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111-91 Theological Foundations: From Fundamentals to Fundamentalism

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Theo 111-91: Theological Foundations

“From Fundamentals to Fundamentalism”

Smith Hall, G27, 6:15-9:30 p.m.

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Office hours by appointment

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 rag-tag 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 (5%) and Quizzes (30%)

In order to participate in class, you must attend. Excessive absences (more than 2) will result in a lowering of your grade. For each absence (beginning with the 3rd and moving forward) the maximum participation grade one can receive (out of a total of 50 points) will be lowered by 15 points. More than four absences (except in the case of serious illness, etc) will result in a failing grade for the course.

Scantron quizzes will be given regularly 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 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.

We will have in-class activities, such as writing our own Ten Commandments, crafting our own gospel narratives, and discussing how popular culture is inspired by the Christian story.

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 One

May 20 Course Introduction

Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible” (broken into four Powerpoints)

May 22 Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible”

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; *Beginning Biblical Studies* pp, 71-75, write out answers to questions 1-5

May 27 Lecture: “The Hebrew Bible”

Reading and writing assignment #2: *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)**

Module Two

May 29 Quiz #1

**Homework assignments #1-#2 due in class**

Lecture: “The Baal Shem Tov and Hasidic Judaism”

In-class: Begin viewing *A Life Apart: Hasidic Judaism in America*

*A discussion guide will assist students in contextualizing the film*

Reading and writing assignment #3: *Mystics, Mavericks and Merrymakers* 1-66; answer relevant questions from the reading guide (posted on BlackBoard and e-mailed to your MyXU Account)

June 3 In-class: Continue viewing *A Life Apart: Hasidic Judaism in America*

Reading and writing assignment #4: *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers* 67-190; answer the relevant questions from the reading guide

Discussion: Hasidic Judaism
Review Quiz #2 (covering material discussed from May 29-June 3)

Module Three

June 5 In-class: Continue discussion of Hasidic Judaism

Reading and writing assignment #5: 191-230

Quiz #2 Reading and Writing Assignments #4-5 due in class

Lecture: “Christianity”

June 10 Lecture: “Christianity” (Historical background)

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

Bible readings: Detailed in the questions found at the end of assigned reading chapters

June 12 Lecture: “Christianity” (Historical Background/Source Criticism)

Reading and writing assignment #7: Beginning Biblical Studies 143-158, write out answers to questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10.

Module Four

June 17 Flex Day (to catch up if we are off syllabus)

No new reading assignment (use this time to catch up if necessary)

Prep for “Quiz” #3, writing Ten Commandments

Time permitting: Lecture: Evangelical Christianity in the United States

Begin to view Jesus Camp

June 19 Hand in “Quiz” #3/ Reading and writing assignments #6-7 due in class

Lecture: Evangelical Christianity in the United States

In-class: View and discuss Jesus Camp

Reading Assignment: The Many Deaths of Judas Iscariot: A Meditation on Suicide, 1-17

Final Exam Take-Home assignment will be handed out/e-mailed

June 24 Reading assignment: The Many Deaths of Judas Iscariot: A Meditation on Suicide, 59-76

Discussion: Suicide in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

Review for final
Students should be working on Final Exam Take-Home

June 26 Final Exam (in-class and take-home)