111-08 Theological Foundations

Michael Lyons

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Theological Foundations
THEO 111-08

Professor Michael C. Lyons
Office: Hinkle Hall 114
Office Hours: by appointment
Email: lyonsm8@xavier.edu
Phone: 513-802-2607

Course Description:
In this course, we will explore theology as a mutually critical dialogue between human experience and religious traditions, with an emphasis on the Christian tradition. We will learn how to think critically and respectfully of religious experience in the past and present, exploring personally how our own presuppositions, theological commitments, and experience of faith shape our theological outlook and ethics. Over the course of the semester, we will challenge ourselves and engage others in readings and class discussion.

Course Objectives:
This course is a required Core Curriculum component of Xavier’s Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) Focus, which endeavors to realize Xavier’s mission and philosophy of education. Xavier believes it is important for its students to learn to analyze societal issues critically in terms of human values and to develop a sense of compassionate solidarity and service.

In accordance with this goal, this course will:
1) investigate the role of presuppositions, faith and religion in human experience, particularly with respect to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
2) explore Scripture, with particular attention to genre analysis and how scholars have studied Scripture
3) evaluate current ethical issues critically in light of your presuppositions, faith, values, and theology

Course Schedule:
The following schedule provides a brief, tentative outline of the course.

Unit 1: Theological Presuppositions—Exploring The Abrahamic Religions
Unit 2: Theological Experience Recorded—Reading Scripture
Unit 3: Theological Practice—Applying What You Value to Ethics
**Expectations**

I expect you to...

- attend class. You should not miss class unless you have a legitimate excuse presented to me in advance (except in the case of an emergency).
- arrive on time. Be here when class starts!
- read the assigned material before class and bring all assigned reading materials to class.
- submit all quizzes and assignments complete, according to instructions, and on time—no late quizzes and assignments accepted.
- actively participate in class. Everyone in class has both a right and an obligation to participate in discussions, and, if called upon, should try to respond. All questions, perspectives, and opinions are important and valuable—you are encouraged to share and discuss.
- show respect to me and your classmates.
- manage Canvas and email communication. I will communicate via Canvas and email. You are responsible for checking Canvas and your emails regularly, and you are responsible for ensuring that you know how to use these tools.
- turn off all electronic devices in class. You should turn your cell phones off during class; laptops are not allowed in class subject to special appeal to the professor based on personal circumstances. Otherwise, I do not want to see or hear electronic devices.
- refrain from prematurely packing up your books and bags before class has ended.
- take responsibility. If you’re absent, it is your responsibility to keep up with coursework and find out what you missed in class; if you have questions, it is your responsibility to ask them; if you’re confused, it is your responsibility to get things cleared up. I want you to succeed, and I’m here to help.
- work hard and live up to your potential. Most of you will likely never see me again after this semester, but you will have to live with yourselves. Start now by living to the fullest potential that is within you.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance**

Regular attendance is required. I will send around an attendance sheet each day at the beginning of class, and you will be marked absent if you do not sign this sheet. You are responsible for making sure you sign the attendance sheet each day.

You may miss two classes without penalty. Beginning with your third absence, you will lose 3 points from your final cumulative grade per absence. (E.g. If your final grade is 95%, your grade will be changed to 92% for the third absence, 89% for the fourth, etc). Excessive absences will result in failing the class, per the professor’s discretion. Save your absences for a legitimate emergency. If you are absent, I assume you have a good reason for being gone. Therefore, I do not need doctors’ notes or other documentation letting me know why you were absent. The sole exception to this rule is an absence due to a University-sponsored activity (e.g., intercollegiate athletics).
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If you are absent from class, you are still responsible for the work assigned for that day as well as any information given out that day. Please attempt to contact fellow classmates to find out what you missed before contacting me.

Course Readings
There are several required textbooks for the course. You may purchase them online or through Xavier's Bookstore.


These textbooks will occasionally be supplemented by other readings and handouts, which are available on Canvas or on reserve in the Xavier Library.

You should bring all assigned reading materials to class.

Quizzes and Assignments
After completing the assigned reading for a given class period, you should take the accompanying quiz on Canvas and/or complete the accompanying assignment. Some quizzes may be given at the beginning of class.

The quizzes and assignments are open-book and open-notes: in other words, you may use the assigned reading and any notes you took on that reading when taking your quiz. You may not use any other resources (e.g., the Internet) when taking your quizzes. You must take each quiz prior to the class period for which it is due. You have only a limited time to take the quizzes (20 minutes). The quizzes are not designed to be tricky or picky; their purpose is to ensure that you stay on task with the class work. The material covered by the assigned readings will be incorporated into the exams along with the lecture material, so be sure to read carefully.

Like the quizzes, you must complete each assignment prior to the class period for which it is due. All assignments must be typed and properly formatted (1 inch margin on all sides, 12-point Times New Roman font, and double-spaced). You must print out a copy of your assignment and bring it to class on the day it is due. I do not accept email submissions.
I do not allow late or make-up quizzes/assignments. Please make sure that you complete your quizzes/assignments prior to the class period for which they are due. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have working technology and a reliable internet connection: I do not allow make-up quizzes/assignments even in the case of computer malfunction or interruption of an internet connection.

Exams
Three exams will be given throughout the course of the semester. The first will follow our unit on Theological Presuppositions, the second will follow our unit on Theological Experience Recorded, and the third will follow our unit on Theological Practice. These exams will cover selected information from the class lectures and discussions, assigned readings, quizzes, and assignments.

Reflection Papers
You will be completing two reflection papers on assigned books. Please see the “Paper Guidelines” on Canvas for more information. Use of the Writing Center (Alter Hall) is strongly encouraged for these papers. Late reflection papers will be automatically 15 points deducted. After one week, late papers will be given a zero.

Grading and Assessment:
Evaluation
Quizzes & Assignments 30%
Exams (3 @ 20% each) 60%
Reflection Papers (2 @ 5% each) 10%

Grading Scale
I follow the Theology Department’s grading policies, including its grading scale:

A 100%-94% Distinctive
A- 93%-92%
B+ 91%-90%
B 89%-86% Superior
B- 85%-84%
C+ 83%-82%
C 81%-78% Acceptable
C- 77%-76%
D+ 75%-74%
D 73%-70% Inadequate
D- 69%-68%
F below 68% No Credit

Grades indicate a professor’s assessment of a student’s academic performance and not a student’s effort. Given the constant threat of the erosion of quality due to grade inflation, I take very seriously what grades stand for. Most students should expect to be in the “acceptable” category unless sufficient reason is given to move one way or another on the scale. An “A” is not the default—an “A” must be
earned, not just by avoiding mistakes, but by demonstrating excellence. Students who seriously engage this class and work hard will do well.

Failure to adhere to the class expectations described above may be used as subjective factors in grading, especially in borderline cases.

**Late Policy**
*You are responsible for quizzes/assignments that are due and for what takes place in class whether you are there or not.* Assignments and readings are due at the beginning of class on the dates specified by the professor; late work will not be accepted. Late work due to computer malfunction or interruption of an internet connection does not constitute a special case and is considered late. Exams not taken at the scheduled exam date and time will receive a zero.

**Academic Integrity**
Academic dishonesty entails the stealing of another's ideas and falsely representing them as one's own; it includes actions such as cheating and plagiarism as well as aiding others in these actions. Xavier’s policy on academic integrity can be found in the University Catalog. You are responsible for knowing this policy and will be held accountable to it.

**Student Accessibility Services**
If you have any special needs for testing or any learning disability, I will accommodate them in conjunction with the Learning Assistance Center (Kuhlman Hall, 745-3280). Please be sure to contact them and communicate with me early in the term, providing the proper documentation, so that proper arrangements can be made.

**Disclaimer:**
This syllabus is not a promise or a contract. I reserve the right to modify class content and requirements as deemed necessary for the effective teaching of our class. You will be informed well in advance if any such changes are made.