

Model Syllabus

Theology 266: The Church in the World

Introduction

Luke tells us that Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth, his hometown, by going to the synagogue on the Sabbath and making the words of the prophet Isaiah his own: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4.18-19)

In our time, the Church of Christ has come to a new understanding and appreciation of Jesus’ mission and purpose, as described here. In this course, we will explore the sources, dimensions, and implications of this understanding - and why it is so hard for Christians in the United States to accept it.

We Americans tend to put the uniqueness and autonomy of the person above other values, like family and community. In the US, then, religion and the Church become either helps or hindrances to one’s individual search for meaning, to one’s private relationship with God. If the Church helps, we stay. If it doesn’t, we leave it and go elsewhere.

But one’s relationship with God, in the Christian view, is not an individualistic affair. The Christian faith, discipleship, has communitarian roots and social implications. As a result, the Church must be tireless in grappling with the most challenging issues and tasks that face people today on the local, national, and international scenes.

In brief, our aim is to understand better why, in the words of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) of the Roman Catholic Church, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

In addition to these particular goals, I hope that this course helps you to think more critically and write more clearly, creatively, and persuasively; evaluate and appropriate your own ultimate convictions and values more consciously and carefully; understand why central Christian doctrines deserve serious intellectual consideration.

As a component of the Core curriculum,

This course provides an introduction to ways in which the Christian churches, and primarily the Roman Catholic Church, understand and enact their identity in relation to the secular worlds of culture, economics, and politics, both nationally and globally. It examines the form, grounds, and elements of the mission to which Christians consider themselves called in today's world.

Thus, the course addresses primarily competency (c) in the area of "**Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge.**" By taking this course, students will be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the social implications of central Christian convictions. For example, students who take this course should be able to:

- (1) explain the religious bases of Christian churches' policy statements and initiatives in response to various forms of injustice;
- (2) compare and contrast mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic approaches to social issues;
- (3) recount basic historical factors (e.g., the Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965) which have shaped the churches' current postures;

(4) perceive and critique the individualism of the American ethos.

The course promotes other competencies as well. Students should be able to analyze and interpret certain contemporary Christian texts, beliefs, and practices, using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency a). Also, students should be able to evaluate the religious perspectives of the Christian churches upon injustice in its myriad forms in light of the perspectives and presuppositions which the students themselves bring to this experience (competency d). Moreover, since the promotion of justice and the defense of the dignity of the person are axial to the contemporary churches' understanding of its role in today's world, this course will promote competency (e).

Lectures, the required reading, and class discussions (both large group and small group) to clarify the content and to develop the implications of the assigned readings will be the most important learning activities in this course and will function as the primary medium for delivering course content. These learning activities may be supplemented in some sections with writing projects, presentations, or brief in-class quizzes and writing.

Skills: The course will promote "Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions," especially competencies (b), (c), (d) and (f). It will do this by requiring students to do the following:

Competency (b): In class discussions, quizzes, brief papers, and/or examinations, students will learn to analyze relationships among various forms of verbal expression of beliefs, judgments, reasons, and opinions.

Competency (c): In class discussions, quizzes, brief papers, and/or examinations, students will increase their ability to "evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of varying points of view."

Competency (d): In class discussions and brief papers, students will learn to "generate new ideas, hypotheses, opinions, theories, questions, and proposals," as well as develop strategies for supporting an argument, making a decision, and/or resolving a problem.

Competency (f): Class discussions and brief papers will require students to reflect on their own presuppositions "in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct" their presuppositions and prejudgments.

Learning Activities:

Lectures and class discussions (both large group and small group) to clarify the content and to develop the implications of the assigned readings will be the most important learning activities in this course and will function as the primary medium for delivering course content. These learning activities may be supplemented in some sections with writing projects, presentations, or brief in-class quizzes and writing. Representative examples of learning activities are given below.

Example A

LEARNING OUTCOME: Be able to analyze and interpret contrasting Christian understandings of the notion of original sin, using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency a).

CRITICAL SKILL: "comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of varying forms of communication;" in this case, a religious text (competency a).

LEARNING ACTIVITY: Require the students to read selected texts of Thomas Aquinas and Luther, as well as commentary that provides the necessary historical context for comprehending the importance of the main ideas. Lecture on the political influence of these ideas in, e.g., Hobbes and Locke. Conduct a brief in-class quiz to monitor the students' understanding of this material. Then break up the class into small groups and have each group answer questions about contemporary social policy proposals that reflect the contrasting theological anthropologies.

Example B

LEARNING OUTCOME: Demonstrate knowledge, with attention to historical development, of the central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of at least one religious tradition (competency b).

CRITICAL SKILL: develop "strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support an argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem" (competency d)/

LEARNING ACTIVITY: Require the students to read key selected texts of the Second Vatican Council, as well as commentary that provides the necessary historical context for comprehending the importance of the main ideas. Conduct a brief in-class quiz to monitor the students' understanding of this material. Review students' quiz answers and lecture on those points which were incompletely or erroneously grasped by a critical mass of the class.

Assessment:

Exams and essays (including take-home or in-class essay portions of exams) will function as the primary assessment strategies for this class. Some sections may also utilize class presentations, group projects, or homework. The assessment strategies will test for the relevant outcomes and skills by asking students to respond to questions that demonstrate they have achieved the designated outcomes, such as 1) explain the meaning and implications of the "preferential option for the poor;" (2) develop an argument in favor of the church polity that will promote social justice most effectively; (3) articulate the benefits and drawbacks of the "social contract" theory as a model for understanding the nature of society; (4) explain how and why human rights became central to the Roman Catholic Church's contemporary agenda.

Required Texts: (available at LU Book Store, LSC and at websites)

Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity. The Church for Others*. Anansi (orig. ed., 1987)
Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith. The Public Significance of Theology*.
New York: Paulist, 1993.

Joerg Rieger, ed., *Liberating the Future. God, Mammon and Theology*. Augsburg Fortress, 1998.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham City Jail"

<http://www.almaz.com/nobel/peace/MLK-jail.html>

Catholic social teaching (CST) - <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/citizenship.htm>

Outline of Topics and Readings

Part 1 - How and why have *liberation* and *justice* become focal points for the Christian churches' mission and agenda today?

Aug 31 - Introduction; **Sept 2** - Rieger, Ch. 1; **Sept 7** - Cobb; **Sept 9** - Gutierrez

Part 2 - What new forms of Christian experience and teaching do *liberation* and *justice* produce? **Sept 14**- Baum, Ch. 1; **Sept 16** - Baum, Ch. 4; **Sept 21** - Meeks

Part 3 - Why is Liberation theology still so marginal, ineffectual, and even unknown in the US today? **Sept 23** - Baum, Ch 2, 5

Part 4 - How does a church focused on *liberation* and *justice* work in today's world?
A Catholic Vision of Public Life

Sept 28, Sept 30, Oct 5 - Small Class Discussion of "Faithful Citizenship" - see paragraph on "Small Class Discussion" below.

Oct 7 - Himes & Himes, Ch. 7

Oct 14 - "Midterm" exam; Lecture on Himes, Ch. 1

Part 5 - What do liberation and justice require of individuals, the churches, and society?

Oct 19 - Himes & Himes, Ch. 1; **Oct 21** - Wilmore; **Oct 26** - King, "Letter From Birmingham City Jail"

Oct 28, Nov 2, Nov 4, Nov 9, Nov 11, Nov 16, Nov 18, Nov 23, Nov 30, Dec 2, Dec 7, Dec 9:

These sessions will be devoted to Himes and Himes, Ch. 2-6 (specific reading for each class will be announced), as well as lectures and discussions on the main political parties' platforms in light of "Faithful Citizenship."

Course Work

Your final grade will be determined according to the following scale:

A = 100-93; B+ = 92-89; B = 88-85; C+ = 84-81; C = 80-77; D+ = 76-74; D = 73-70;
F = 69 and below.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

“Midterm” exam, 30%; Final Exam, 30%; Paper 1, 10%; Paper 2, 15%; Quizzes, 15%

Both the midterm exam on October 14 and the final exam will consist entirely of “objective” questions.

There will be brief (3-4 questions), occasional, unscheduled, unannounced quizzes on the reading to be discussed on that particular day. So, for instance, on Sept 16, there may be a quiz on chapter 4 of Baum. If you miss a quiz because you did not come to class, no matter how justifiable the reason for your absence (e.g., illness, a death in the family), that quiz cannot be made up. The quiz grade that will be a component of your final grade will be the percentage of all your correct answers.

“Small Class Discussion:” On Sept 28, 30, and Oct 5, only one-third of the class will meet with me to discuss “Faithful Citizenship.” This arrangement will allow me to get to know each of you better and allow us to examine the bishops’ text more carefully. During the two and half hours you are not in class on two of those days, you will (a) select a news article or editorial or opinion essay from a current issue of a daily newspaper or a weekly newsmagazine that relates to (i.e., illustrates, disagrees with, provides support for) one or more issues that we examine in this course; (b) write a brief essay (1-2 pages, single-spaced, 12 point type) in which you (i) summarize the main points of the selection in 1-2 paragraphs, (ii) explain the relationship between these points and some aspect(s) of the course material in 2-4 paragraphs, and (iii) add your own reflections and reactions in 1-2 paragraphs. These essays, along with their corresponding articles, editorials, or essays, will be handed in to me by October 7. They will be graded Pass/Fail. Papers that are graded Fail will have to be rewritten until they “Pass,” since this essay is a non-graded course requirement.

Two other brief (2-3 pages, single-spaced, 12 point type) papers are required. The first will be due in the first half of the course (Sept 9 or 16 or 23) and the other due in the second half (Oct 28 or Nov 4 or Nov 11). No late papers will be accepted without prior approval from me at least 48 hours in advance.

Here is the three-part outline to be followed in these papers:

- I. The (single - two - three) most important statement(s) made by (author’s name) in the reading for the (past date) class session (is - are) :
- II. I consider (this - these) statement(s) to be the most important because . . .
- III. The aspect(s) of this reading which (is, are) particularly meaningful to me (is, are) . . . because . . .

Here is an explanation of the marks on your Response Papers when I return them. Straight underlining indicates passages that are especially good. Wavy underlining marked “C” (that is, “Content”) in the margin indicates passages that are unclear or inaccurate. Wavy underlining

marked “S” (that is, “Style”) in the margin indicates wording that is clumsy or inappropriate in style. If you don’t see why I marked something “C” or “S,” **please** ask me to explain it. If you are willing to work with me, you can become a better writer more quickly and easily. Not only do I want to help you, but I have a special responsibility to help you. If you do not take advantage of this, you are wasting some of your tuition money!

All the spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes that I notice will be circled. Each will produce a half-point deduction from the essay grade.

Norms for grading the papers are the following:

A (100-93): the paper not only meets the norms for a B but it also shows originality and/or creativity. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are perfect or nearly perfect.

B (92-85): the paper covers the information necessary to discuss its subject(s) adequately. Its expression is precise and its organization is logical. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar are perfect or nearly perfect.

C (84-77): the paper is substantially accurate but it is imprecise in its expression and/or deficient in providing support for its main points and/or deficient in its logic. Mistakes in spelling, punctuation, or grammar may obscure the ideas.

D (76-70): the paper is substantially inaccurate but it shows some effort to deal with the issues at hand. Mistakes in spelling, punctuation, or grammar may obscure the ideas.

F (69-0): the paper demonstrates a slight or non-existent grasp of the issues and no substantial work or thought behind it.

Your paper will probably get an A grade if you can answer “yes” to the following:

Have I just knocked this piece off because it’s required for the course or do I really care about what I’ve written? Will my paper give my reader some insight, some valuable information? Will it make my reader think and care about my topic? Have I gotten to the “why” of the matters and not just piled up words without much thought or feeling? Have I avoided general statements that are not supported by reasons or examples? Have I done enough reading and thinking to make convincing arguments? Did I use an outline before or during the actual writing to guide me? Have I cut out every sentence and every word that isn’t necessary? Have I shortened overly long sentences and clarified any confusing ones? Have I cut out the clichés and words like “very” that are vague and useless? Does every word help the reader to grasp what I am trying to convey? Have I gone over every line, checking my spelling and punctuation and grammar? Have I done a serious search for typos?

Am I proud to be the writer of this essay?

“Academic Integrity”

is a central value in the university. It is a central value in this course as well. So you may want to read the statement on “Academic Integrity” in the current Loyola University Undergraduate Studies catalog, which describes and gives examples of academic dishonesty and the penalties attached.