**Faith & Critical Reason**

THEO 1000 L21, Summer II 2016  
Leon Lowenstein 522  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 6-9 p.m.  
Prof. Lynne Moss Bahr  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:30-6 p.m. or by appointment  
Office LL 517E  
646-784-5588  
lbahr@fordham.edu

**Course Description and Objectives**

This course introduces students to the academic discipline of theology, a field that touches on every concern of human life. To this end, we will engage a variety of texts and other materials that question, reflect on, bear witness to, reject, and otherwise confront what we most commonly call God. Our prevailing question will be, What are the ways in which people have come to express and question a divine reality in relation to themselves? We will focus on Christian material but will also engage Atheism, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam as well. No previous faith commitments are presupposed, but each student is expected to critically yet charitably engage all the material presented.

At the completion of the course, students will have 1) acquired the foundational vocabulary and conceptual tools of theology; 2) appreciate the complexity of religious traditions; 3) articulate the basic beliefs and practices of some of the major world religions; 4) understand the significance of religious thought and practice; and 5) convey in both speaking and writing the ability to engage religious discourse in an informed and insightful manner.

**Schedule and Readings**

**Part I: What Is Faith, and Is It Reasonable?**

July 5: Introductions, syllabus.  
What Is Faith?  
No QCQ due.
July 6: The Sociology of Religion
   The Problem of Evil
   Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, ch. 3.

July 12: Catherine Keller, “After Omnipotence.”
   There Is No God
   Ludwig Feuerbach, “God as a Projection”
   Karl Marx, “Religion as Opium”
   Sigmund Freud, “Religion as Wish Fulfillment”
   **Reflection Paper, Part 1, due in class as a hard copy.**

July 13: The Struggle of Faith
   Elie Wiesel, *Night*

**Part II: Varieties of Religious Expression**

July 15: Buddhism

July 19: Islam
   Hinduism

July 20: Judaism
   Atheism
   Richard Dawkins, excerpt from *The God Delusion*. 
Christopher Hitchens, excerpt from *God Is Not Great*.

**Part III: Christian Faith and Its Function**

July 26: Feminist Theology
- Postcolonial Feminist Theology

**Reflection paper, Part 2, is due in class as hard copy.**

July 27: Black Liberation Theology
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.

July 28: “A Preferential Option for the Poor”
- Christians and Conflict

August 2: Watch *Soldiers of Conscience*.
- No Quote, Comment, and Question paper due.

- Review for final exam

August 4: Final Exam

**Books**

Students should purchase the following books at the campus bookstore or from Amazon, Abe Books, or another online retailer:

All other readings are available on Blackboard.
Requirements and Assessments

Reflection paper (spiritual autobiography), part 1 and part 2: For this assignment, you assess your own position relative to the claims presented by the authors we are engaging. For Part 1 (DUE July 12), identify how Tilley and Tillich define the term “faith,” and then for yourself, identify your “ultimate concern(s).” How did you arrive at this “ultimate concern,” and to what extent is it a reflection of your upbringing or inherited faith tradition? How does your “ultimate concern” impact your way of being in the world? In what ways does this form an image of God for you (or not)? For Part 2 (DUE July 26), identify one concept, teaching, or practice from the religious traditions we have studied. Explain it to an audience that is totally unfamiliar with it. Next, determine the extent to which this concept intersects with or departs from your own concept of God (or lack thereof). Use your imagination and experience to make sense of this concept for yourself. Each of these essays should be three to five pages in length.

Quote, Comment, Question: For EACH class, you will prepare a one-page paper in which you select two quotes you find particularly compelling or problematic. You may address any one or two of the readings for a given day. Present each quote and comment on it in a paragraph or two, describing what you find compelling and why or problematic and why. How does it advance or undermine the author’s main argument? Next, pose a question related to one or both of the quotes you cited. You may skip this assignment TWO TIMES without penalty (one freebie of your choice and on the day of your presentation). These papers are due in class as a hard copy and are intended to prepare you to participate in the discussion. You may NOT e-mail me the paper. See below about late work.

Presentation/Position Paper: Each student will sign up to lead one class discussion. To prepare, you are to write a four- to five-page paper in which you present a short summary of the author’s main points and argumentation. You then critically engage the author, meaning you evaluate the claims and the evidence deployed by the author. Which claims are the most salient, and why? Which ones are unconvincing, and why? Do not read the paper, but use it as a guide for the presentation. You may use Prezi, a short video, or handouts as aids to your presentation. **Do NOT use Powerpoint.** To conclude, pose a critical question to the class for discussion.
Exam: A final exam will be administered on August 4. As the date approaches, I will provide suggestions on how to prepare. The exam will consist of short-answer questions and one or more long essay questions.

Participation: Any learning process requires the active participation of all in attendance; this includes both speaking and listening. Read, think, and come to class with questions and notes. If you are too reserved to speak up frequently in the group, please send me e-mail with your comments and questions. Dominating the conversation, interrupting others, or being hostile counts against participation. Always seek to advance the conversation and to engage others with respect and humility. Regular attendance is expected; only those who advance the discussion will receive high grades for participation.

Format for Papers: All papers should be double-spaced with 12-point type and one-inch margins. Submit everything as hard copies in class. I will not accept papers by e-mail. All ideas other than your own must be indicated with footnotes or parenthetical documentation. As a guide, consult Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1993), ch. 8 and 11.

Your work will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Paper Part 1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Paper Part 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote, Comment, Question (10)</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper/Presentation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total points</strong></td>
<td><strong>275</strong></td>
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Grading: The scale is as follows:

* A 93-100; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D 60-69; F 60 or below.*

Course Policies and Procedures
Texts: It is imperative that each student brings the text we are working with to class. I strongly prefer that you print out the readings from Blackboard rather than looking at them on your laptop. You will not be able to follow the discussion without the text in front of you. Failure to bring the text negatively impacts your participation grade.

E-mail: I will contact students through their Fordham e-mail account. Please check it regularly.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism (using someone else's ideas without citing the source) is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. Any instance of cheating or plagiarism will automatically result in a zero on the assignment and will be reported to the university authorities.

Late Work: Quote, Comment, Question papers are due in class as a hard copy. You may not e-mail it to me after class. I will grade this as check-plus, which means exceptional work; check, which means adequate work; and check-minus, which means below average. Each paper is worth 5 points, a check-plus gains one point and a check-minus loses one point. You need a check for every paper to receive all the points for this part of your grade. I will not accept the paper late unless your absence is excused. For the other papers, a late submission results in a reduction of half a letter grade per day.

Attendance: I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. If you know in advance that you will not be able to attend class, please notify me as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to find out what you missed in class. Excused absences include religious holidays, illness, death in the family, or required participation in a university-sponsored event. More than two unexcused absences negatively affects your grade.

Food, Phones, and Laptops: Food and drink in small amounts are permissible as long as they are not a distraction. All cellphones should be silenced and put away when class begins. Laptops are allowed for the purpose of consulting the texts at hand that are in electronic form if you did not have the opportunity to print out the reading. If I discern that cell phones are in use and that laptops are being used for purposes other than the course material, I reserve the right to ban all electronics in the classroom.
Disabilities: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please speak with the instructor in the first week of class and schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services. On the Rose Hill Campus this office is in O'Hare Hall, Lower Level, ext. 0655; at Lincoln Center this office is in Room 207, ext. 6282.