111-04 Theological Foundations

Christopher Pramuk

Follow this and additional works at: http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/theology_syllabi_fall_2014

Recommended Citation
http://www.exhibit.xavier.edu/theology_syllabi_fall_2014/41

This Restricted-Access Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Theology Syllabi 2014 at Exhibit. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology Syllabi Fall 2014 by an authorized administrator of Exhibit. For more information, please contact exhibit@xavier.edu.
Above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build life as if it were a work of art. You’re not a machine. When you’re young, start working on this great work of art called your own existence.

~ Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

This course explores the intersections of human life with sacred mystery, with attention to questions of meaning, hope, and social transformation in history. What is the meaning of life? How ought we to live? Is God real? Are we really capable of empathy and compassion? In the face of so much suffering in the world, what or who is the basis for our hope? We will explore these questions through case studies in the lives of ordinary people, some famous, others hidden. We’ll draw from academic essays in theology but also from music, film, the Bible, and, of course, through the lens of our own spiritual journeys. The Jesuit/Ignatian tradition of critical thought and creative imagination will frame our discussions throughout the semester.

As an essential building block of the Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) component of the core curriculum, Theo 111 emphasizes issues of faith and justice more than philosophical or advanced scriptural and historical study. Questions of belief and unbelief, mystery and sexuality, suffering and joy, science and faith, will be accompanied by the study of meditation and prayer practices that accompany and sustain people of many faith traditions throughout their lives. How ought we to live, to love, and finally, as Heschel suggests, to make of our lives a beautiful work of art?

Goals and Methods

- To develop critical thinking skills and to apply these skills to fundamental theological sources such as sacred scriptures, religious traditions, and human experience

- To reflect on significant persons, events, role models, and intellectual currents of the 20th century which continue to shape religious, ethical, and philosophical questions today, with special attention to Jesuit history and spirituality and its implications for Xavier students today

- To explore the lived experience of different communities—e.g. European Jews, Vietnamese Buddhists, African Americans, women and men in the Catholic Church today, ourselves and fellow students of every background—and to evaluate how different histories and cultural experiences shape our conceptions of God and the search for meaning and joy

- To engage (and enjoy!) theology as a way of thinking that involves the whole person: i.e., which engages both faith and reason, both the poetical and the scientific spirit, and which orients persons and communities toward the way of peace, solidarity, and responsible social action.
Required Texts

The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching, Thich Nhat Hanh
My Life with the Saints, James Martin, SJ
The Man Who Planted Trees, Jean Giono
Black Like Me, John Howard Griffin
Women and the Word, Sandra Schneiders
The Bible (any modern translation; online access OK)

Required Articles: will be posted each week to Canvas and occasionally provided in class

Requirements: Each student is expected to:

1. Prepare assigned readings and films, take notes, and actively participate in class discussions

2. Post Discussion Board comments on Canvas the night before class in response to readings. Once during the semester, prepare and “set the table” for discussion (5 min. max), providing a brief handout with key points from readings and discussion questions. Guidelines below.

3. Write a series of Short Reflection papers (8 total/about 1.5 pages each), in which you critically reflect on and synthesize major ideas and themes in the course. These are the primary tool I will use in evaluating your grasp of material as we move along. Guidelines below.


5. Take the Final Exam

Grade Summary

Attendance/active participation 10%
Discussion Board (30) + set the table (1) 15%
Short Reflection papers (8 X 5%) 40%
Immersion Experience Paper 15%
Final exam 20%

Work will be evaluated according to the standards set forth in the Theology Dept. Grading Guidelines (see www.xavier.edu/theology/grading_policy.html), which indicates the following scale:

A = 100-94  B = 89-87  C = 81-79  D = 73-71  F = 67-0
A- = 93-92  B- = 86-84  C- = 78-76  D- = 70-68

According to Theology Department standards, the grade of “A” does not mean “average” or “good” work, or “strong effort,” but is reserved for exceptional academic performance.
Course Requirements and Expectations

1. Attendance and Active Participation [10%]

Attendance: This is not a course to miss casually and expect to do well. With a total of 29 meetings in the compressed Tues/Thurs schedule, you may miss up to three (3) classes only without penalty. After this, 4 points will be deducted from your final grade for each additional unexcused absence. The idea here is to allow you some room for illness, death in the family or other inevitable circumstances. Please do not waste your free absences. In the event of prolonged absence due to serious illness or otherwise, withdrawal from the course may be advised, or some other solution worked out with the instructor. Excessive tardies will also significantly lower the participation grade.

Involvement: This course is designed with the expectation that students are committed to being engaged, actively attending to lectures and group discussions. If you find it impossible to do so early in the morning, please consider taking a later section. Along with attendance this portion of the grade will include the instructor’s subjective evaluation the student’s engagement with the class.

2. Discussion Postings (28) and Set the Table (1): [15%] Instead of regular quizzes, students will post “discussion board” comments to Canvas the night before each class. These allow you to reflect online with your classmates about the material and lay the ground for class discussions. These are not given individual grades but are carefully read and noted in my grade book before every class, and are a crucial part of your active participation in the course. It is not possible to skip these or do them poorly and earn an A in the class.

“Set the table” for discussion – once during semester. Review carefully the readings for the session you have been assigned. Find the “gems”: particular quotes or insights you find most thought-provoking. On a half-page, quote at least 2 key points from each of the readings that you’d like to discuss. Then formulate 2-3 questions (total) you propose we discuss. Feel free to think “outside the box” – your main task is to propose questions that will help us make larger connections between the readings and everyday life here at Xavier or in U.S. society. Add your questions to the half page, with your name and date, and print enough for everyone.

3. Short Reflection Papers [40%] These are the primary tool I use in evaluating your grasp of material as we move along. Focus questions may be provided for the paper. See guidelines below.


5. Final exam [20%] Comprehensive. The best way to prepare for the final is to be an active learner and participant, to attend all classes, and to take careful and expansive notes. At this level of study, you should take careful notes on:

1/ reading notes outside of class on assigned readings
2/ lecture content (material I say or put on the board, along with your expanded thoughts)
3/ class discussions (take note of your own insights and that of classmates)

A makeup final will be granted only for serious and verifiable emergencies, or an unavoidable conflict cleared with the instructor well in advance, and must be completed promptly, before the end of term. Missed exams become F grades.
Classroom Atmosphere

Theology explores questions of a personal, political, and often challenging and controversial nature. Much of our time will involve open-ended critical thinking and personal discussion. It is important to cultivate an open and generous atmosphere in the classroom, with room for diverse and conflicting points of view, even struggles or diverse perspectives within oneself. In short, this course calls for an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, especially where we may disagree with another person’s point of view.

A good Jesuit or “Ignatian” rule of thumb, when feeling challenged is to listen carefully and try to consider the idea (above all the person advancing it) through the best possible lens, or what we might call seeing through a “lens of generosity.” It is also crucial to maintain a rule of confidentiality in cases where students may share experiences of a personal or sensitive nature during class discussions.

Note on writing for this class

Papers should be turned in online via Canvas before class, and bring a hard copy to class for discussion.

Good theological writing combines objective analysis with more personal, experiential, and imaginative elements. In this class a strong paper will reflect depth of thought and willingness to engage multiple sides of an issue, specific references to the text or material at hand, and thorough responses to suggested reflection questions.

Careful presentation is very important. Sloppy papers or work with errors in grammar, spelling, and content will be downgraded. Use of the Writing Center (Alter Hall) is strongly encouraged, especially in writing and editing the Immersion Experience paper. I am always happy to work directly with students who show a sincere and concerted effort to improve their critical writing skills.

Theology is a reading and writing-intensive discipline. Please see me if you ever have questions or concerns about your writing for this course, or guidelines provided for a particular assignment. The main thing is to communicate with me directly, in person.

Late policy: For each class period a paper is late, a half letter grade or more will be subtracted, up to one week. After one week overdue papers will not be accepted for credit. Please remember that direct communication with me is essential if you run into difficulties with any assignment. No course material will be accepted after the final exam. In keeping with Xavier policy, “Incomplete” grades are discouraged and granted only in extraordinary circumstances.

Academic Honesty: This course will be conducted in keeping with Xavier University’s policy on academic honesty, which includes the use of Turnitin.com and other resources in cases where plagiarism is suspected. Please don’t put yourself, or me, in the very uncomfortable position of having to make such an inquiry. In all material submitted for this course (including discussion posts and papers) both the ideas and wording must be your own, or must be clearly attributed to their proper sources using full citations. Re-submission of any work used for a previous course, whether your own or that of another student, is a serious violation.

Disabilities. If you have a documented physical or learning disability requiring academic adjustments for this course, please contact the Learning Assistance Program (Kuhlman Hall/745-3280), and see me in the first week of class to discuss any necessary arrangements or ways I can be of assistance.
Athletic or academic team commitments. It is your responsibility to ensure that I am aware ahead of time of any scheduling conflicts or absences you may incur due to university sponsored athletic events. Please provide a letter from your coach or adviser with the team schedule and dates highlighted that will necessitate absence from this class. If the number of projected absences is excessive, it may be recommended that the course be taken at another time.

Unavoidable absences: The rule here is communicate with me early and often. Please remind me the previous class about an absence approaching. In cases involving an exam we will need to work out a solution well in advance. Please don’t expect accommodations after the fact.

Classroom Protocol

Late entry: If you arrive after roll is taken, there is a good chance you will be counted absent unless you check in with me at the end of class and have the record changed from absent to tardy.

If for any reason you need to leave before class is dismissed, whenever possible please let me know before class begins. Bathroom emergences are an obvious exception.

Please resist the temptation to gather your belongings before the actual end of the class period. I do my best to end class consistently on time. If I am over time, feel free to give me a (kind!) signal.

No laptops, pagers, cell phones, or other technological intrusions, unless you have a documented need.

These are OK: water bottles, covered coffee mugs, anything that won’t spill if tipped over.

What you can expect from me:
1. An attitude of respect and reverence for the faith traditions of Catholic, non-Catholic, and non-Christian students.
2. Careful preparation of each session of this course.
3. An attitude of respect for your questions, your input, and the particularities of your journey.
4. Availability outside of class when needed.
5. Every effort to make this class interesting, challenging, and enjoyable.

Personal
I grew up in Lexington and graduated from the University of Kentucky. After studying music in Boulder, Colorado, I began teaching at Regis Jesuit High School in Denver, and met my wife at Regis University, where I worked as a choir director, and eventually as a religious studies teacher. After my wife finished medical school we moved to South Bend where I completed my PhD at the University of Notre Dame. In 2007, we moved our family to Cincinnati, and I began teaching at Xavier. My wife is a pediatrician and travels to Guatemala with Xavier’s Interfaith Medical Mission trip each year. We have four children. Besides a passion for baseball and March Madness I am probably happiest when playing the piano or fumbling at the guitar. My love for Jesuit education runs deep, and I’m honored to be teaching at Xavier University.
Short Reflections Papers [8 total, 1.5-2 pages each]
Submit online to Canvas prior to class that the paper is due and bring hard copy

The “short reflection” is your opportunity to reflect on course readings, and my primary measure of how well you are engaging the course material. The goal is not to attempt a detailed analysis of the entire reading but to express your understanding of the author’s essential points.

Generally I will provide a rubric to focus your attention on key themes or ideas in the assigned material. Use these to help structure your response to the reading, but do not limit yourself to the questions provided. In other words, you should feel free to go beyond the provided questions in your evaluation of the material.

If you structure your papers (more or less) around these guidelines you should be in good shape.

a. In your own words discuss what you perceive to be the author’s main ideas or thesis advanced in the text. What central argument or insight is being forwarded? What basis or authority is the author drawing from to advance the argument? Reason? Personal experience? Church teaching? The Bible? Historical data?

b. After demonstrating your grasp of the author’s perspective in the text, and his/her basis for it, draw connections to other readings or from class discussion which support, complement, or contradict this author’s perspective. The goal here is to draw larger connections between different authors and larger themes in the course, bringing them into conversation.

c. Move finally into your personal evaluation of these readings on the whole. Do you find the author persuasive? Why/why not? What strikes you most in this (these) reading(s), and why? What questions or insights do they raise for you?

Questions I will ask myself in grading the short reflection paper:

a. Does the writing reflect careful engagement with the author’s perspective in the reading?

b. Does the paper reflect both critical and personal engagement with the material?

c. Is the writing done with care for appearance, spelling, and grammar? Did the student proof-read carefully before turning it in?

d. Is the paper clear, thoughtfully structured, easy to follow?

A range: exceptional, uncommonly insightful, well-crafted, creative, no grammatical errors
B range: very good critical and personal engagement with the material, well-crafted with no conceptual or mechanical writing problems (spelling, grammar, etc)
C range: good or acceptable engagement with the text; basic completion of the assignment, but with some mechanical or conceptual problems
D and below: minimal effort, poor mechanics, or weak engagement with ideas

Please bear in mind that the “A” grade does not mean “average,” “very good,” or “sincere” effort, but is reserved for uncommonly insightful, creative and exceptional academic work.
Immersion Experience/Research Guidelines (Due Nov. 4)

Option A: RELIGIOUS RITUALS IMMERSION/RESEARCH

1. Research online a religious tradition other than your own.

The tradition you select can be from a different religion (e.g., Christian students can select a community within Islam, Hinduism, or any other non-Christian tradition. Muslim students can select a particular Christian church or any other non-Islamic group, and so on) or a different denomination (e.g., Catholic students can choose from among Protestant and Orthodox churches. Protestant students can select the Catholic church or other Protestant churches, and so on.). If you were not raised in a religious tradition, then any religious tradition will do.

2. Attend two worship services or events within this tradition.

The two services you attend must be within the same tradition, though they need not be at the same place. For example, you could visit two different mosques, or attend services at two different Catholic churches. But it may be easiest to attend the same church (or temple, or mosque, or synagogue) on two different occasions. When you attend, above all be respectful. Remember that you are a guest. Dress appropriately. Avoid going with a large (more than 3-4) group of classmates. Avoid taking notes during the service or too obviously “analyzing” what’s going on. If asked, express your interest in learning more about the service.

The following questions may be helpful in directing your observations and focusing your thoughts. You need not address all of them in the final paper. (1) Space: How is the worship/mediation/gathering space laid out? Is there a focal point? Does it create a certain mood (transcendence and awe or intimacy and familiarity)? What does this suggest about the presence of the Divine? Is there art in this space? What is it like? What does the art communicate about the sacred? (2) Ritual: What happens? prayer? silence? movement? preaching? music? Is it very ritualistic or more free-flowing? Who are the main actors? What is the attitude of the participants? serious? upbeat? inattentive? Does this suggest a sense of the sacred? (3) Words: What is said? How is God or the Divine described? Do the texts of the hymns or the prayers suggest a particular theology, a particular notion of the sacred?

2. Write a paper.

You are then to write an integration paper (5–6 pages typed, double-spaced) that explores the most significant aspects of your experiences and observations. In particular, you are to address the question: What did these religious events communicate to you about this community’s understanding of the divine?

Your task is not simply to describe the service but further to reflect on how the different aspects of their rituals communicate a particular understanding of the divine. The paper should advance a thesis that brings into dialogue what you have learned through your research with what you have experienced through the rituals. Though not required, you may make comparisons to your own religious tradition if this is helpful.

The paper should clearly indicate where and when you attended the services. An annotated bibliography must be included that lists the websites used and gives a brief explanation and justification of these sources. At least two reliable web sources must be cited (Wikipedia may be used as a source, but not as one of your primary sources).

DON'T FORGET: BEFORE TURNING IN THE PAPER, PROOFREAD YOUR WORK CLOSELY, AND EVEN BETTER, VISIT THE WRITING CENTER FOR FEEDBACK
Option B: SLAVERY TODAY: “THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES”

1. Visit the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in downtown Cincinnati. After exploring the various exhibits, spend some time in the film and exhibit entitled “The Struggle Continues.” (The center recommends that you allow at least 1 ½ hours per exhibit.) The various kiosks accompanying this film and exhibit describe six forms of “unfreedom” in the world today: racism, illiteracy, genocide, hunger, tyranny, and slavery (R.I.G.H.T.S). Please pay special attention to the last category, i.e., the various forms of slavery that are still pervasive throughout the world today. While every country has outlawed slavery and claims not to have slaves, many forms of slavery still plague the world, including in the United States.

2. Research online the problem of slavery today, utilizing resources from the freedom center’s website (www.freedomcenter.org) or Xavier Library’s online resources. Of the various forms you learn about, choose one particular form of contemporary slavery to research. What is it? How pervasive? Where does it exist?

   Traditional or “chattel slavery” is the buying and selling of people for money. Chattel slavery still exists in the world today. Many other forms of control that limit people’s freedom are also considered slavery. “Bonded laborers” must work for someone who loaned them money until all of the money is paid back. Slavery also includes forces prostitution or “sex slavery,” in which people, including children, are forced to have sex for money. “Child laborers” can also be slaves. Many children are forced to work for very small pay in dangerous jobs to help their families. Another form of modern slavery is when companies force workers to work long hours in “sweatshops.” The workers are often threatened with violence.

3. Write a paper (5-7 pp, typed, double-space) that examines one form of slavery that still exists in the world today, incorporating both your experiences of the Freedom Center exhibits and observations from your research. Your paper should include:

   a. specific references to the Freedom Center exhibits and what your “immersion experience” was like for you
   b. at least three solid on-line research sources (Wikipedia may be used to get started, but not as one of your primary sources)
   c. personal and/or theological reflection on this issue: e.g., How does this issue affect me, if at all? Why should I care? Given my personal, religious, or spiritual beliefs, why should I care about this reality?
   d. at least several paragraphs on particular persons or organizations trying to make a difference on this particular issue. Where do you see hope for change?
   e. an annotated bibliography that lists the websites used and gives a brief explanation and justification of these sources.

DON’T FORGET: BEFORE TURNING IN THE PAPER, PROOFREAD YOUR WORK CLOSELY, AND EVEN BETTER, VISIT THE WRITING CENTER FOR FEEDBACK
Course Calendar
(All Assignments Subject to Change)

Required readings, including any changes, will be posted on the whiteboard and updated on Canvas every class.

Tu Aug 26  Introduction

Unit One:  Faith Seeking Understanding

1/ Th Aug 28  Review Syllabus
DB#1

2. Tu Sep 2  Thich Nhat Hanh, chs. 1-6
Interview with poet Maxine Hong Kingston [online video]
DB#2 / SR#1

3. Th Sep 4  “A Woman’s Faith Journey: Interview with Vilena Cherry”
“Autobiographies of Religious Experience”
Film: Awakenings (watch before Sep 11)
DB#3

4. Tu Sep 9  Thich Nhat Hanh, ch. 7, 24
Walter Burghardt, SJ, “Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real”
David Levy, “No Time to Think” [YouTube lecture – first 20 minutes]
DB#4

5. Th Sep 11  Heschel, “Knowledge by Appreciation”
David Foster Wallace, “On Life and Work”
DB#5 / Film: Awakenings (due)

6. Tu Sep 16  Thich Nhat Hanh, ch. 25
James Martin, SJ, My Life with the Saints, Chs. 1-4
DB #6 / SR#2

Unit Two:  Freedom, Sin, and Grace: How Ought We to Live?

7. Th Sep 18  Bill Huebsch, “Life is Mysterious”; “Grace is Ordinary”
Wendell Berry, Leavings
DB#7

8. Tu Sep 23  Jean Giono, The Man Who Planted Trees
“TV and the Culture Industry”
DB#8

Bible: selections from Psalms and Genesis
DB#9 / SR #3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10. Tu Sep 30 | Bill Huebsch, “Sin and Grace”  
“Xavier student reflections” (see course documents tab)  
Jamie Manson, “Sex and Crime Tales”  
[In class video: Dreamworlds 3]  
DB#10 |
C. Pramuk, *Surviving the Search*, book excerpts  
Film: “The Truman Show” [on library reserve: watch *no later than* Tu Oct 14]  
DB#11 |
| 12. Tu Oct 7  | The Song of Songs (Bible)  
Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, “A Call to Listen: The Church & Gays and Lesbians”  
Vatican II on the conscience  
DB#12 |
| Th Oct 9     | **Fall Break – No Classes**  
[Begin researching/writing Immersion Experience Research Paper] |
Sexuality and Ignatian Spirituality [online video]  
Martin, *My Life with the Saints*, pp. 197-207  
DB#13 / Film: *The Truman Show* (due) |
| 14. Th Oct 16 | Andrew Greeley, “[Jesus and Women”  
Joseph Nangle, “The Incarnation”  
DB #14 / SR#4 |
| **Unit Three:** | **God and Humanity in a Suffering World** |
| 15. Tu Oct 21 | *Black Like Me*, p. 1-83  
Fyodor Dostoyevsky, “Rebellion”  
DB#15 |
| 16. Th Oct 23 | *Black Like Me*, p. 84-164  
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”  
DB#16 |
| 17. Tu Oct 28 | *Black Like Me*, p. 165-94  
C. Pramuk, “Interruptions”  
DB#17 / SR#5 |
Pope John Paul II: speeches during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem  
DB#18 [In class video: Rabbi Harold Kushner] |

[Note: Immersion Paper due in one week]
19. Tu Nov 4  Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Men and Women for Others”
   Martin, *My Life with the Saints*, Chs 5-6
   DB#19 / Immersion Experience Paper Due

   James Martin, “Rejoice Always”
   DB#20

21. Tu Nov 11 James Martin, *My Life with the Saints*, Ch. 11, on Mother Teresa
   Abraham Joshua Heschel: podcast
   DB#21 / SR #6

**Unit Four:** Christian Theology and its Sources: The Hermeneutical Circle

   Margaret Ralph, *Myth*
   DB#22

   Thomas Merton, “The Time of the End is the Time of No Room”
   Film: Children of Men (watch by Dec 2)
   DB#23

24. Th Nov 20 Sandra Schneiders, *Women and the Word*, outline up to pp. 28
   Thomas Merton, “The Time of the End is the Time of No Room”
   M. Tabar, “Who Wrote the Koran?”
   DB#24

25. Tu Nov 25 Two Ancient Wisdom/Sophia texts
   Two Readings on women’s ordination
   DB#25 / SR #7 = *Women and the Word* complete outline to end

26. Tu Dec 2  George Coyne, SJ, “The Fertile Universe”
   Martin, *My Life with the Saints*, Ch. 17, on Mary
   DB#26 / SR #8: FILM: Children of Men

27. Th Dec 4  John Garvey, “Only Wonder Comprehends”
   Paul Johnston, “A Fuller Life”
   DB#27 / Final exam review
Course Overview

Unit One: Faith Seeking Understanding
- Why a Jesuit education?
- World of Facts vs. World of Mystery
- Autobiographies of religious experience
- Buddhism: the story of Siddhartha
- Faith seeking understanding

Unit Two: Freedom, Grace, Sin: How Best to Live?
- Earth: the matrix of all life
- The impact of visual media culture
- Sexuality, spirituality and “hook-up culture”
- Models of friendship and love: Jesus and the Song of Songs
- The Ignatian “examen”

Unit Three: God and Humanity in a Suffering World
- Race in America: John Howard Griffin
- Rebellion: flirting with protest atheism
- Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust
- Men and women for others: Pedro Arrupe, SJ
- Hindu, Buddhist and Christian perspectives on suffering and evil

Unit Four: Theology and its Sources: The Hermeneutical Circle
- Approaches to the Bible
- Test case: the birth stories of Jesus
- Feminine images of the divine
- God after Darwin: science and faith
- Many religions: which is true?