2014

290-01 Christian Doctrine Today

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to constructive Christian theology. The aim of this course is to engage the landscape of Christian belief and practice through the exploration of doctrine. Doctrine, in this course, is another name for those compelling themes or living topics that repeatedly emerge when Christians reflect on the beliefs and ways of life they embrace and order their world. This course stresses contemporary interpretations of selected Christian doctrines and pushes students to develop hermeneutical skills to do their own constructive work. We will explore sources and norms, methods and interpretation, God and world, human persons and Jesus Christ. Through a major research project on a topic of their own selection, students will explore pressing questions and new developments in twenty-first century theology. The course is designed to serve theology majors and minors and is also open to honors students.

Learning Outcomes

1. To be able to articulate, explain and evaluate contemporary approaches to the doctrines of God, the human person and Christ.
2. To understand the basic concepts and new approaches in contemporary constructive theology.
3. To strengthen capacities for analysis and interpretation of texts, critical thinking, collegial discussion, and constructive theological reflection and writing.

Required Text

*Joseph Bracken, God: Three Who Are One (Engaging Theology: Catholic Perspective Series) Liturgical Press; Collegeville, Minnesota, 2008 (less than $8)

Course Requirements

1. Preparation and Presentation of assigned readings, thoughtful note-taking, and active participation in class discussion
2. Defining Theology Paper
3. Theology and Empire Paper
4. God and Humanity Paper
5. Final paper on Doctrine (12-15 page)
Grade Determination

Class Preparation, participation and Presentations 10%
Reflection Papers (2) 5%
Defining Theology Paper 20%
Theology and Empire Paper 20%
God and Humanity Paper 20%
Final Paper and Exam 25%

Work will be evaluated according to the standards set forth in the theology department grading guidelines (see www.xavier.edu/theology/grading_policy.html). The department grading scale is as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
B+ &= 91-90 \\
C+ &= 83-82 \\
D+ &= 75-74 \\
F &= 67-0 \\
A &= 100-94 \\
B &= 89-97 \\
C+ &= 81-79 \\
D &= 73-71 \\
A- &= 93-92 \\
B- &= 86-84 \\
C- &= 78-76 \\
D- &= 70-68
\end{align*}
\]

According to department standards, the grade of “A” does not mean good work nor strong effort but exceptional academic excellence.

The grades assigned to essays will follow the standards outlined above, with special attention to the following:

Excellent (A): An exceptional essay includes original analysis, well-documented and supported argument, and where appropriate consideration of counter-argument. It demonstrates insight and originality, attention to detail and nuance, and synthesis. It is well-written and free from error in spelling or grammar.

Good (B): A good essay is well-written, organized, and clear. It is accurate in its discussion of authors and issues, adequately supported in its documentation, and demonstrates that you have reflected on the topic at hand.

Satisfactory (C): A satisfactory essay has some good features but is inconsistent in the quality of reflection and writing. It may contain some inaccuracies, inadequate argumentation and documentation, and/or problems with composition and spelling and grammar.

Minimal performance (D): A deficient essay is insufficiently argued or documented, inaccurate, and/or incoherent.

Failure (F): A failing essay bears little or no relation to the assignment.

Your learning outcomes will be strongest if you:

1) Read carefully and thoughtfully the assigned texts. Outline major theological arguments.
2) Make notes about important ideas and questions stimulated by the readings, class presentations and discussions.
3) Rewrite first drafts of all papers to improve clarity, argument, and prose. The staff at the writing center is there to assist you with this. Exchanging drafts of papers with friends for constructive critique is another way to improve writing quality.
4) Pace yourself on your major paper so that you have time for adequate reading and reflection and improvement of multiple drafts.
5) Synthesize and integrate course work in preparation for exams.

**Writing Assistance**
Xavier has resources to assist you with writing if you feel that you need help to improve. Please visit James A. Glen Writing Center in CLC ph. 513-745-2875, or go online to [http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center/](http://www.xavier.edu/writing_center/) to arrange for a consultation.

**Helpful sources on writing**

**Students must check their XAVIER email regularly**
Important notifications in cases of emergency and updates about course material, assignments, etc. will be sent via Xavier, not private, email. Make sure you direct all Canvas notifications to your Xavier email address.

**Academic Policies**

1. Attendance and active participation are essential to achievement of course learning outcomes. Please notify me in the event of illness, overriding family circumstance, etc. Any student with more than 3 unexcused absences will be asked to withdraw from the course to avoid a failing grade.

2. One of the functions of the short reflection papers is preparation for class discussion. They cannot be accepted for credit after the class for which they were assigned.

3. In keeping with Xavier’s policy on academic honesty, all material submitted for the course must be your own original work. Citations of texts or the statements of others must be properly noted.

**Questions I will ask myself in evaluating your class preparation and participation:**

1. Does your participation in discussion consistently reflect a careful and critical reading of all the assigned readings for the session?
2. Do you show an ability to actively listen, compare differing perspectives accurately, fairly, respectfully? A willingness to integrate multiple perspectives into a (more or less) coherent whole?
3. Are you having any fun?

**Class Environment: A “hermeneutic of generosity”**

At its best, theological conversation opens up questions of a personal, political, and sometimes sensitive or controversial nature. The dialogue model itself is designed to facilitate open-ended discussion and critical questioning of assumed positions or complacent beliefs. This kind of personal engagement necessitates that we do our best to create ample space for diverse and conflicting points of view, even struggle and growth within ourselves. In short, at its best the seminar should cultivate an atmosphere of intellectual openness, trust, and mutual respect, especially where we may disagree with another’s point of view.

A good Ignatian rule of thumb, when feeling challenged or uncomfortable with another’s position, is to listen carefully, ask follow-up questions for clarity and understanding, and try to consider the idea
(above all the person advancing it) through the best possible lens, or what we might call a “hermeneutic of generosity.” At the end of the day, surely we will all depend on the same wellspring of mercy and understanding for our painfully limited, obscure, and imperfect view of things.

Finally, a climate of openness and trust implies a rule of confidentiality to the degree experiences of a personal or sensitive nature may be shared during seminar discussions.

This is an unplugged classroom! No lap tops, cell phones or electronic devices are to be used during class as they can distract from engagement with class discussion. Electronic devices are only to be used during student presentations.

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

Tuesday, January 14   Introduction and Overview

Cultured Despisers of Religion

Thursday, January 16 Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Grand Inquisitor Part II Chapter 5 of The Brothers Karamazov

Tuesday, January 21 Freud, The Future of an Illusion

Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of The Right (Religion as the Opium of the People)

Nietzsche’s “God is Dead”

Defining Theology

Thursday, January 23 What is Theology? pp. 1-18 (e-reserve); Introduction: Crisis, Hope and Contemporary Theology pp. 1-24 (e-reserve)

Tuesday, January 28 Paul Tillich “What Faith Is” in Dynamics of Faith, pp. 1-29 “Christian Thought at the End of the Twentieth Century” in Modern Christian Thought, pp. 493-500

Thursday, January 30 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, Chapter 1 & 2 Paper Due: Defining Theology paper. In this paper you should put forth a definition of theology, respond to critics of theology and articulate the tasks and challenges of contemporary theology projects. 4-6 pages

Source, Norms and Interpretation

Tuesday, February 4 McGrath, Christian Theology pp. 120-151 (Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience)

Thursday, February 6 Mark Kline Taylor, “The Cultural-Political Hermeneutical Tradition” in Remembering Esperanza pp. 46-75

Theology and Empire: Toward a Theological Account of Modernity

Tuesday, February 11 Joerg Rieger “Christian Theology and Empires” and Kwok Pui-lan “Theology and Social Theory” in Empire and Christian Tradition, Chapters 1&2

Thursday, February 13 Willie Jennings, “Acosta’s Laugh” in the Christian Imagination, pp. 65-84

Student Presentation

Tuesday, February 18 Willie Jennings, “Acosta’s Laugh” in the Christian Imagination, pp. 84-116 Paper Due: Theology and Empire 5-6 pages
The Nature of Doctrine in a Post-Liberal Age

Thursday, February 20  George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, Chapter 1


Reflection Paper Due: *The Nature of Doctrine* 2 pages

God and The World

Thursday, February 27  Madges, *God and The World*, The Early Period, pp. 5-20; The Modern Period, pp. 246-264

Student Presentation (Present the major figures and key ideas in the development of the doctrine of God)

March 4-6 SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS

Tuesday, March 11 Bracken, *God: Three Who Are One*, Chapters 1 & 2

Thursday, March 13 Bracken, *God: Three Who Are One*, Chapters 3&4

Student Presentation

Tuesday, March 18 Bracken, *God: Three Who Are One*, Chapters 5&6

Reflection Paper Due: *God and The World* 2 pages

Theological Anthropology: Being Human

Thursday, March 20 Fernandez, *Reimaging the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systematic Evil* Chapter 1

Tuesday, March 25 Fernandez, *Reimaging the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systematic Evil* Chapter 3

Student Presentation

Thursday, March 27 Hopkins, *Being Human*, Ch. 1 pp. 13-35

Tuesday, April 1 Hopkins, *Being Human*, Ch.1. pp. 35-52

Thursday, April 3 Hopkins, *Being Human*, Chapter 2

Student Presentation

Jesus Christ

Tuesday, April 8 Jones and Lakeland, *Constructive Theology*, Chapter 5 on Jesus Christ (consider the proposal of Joerg Rieger)

Paper Due on *God and Humanity* 5-6 pages
Thursday, April 10 Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* Introduction pp. 1-16

**Discuss Final Course Paper**

Tuesday, April 15 Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times*, Chapter 1 pp.23-54

**Student Presentation**

Thursday, April 17 **EASTER BREAK- NO CLASS**

Tuesday, April 22 Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times*, Chapter 7


**Student Presentation**

Tuesday, April 29 Johann Metz, *Faith In History and Society*, Chapters 6, 11; James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Chapter 1

Thursday, May 1 TBA

**Tuesday, May 6 Final Paper Due 10:30-12:20pm**