111-21 Theological Foundations

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Theo 111-21
Theological Foundations
Spring 2014

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Course Description
The purpose of this course is to provide an opportunity for theological and ethical reflection. Our primary focus will be upon the Christian tradition. We will examine the biblical foundations of Christianity, explore debates in contemporary Christian theology, and reflect upon the implications of Christian faith for life in our contemporary world. A brief introduction to other religious traditions will also be provided, with particular attention to Buddhism. Throughout the course significant attention will be given to issues in social ethics. This concentration upon ethics is in keeping with the status of this course as one of the required courses in the Ethics/Religion and Society Focus, an integral part of the core curriculum for all students at Xavier.

Objectives
- to provide an opportunity for reflection upon the Christian tradition
- to foster knowledge of and appreciation for other major religious traditions
- to encourage thoughtful exploration and articulation of one’s own religious identity
- to explore the current state of our world in light of religious faith, with particular attention to issues of social justice and ecological sustainability
- to strengthen our ability to be critical and constructive readers, articulate speakers and writers, good listeners and discussion participants

Texts
1) Bible - you will be expected to bring a Bible to class (or a printout of the assigned passages) during each class period for which there is an assigned Bible reading
3) Shane Claiborne, The Irresistible Revolution (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)
4) Thich Nhat Hanh, Essential Writings (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001)

Recommended Text
This text is not required, but is available for purchase in the bookstore if you are interested: Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler, and Brett Johnson, The Better World Handbook: Small Changes that Make a Big Difference (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2007)

E-Reserve
There will also be numerous required readings placed on electronic reserve at <http://library.xu.edu> The e-reserve password for this course is ‘shalom.’
Course Requirements

Attendance, careful reading of the texts, and active participation in the classroom are the fundamental course requirements, forming the basis for all others. Final grades will be determined as follows:

1. Class participation (10%)

Class participation includes attendance, contribution to discussion, occasional quizzes and short writing assignments, and participation in various in-class activities.

Excessive absences (4 or more) will result in a lowering of your grade. For each absence beginning with the 4th the maximum participation grade that you can get (out of a total of 10) will be lowered by 1.5 points. More than eight absences (except in case of serious illness, etc.) may result in a failing grade for the course.

If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to see me after class to be sure that you were marked present.

2. Two exams (20% each) plus a final exam (15%)

The exams will consist primarily of essay and short answer questions, along with some multiple choice and true/false questions. A study guide will be provided for each exam. Exam dates will be announced.

3. Paper on a contemporary theological/ethical issue (15%)

You are expected to write a paper (minimum of 5-6 pages) on a contemporary issue in Christian theology/social ethics. Guidelines for writing the paper, including a list of suggested topics, will be distributed during the first couple weeks of the semester. These papers will be due on the final day of class, though you are welcome to submit them earlier.

4. Journal/reflection essays (10%)

Over the course of the semester each student is expected to write a series of at least five brief reflections (each 1½ pages or greater in length) in dialogue with the course material. While I will occasionally assign specific topics (probably twice in the semester), you will otherwise be free to write on any course-related topic that most interests you. You may, for example, reflect upon things learned, relate the course material to other coursework or experiences, express agreement or disagreement with the material (giving reasons), or note questions that the material raises for you. These reflections will be evaluated not on the basis of agreement with any particular position but rather according to the degree of active, thoughtful engagement with the course material that they demonstrate. You should be sure to make reference to specifics from the readings or other class material in your reflections. These reflections can be either handwritten or typed. I will collect a reflection early in the course to give you feedback then collect them again around mid-term and at the end of the semester. The due dates will be given well in advance.

5. Songs expressing the ethics of Jesus (5%)

You are asked to put together a CD of at least three songs (more if you wish) that you believe in some way reflect the ethical teachings of Jesus. Along with the CD you are to write a brief explanation (at least 1½ pages or so) of why you chose these songs, making connections with the course readings. The songs do not need to be explicitly religious in nature. This assignment will be due within a couple weeks of when we finish the New Testament portion of the course. The specific due date will be announced.
6. Out-of-class experiences (5%)

You are asked to attend/watch two (2) out-of-class lectures or videos and write a brief reflection paper (at least 1½-2 pages) on each. These papers should include both a brief summary of the video/lecture and your reaction to it. Information concerning possible events to attend will be announced throughout the semester. A list of suggested videos that can be borrowed from the XU library or, in some cases, directly from me, as well as a listing of some possible on-line videos, will be posted on e-reserve. These essays on out-of-class experiences can be turned in at any time during the semester.

There may also be some out-of-class experience options that require a larger time commitment (e.g. attending a meditation retreat, etc.) that would count for both of your required experiences. I will let you know what experiences meet this criterion when I announce them.

Grading Scale (as determined by Theology Department grading guidelines)

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=67 or below

Papers, essays, etc. will be graded on the following basis:

A = exceptional. You not only complete the assignment well but do so in a way that demonstrates a significantly above average degree of thoughtfulness, effort, and clarity.

B = good. You complete the assignment well, without any major weaknesses.

C = fair. You complete the assignment adequately, though some significant weaknesses exist.

D = poor. You fail to adequately complete some major aspects of the assignment.

F = you fail to complete the assignment at all or do so in a way that does not demonstrate that you have read or seriously thought about the relevant course material.

Additional details concerning grading can be found on the Theology Department website at http://www.xavier.edu/theology/Grading-Policy.cfm

Technology Policy

Unless you have a documented need, the use of laptop computers, tablets, phones or other electronic devices is not permitted during class. Anyone using such devices will be marked absent for that class. Multiple violations of this policy can result in a failing grade for the course. Exceptions can be made if there is a need to look up something online as part of a class discussion, if permission is requested prior to use.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE

The course will be divided into 5 broad sections:

1) an introductory class exploring views of God and the current state of the world, followed by several classes centered upon the video “When the Mountains Tremble” and accompanying readings

2) a section devoted to exploration of the Bible, including selected texts from the Old Testament and from the Gospel of Luke, including discussion of the relevance of the biblical material in our contemporary world

followed by EXAM #1
3) a section exploring topics in contemporary Christian theology - e.g. images of God, the meaning of ‘salvation,’” God and evil/ suffering, Christian diversity, Christian views of other religious traditions, etc..

4) a section exploring world religions, with particular attention to Buddhism

followed by EXAM #2

5) a section exploring various contemporary ethical issues (some possibilities include: war and peace issues, ecological issues, hunger and poverty, racism, discrimination/violence against women, abortion, death penalty, same-sex marriage, food ethics, etc.)

followed by FINAL EXAM

Required readings, along with study questions, will be made available in class and/or on e-reserve at least several days prior to each class.

Due dates for all assignments will be announced in class and by email well in advance.

Final exam = Tuesday, May 6, 4:00-5:50