suggested to help students stay on track*

**August 26/28**  Course Introduction  
Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible” (broken into four PowerPoints)  
**Reading and writing assignment #1:** *Beginning Biblical Studies* 33-40, write out answers to questions 1, 4, 5, 6; pp. 41-60, write out answers to questions 1-5

**August 28-**  Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible”  
**Sept 6**  
**Reading and writing assignment #2:** *Beginning Biblical Studies* pp, 71-75, write out answers to questions 1-5

**Sept 9-18**  Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible”  
**Reading and writing assignment #3:** *Beginning Biblical Studies* 76-90, write out answers to questions 1-9; pp. 91-100, write out answers to questions 1-7; 101-108, write out answers to questions 1, 3, 6, and 7  
Bible readings: Detailed in the questions found at the end of assigned reading chapters  
**Review for Quiz #1** (quiz will cover material from first three homework assignments, and from in-class lectures)

**Sept 20**  
**Quiz #1**  
**Homework assignments #1-#3 due in class**

**Module II: Hasidic Judaism (September 23-October 18)**  

**Sept 27-October 4**  
In-class: View *A Life Apart: Hasidic Judaism in America*  
**A discussion guide will assist students in contextualizing the film**  
Students also should be reading *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, answering relevant questions from the Reading Guides (available on Blackboard)

**Oct 7**  
No class for Theo 111-32

**Oct 9-16**  
Discussion of *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*; to be driven by questions asked in the Reading Guides

**Oct 18**  
**Quiz #2 (Reading Guides I and II due in class)**  
Lecture: “Christianity”

**Module III: Biblical Christianity (October 21-November 8)**
Lecture: “Christianity” (broken into three PowerPoints)
Reading and writing assignment #6: *Beginning Biblical Studies* 110-123, write out answers to questions 1-9; pp. 125-142, write out answers to questions 3-6; Reading and writing assignment #7: *Beginning Biblical Studies* 143-158, write out answers to questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10.

Nov 8 Quiz #3 (Assignments #6-7 due in class)

Module IV: Evangelical Christianity (November 11-December 13)

Lecture: “Evangelical Christianity in the United States”
View *Jesus Camp*
Reading Assignment: *The Many Deaths of Judas Iscariot: A Meditation on Suicide*, 1-17; 59-76
Discussion: Suicide in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

Final Exam
Theo 111-32 Monday, December 16 2:00-3:50
Theo 111-33 Wednesday, December 18 2:00-3:50