UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term:         Fall 2011
Instructor:   Dr. John Zemler
Course #:     THEO 4420/5420
Sections:     101 & 701
Course Title: Theology of Violence and Non-Violence

Description:

This is a demanding third-level Theology course. We will explore the theologies of non-violence and violence. The course will survey the biblical and historical trajectories of non-violence and the theological components of peace. Those components are exemplified by understanding and growing a series of proper relationships: Relationships with God, Yourself, Your Communities, and the Creation. These relationships will be explored biblically and in the Christian tradition. They will be further explored and developed in the writings of Thomas Merton, Michael Duffey, and Gerald May, among others.

[Students signed up for the Theo 5420 MACD version of this course must see the professor immediately. If you are an undergraduate signed up for Theology 4420, then MACD does not apply to you.]

The course will also examine the Just War Tradition, its uses and abuses. Is it possible in the Nuclear Age and the Age of Insurgency to have a Just War? Has the Catholic Church ever pronounced on the morality of nuclear war or torture? Does a prisoner have rights? Can your mother be tortured if it is in the interest of national security? Do you have the right to defend yourself from aggression? We shall find out.

Any credible theology of non-violence requires an awareness of how to help those who suffer from trauma. Trauma damages the human soul and alienates us from our proper relationships. If left unchecked it will induce despair. It is not enough to say “I am against war,” or “I am against rape,” and then do nothing to help those who have been devastated by military operations and/or sexual assault.

This course will examine the spiritual dimensions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), its causes, and how to diminish its affects. In this context we will also explore the value of finding meaning in our traumatic experiences and the will to stay alive through craft and prayer. Souls wounded by PTSD need our attention. Given the prevalence of violence, poverty, abuse, and sexual assault, this remains a relevant theological topic.

Any real commitment to peace requires that one first be at peace in themselves and in their relationships. This is a journey of self-understanding, renewal, and inner-conversion: a commitment to sanctification. Before one can be an effective peacemaker, one must first be at peace themselves. This is why so many vocal, public, so-called “peace activists” routinely fail in converting people to peace and then actually drive well-meaning individuals away. They cannot make authentic peace because they are not at peace themselves.
Throughout our course we will explore the dimensions of becoming an authentic peacemaker and not merely someone who likes publicity and the limelight. Thus, inner-conversion, humility, compassion, and sanctification will be part of our on-going focus. Hence, this is a course in theology and neither social work nor political science, as admirable as those fields may be.

The course contains a Catholic emphasis and will also touch on peacemaking traditions and practices from the Protestant faiths, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as applicable. While it should not be too shocking that a Jesuit Catholic University might have a theology course that tracks a Catholic emphasis, the student should be able to develop theoretical models, factual data, and practices of peacemaking and non-violence that are applicable to nearly any religious or secular environment.

The course is demanding. Expect to work. Attendance and attention is mandatory.

The instructor enjoys teaching theology and demonstrating how it is relevant to our modern world. He also enjoys interacting with students who are dedicated to all facets of their education. Students who are not dedicated to learning or who are not willing to work should not take this class.

Everything necessary to succeed in this course is presented within the course content. Personal faith commitments are not required to succeed in this course. It is an academic theology class where everything that is required to succeed is presented in the course itself.

**Learning Objectives:** As a third-level theology course, this class aims to help students meet certain basic objectives. These are as follows:

1. Describe theologically the basic content of the Catholic faith in relation to other Christian and religious traditions as well as other world views.
2. Interpret theological texts and frameworks in their historical contexts.
3. Articulate implications of Christian faith for growth in holiness and promotion of justice in the contemporary world.

Additionally, students who are interested in achieving both high grades and an education will be able to acquire and articulate the biblical, historical, and systematic aspects of the Theology of Violence and Non-Violence. This articulation can be demonstrated by something as basic and easy as the memorization of useful facts to something more complex such as the synthesis of those facts into a written theological framework that is both accurate and meaningful. Students are not expected to know these things coming into the class. Rather, they will gain the opportunity to learn them in the course of the semester.

Student achievement of these objectives is assessed in the context of research writing and several examinations.