2014

111-84 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, 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:
- Explore important theological concerns and issues.
- Understand the ways in which scripture took shape in a specific time and place in order to address specific contextual concerns of the time.
- Critically imagine ways scripture can still speak to us even when its historical context is considered.
- Understand the modern/secular responses to religion that arose in light of historical-critical approaches to scripture and other scientific discoveries.
- Express what it means to have ‘faith’ in light of modern and postmodern doubt. (Likewise, it may be that you find ‘faith’ to be impossible today, and thus will need to express this in a thoughtful, respectful way).
- Understand that everyone’s experience is dissimilar as a way of promoting the thoughtful and ethical treatment of others.
- Develop reading and writing skills.

Requirements:

Class attendance and active participation are vital to your success in this course. Perhaps more so in this class due to its condensed time—where each class session corresponds to one week of a normal semester. You should come to class prepared and ready to discuss the material from that days assigned readings. 15% of your grade relies on attendance, preparation, and active participation in class.

Each day of class you will be assigned a question. You are to type out a 20 word answer to the question in the form of a thesis. These will be due at the beginning of each class and will not be accepted late. See example at the end of this syllabus.
For Mondays, in addition to your thesis/answer, you will write a 300-word explanation of your thesis/answer. 20% of your grade depends on your Answer/Thesis/Explanations. See example at end of this syllabus.

For each class, type out a 2-5 sentence quote from that days assigned readings and place it on the same paper with your answer/thesis/explanation. The quote should be one that affected some sort of reaction: whether it be agreement, disagreement, anger, joy, hope, confusion or excitement, etc. There is no need to explain why the quote was given, though be ready to discuss it in class. In each class, I will randomly select some of these quotes to read aloud, and then ask the student to explain why that passage was chosen. The class will then discuss the passage. This is meant to be an exercise in close reading and textual analysis. See example at the end of this syllabus. Written quotes are part of your participation grade.

Mid Term: The mid term will be take home and open book. You will receive a series of short answer and essay style questions with instructions on length and number of questions that should be answered. The exam will be given out on Wednesday July 23rd and due Monday July 28. No theses/answer will be due on July 28th. 25% of your grade depends on the Midterm.

Presentations: Each student will be responsible for two presentations. We will discuss the first presentation on the first day of class. The second presentation will be a 5-10 minute presentation of your final paper and will take place during the scheduled exam time. You need not have your paper done, but rather should present your thesis and main arguments, discuss sources, etc. The presentation should be 10 minutes long, followed by 5-10 minutes for questions and feedback. The purpose of the second presentation is to gain insight about your final papers. Theology is a dialogue, and this should be a time for robust discussion as a way of rapping up our time together. 10% of your grade depends on the presentations.

Final Paper: A 6-8 page double spaced, Times New Roman, paper will be due one week after the final class. The paper should address the theme of faith and doubt, specifically as it relates to your contemporary context. It should also, however, be rooted in one or two of the theological positions we have explored through the course—whether that be scripture, liberation theology, black theology, modern criticism, postmodern responses. Students should bring in at least two non-internet sources (i.e. books or academic articles) that are not on this syllabus. It is encouraged that each student meets with me to discuss the topic for his or her paper. Not only can I help formulate a solid and manageable thesis, I can also point you directly to outside sources that will be helpful. You are free to use up to two of your 300 word explanations in this paper. However, this should be presented as one seamless paper, and thus some editing and weaving—which are important writing skills to have—will be necessary if this approach is taken. Extra credit will be given if a completely new paper is produced. 30% of your grade depends on the final paper.

Grade Breakdown:
Participation: 15%
Answer/Thesis/Explanation: 20%
Presentations: 10%
Midterm: 25%
Final Paper: 30%

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. 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.

The Classroom:

It is my hope that we can make this classroom 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.
Cell phones are strictly prohibited within the classroom as they can distract from engagement with class discussion. If I see you checking your phone, you will be asked to put it away. On the second occasion of such usage you will be asked to leave class and that day will count as an absence, even if it is 9:29.

I understand that people like to take notes, store and read PDF’s and books on lap tops and IPads, etc,. I also understand the temptation you will feel to check play on the Internet if you find my lecture not particularly enthralling (doubtful, but I am sure it might happen). If I catch you with your computer open to ANYTHING OTHER THAN COURSE MATERIAL AND NOTES I will deduct automatically ½ a letter from your overall grade and you will not be able to use your laptop in class for the remainder of the semester.

Books:

Required: Terence Tilly *Faith: What it is and What it Isn’t*
Marcus Borg *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*
Marcus Borg *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*
James Cone *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*

*The Bible*  New Revised Standard Version

The majority of our readings will be in PDF format and can be found on Canvas or your inbox.

The Professor retains the right to modify the schedule and readings assigned, and probably will.

Week 1

July 7  What does it mean to think theologically?

July 9  Faith, Doubt, and the Process of Theology
        Tilley, *Faith: What it is and What it Isn’t* Pgs. 1-56
        Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery* Pgs ix-26 (PDF)

Week 2

July 14  “Actually Uncle Bill, the Bible doesn’t say that!”: Intro to historical Biblical Criticism
        Borg: *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*
        All of Section 1, Pgs. 3-56

Answer and explanation due
July 16  Creation and Sexuality in Scripture
Geneses 1-2
Reading the Bible Again, Chapter 4
Keller, On the Mystery, Chapter 3 (PDF)

Genesis Chapter 19:1-11
Leviticus 18:22
Leviticus 20:13
Romans 1: 26-27
Walter Wink “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality” (PDF)

Answer due

Week 3

July 21  “Who do they say I am?”
Matthew Chapters 5-7
Luke Chapter 6
Matthew 26: 36-46
Mathew 25: 31-46
Luke 10: 25-37

Borg: Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time

Answer and explanation due

July 23  Doubting God: The Bible and the Oppressed

Sections of Job
Gutierrez On Job xi-17 (PDF)
Reading the Bible Again Chapter 7

Answer due

Take Home Mid-Term will be hounded out.

Week 4

July 28  Film: Europe 51

Mid-Term Due (No Thesis/Answer Due)

July 30  Modern Doubt: Bearded God Killers and Angry White Dudes
Merold Westphal, *Suspicion and Faith*  
10-17, 25-29, 33-49, 55-60, 123-140  
Answer Due

**Week 5**

August 4  Postmodern Responses to Modern Doubt:  
Crockett and Robbins, *The New Materialism*, Chapter 2, Pgs. 17-35. (PDF)  
Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery*, Chapter 4 (PDF)  
Tilley, *Faith*, Chapter 5  
Answer and Explanation Due

August 6  Women Speaking  
Readings TBA  
Answer Due

**Week 6**

August 11  Theology in Context  
*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*  
Answer and Explanation due

August 13  Buddhism, Hinduism, and Faith Today  
Selections from the Upanishads  
*What the Buddha Taught*  
Religion vs. Spirituality by Sandra M. Schneiders  
Answer Due
Example of Answer/Thesis/Explanation

Question: What are the logical consequences of uncovering the historical development of the Spirit of God?

Answer/Thesis:

Historical development reveals that the spirit of God has always been expressed and organized in a plurality of ways.

Explanation:

Even if one excludes the various Gnostic and apocryphal early Christian writings and abides strictly to the cannon, one can locate a plurality of institutions, methods and interpretations of the spirit of God as experienced in Jesus. Thus, a hermeneutic of regression that seeks to uncover some type of ecclesial structure that mirrors a Platonic form will always be misguided. Following his death, Jesus began to be understood and interpreted in various ways by various people, Jews and Gentiles being an easy distinction. The distinctive history, customs and practices of each group—their habitus—necessarily formed their interpretation of Jesus even as they understood themselves to be entering into this new community. Even the two normative rituals of the early church represent plurality. Baptism and the Eucharist both developed out of Jewish traditions and practices and eventually became distinctively Christian and are now, as then, practiced in a plethora of ways. Constituted by a specific churches own social location and habitus.

Looking back to the earliest churches will not provide a model of what to be, but rather of how to be. Just as the early church was shaped by the other religions they encountered, the empire they lived in, and the urban structure that provided them with organizational models, so too must the church today be attuned to these influences and learn from them. Of course, this necessarily entails a risk of loosing a certain distinct theological or institutional identity, but to not take this
risk and resist the developmental and pluralistic character of the church would mean to be out of touch and in resistance to those aspects of the church that are indeed normative.

“Beginning is going on. Everywhere. Amidst all the endings, so rarely ripe or ready. The show up late, these beginnings, bristling with promise, yet labored and doomed. Every last one of them is lovingly addressed: “in the beginning.” But if such talk—talk of the beginning and end—has produced the poles, the boundary markers of a closed totality, if “the beginning” has blocked the disruptive infinities of becoming, then theology had better get out of its own way. In the beginning, theology starts again.” Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep*, Pg. 3