111-27 Theological Foundations

Elijah Prewitt-Davis

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_2014/45
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. You should come to class prepared and ready to discuss the material from that day’s assigned readings. 10% of your grade relies on attendance, preparation, and active participation in class.

For each week 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 the class in which we discuss the reading that the question pertained to and will not be accepted late. See example at the end of this syllabus.
Six times throughout the semester, in addition to your thesis/answer, you will write a 300-word explanation of your thesis/answer. It is up to the student which questions they choose to write an explanation for. You must turn in at least three before the midterm, and at least three afterwards. However, EXPLANATIONS WILL ONLY BE ACCEPTED ON THE DAY THAT THE QUESTION WAS ASSIGNED FOR. No late explanations will be accepted. 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 post it on canvas by one hour before class begins. 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 midterm 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 best way to prepare for the midterm is to come to class prepared, and to take notes during the lecture and discussions. 25% of your grade depends on the Midterm.

Group Presentation and Reflection Paper: Groups of 5-6 people will be responsible for a 10-15 minute presentation on a religious tradition other than their own. For this presentation, you will be required to visit, at least twice, a religious service from the tradition that you have chosen. Along with the presentation, each member will write a 3-5 page reflection paper on their experience of attending the service and doing research for the presentation. 20% of your grade depends on the group presentation and reflection paper.

Final Exam: The final exam 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 final exam will be comprehensive. The best way to prepare for the midterm is to come to class prepared, and to take notes during the lecture and discussions. 25% of your grade depends on the final exam.

Grade Breakdown:
Participation: 10%
Answer/Thesis/Explanation: 20%
Presentation and Reflection: 20%
Midterm: 25%
Final Paper: 25%
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. Students who seriously engage this class - the readings, discussions, papers, exams - should do well, and of course will get the most from the experience. Students who do not stay on top of the reading assignments, take poor notes, or regularly drift from discussions will do poorly in this class. The kinds of questions raised here will necessitate close attention to the reading material.

Grade Equivalents (see http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm)
A = 94-100 A- = 92-93 B++ = 90-91 B+ = 87-89 B = 84-86 C++ = 82-83 C = 79-81 C- = 76-78
D+ = 74-75 D = 71-73 D- = 68-70 F = 0-67

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.
All documents that are turned in via email should be labeled as, students lastname, first initial, assignment with the document open to the reviewing tool bar. If I were to turn in a paper the document it would be named prewittdavise.midterm.docx

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.

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:

Terrence Tilley, *Faith: What it is and What it Isn’t*
Marcus Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*
Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*
James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*
Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*
Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*
Schedule:
Professor retains the right to change the syllabus at any time, and he probably will.

Week 1
August 27 What does it mean to think THEOlogically?
August 29 Terrence Tilley Faith: What it is and What it Isn’t
Pgs. 3-25

Week 2
September 3 Tilley,
Pgs. 26-56

September 5 Tilley, 57-73

Week 3
September 10 Intro to Historical Biblical Criticism
Marcus Borg, Reading the Bible Again for the First Time
ix-36

September 12 Borg, 37-56

Week 4
September 17 The Bible and Creation Narratives
Genesis 1-3
Michael D. Coogan, “Creations” (PDF)
Borg, Reading Again, Pgs. 57-84

September 19 The Bible and Sexuality
Genesis Chapter 19:1-11
Leviticus 18:22
Leviticus 20:13
Romans 1: 26-27
Walter Wink “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality” (PDF)
Week 5

September 24  “Who do you say that I am?” The Historical Jesus
Borg, Meeting Jesus Again For the First Time, Chapters 2-3

September 26  No Class, Professor away at conference

Week 6

October 1  Borg, Meeting Jesus, Chapter 4
Matthew Chapters 5-7
Luke Chapter 6
Matthew 26: 36-46
Matthew 25: 31-46
Luke 10: 25-37

October 3  The Book of Job

Week 7

October 8  Reading TBD,
Midterm Handed Out

October 10  No Class, Fall Break

Week 8

October 15  Midterm Due
Film, Higher Ground

October 17  Film, Higher Ground
Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be, (PDF)

Week 9

October 22  Modern Doubt
Merold Westphal, Suspicion and Faith
Pgs. 10-17, 25-29, 33-42

October 24  Westphal, Suspicion,
Pgs. 55-60, 55-60, 123-140
Week 10

October 29  Postmodern Responses to Modern Doubt
Crocket and Robins, *The New Materialism: Religion, Politics, and the Earth*
Chapter 2. (PDF)

John D. Caputo *After the Death of God*, Pgs. 47-70 (PDF)

October 31  Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*

Week 11

November 5  Liberation Theologies
Chapter 1 (PDF)

James Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, Chapter 1

November 7  James Cone, *The Cross and The Lynching Tree*, Chapter 2-3

Week 12

November 12  *The Cross and The lynching Tree*, Chapter 4 and Conclusion

November 14  Feminist Theology
Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God Talk*, Chapter 1
(PDF)

Week 13

November 19  Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, Pgs. 3-41, 150-169

November 21  Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*

Introduction Pgs, 1-12
Chapter 6, Pgs. 143-177
Chapter 7, Pgs. 178-203
Week 14

November 26  No Class, Thanksgiving Break

November 28  No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

December 3  One Earth, Many Religions

Bill McKibben, *Eaarth*, Preface

Catherine Keller “Talking Dirty: Ground is not Foundation” (PDF)

Paul Knitter, “Deep Ecumenicity versus Incommensurability: Finding Common Ground on a Common Earth” (PDF)

December 5  *Eaarth*, 1-47

Roger S. Gottlieb, “Spiritual Deep Ecology and World Religions” (PDF)

Nawal Amar, “Islam and Deep Ecology” (PDF)

Week 16

December 10  Christopher Key Chapple “Hinduism and Deep Ecology”, “Hindu Environmentalism” (PDF)


Brian Brown, “Toward a Buddhist Ecological Cosmology.”

December 12  *Eaarth*, 151-212

Interfaith Eco Activism

Roger Gottlieb, “Religious Environmentalism in Action” (PDF)
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 church's 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 losing 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