

This course is a required core course for all undergraduates at Rivier University. It is paired with an English course to create the First Year Seminar experience, which introduces students to college-level research, critical reading and writing, and the discussion-based classroom experience.



“Transforming Hearts and Minds to Serve the World”

First Year Seminar – God and the Created Order

REL115F/Fall 2016

Instructor: Cynthia Cameron

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Class Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:15pm

Class Location: ED-314

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:00am-12:30pm, and by appointment

Office: TBD

Course Description:

One of two First Year Seminars, this course focuses on the ways in which the Christian tradition in general and Roman Catholicism in particular have articulated and explored the idea of God’s relationship to humans and the non-human world, placing this articulation and exploration in dialogue with other world religious traditions. In a seminar, students are expected to participate in discussions, and all students will lead one discussion during the term. The seminar requires a set sequence of writing assignments across sections. The seminar culminates in a symposium during which students critique an argument. This course is taken first or second semester of the first year.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- 1) Analyze the ways in which the Christian tradition in general and Roman Catholicism in particular have articulated and explored the idea of God’s relationship to humans and the non-human world, especially as this articulation and exploration is informed by and challenges the principles of Roman Catholic Social Teaching;
- 2) Analyze this articulation and exploration as it is in dialogue with other world religious traditions;
- 3) Persuasively communicate these analyses in writing;
- 4) Persuasively communicate these analyses in class discussion and oral presentation;
- 5) Use library-based research to inform their written and oral communication;
- 6) Use the principles of Roman Catholic Social Teaching as a way to ask questions about any public problem, as part of the overall goal of the FYS program.

Course Policies:

Several academic policies are common to all undergraduate courses at Rivier University. You will find these common policies at the following web address:

<http://www.rivier.edu/undergradcoursepolicies>. In particular, please thoroughly review policies related to “The Classroom” (see “Attendance,” “Behavior,” and “Electronic Devices”), and “Academic Standards” (particularly “Academic Honesty”).

Rivier University is committed to providing equal opportunity in education for all students. If you have a diagnosed disability or if you believe you have a disability (physical, learning, hearing, vision, psychiatric) that might require reasonable accommodation in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services, Learning Commons, Room 115 (897-8497) or email at disabilityservices@rivier.edu. Please also consult the resources Rivier University offers to address special needs: <http://www.rivier.edu/specialneeds>.

As your instructor, I require you to have read these policies. In addition to these college-wide policies, in this course, I draw your attention to the following:

1. Attendance: Regular and punctual attendance is required. Your preparation/participation grade will be affected by unexcused absences and lateness.
2. Academic Integrity: I take academic integrity very seriously. I am very careful to avoid plagiarism in my own academic work and I expect the same of you.
 - a. Conformity with all Rivier University standards of academic integrity is expected. Violations will be reported to the student’s divisional dean. Plagiarism, cheating, or collusion will result in no credit being awarded for the given assignment and may result in the failure of the course. This is in addition to any penalties assigned by the University including probation, suspension, or permanent expulsion.
 - b. Boston College offers an online quiz that explains how to avoid plagiarism: www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity/quiz.html
 - c. If you have any questions or doubts regarding plagiarism, it is best to contact the instructor prior to an assignment’s due date.
3. Late Assignments
 - a. Reading reflections, that are a part of the preparation/participation grade, cannot be turned in late (except in cases of serious illness or family emergency, verified by a note from your doctor or your academic advisor or divisional dean).
 - b. Short assignments, essays, and the final project, when turned in late, will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each calendar day that it is late (e.g. from a B to a B-).
4. Technology
 - a. All cell phones and other electronic communication devices must be silenced and remain unused during class. Students who call, text, email, or engage in any other type of electronic communication, including the checking of voicemail, email, and text messages, during class time will have their participation grade penalized for that day. It is the student’s responsibility to avoid even the appearance of engaging in electronic communication during class.
 - b. The use of laptops or tablets during class is permitted for taking notes or accessing information pertinent to class activities. When neither of these functions is relevant to a

class activity (such as during discussions or group conversations), these devices should be closed, turned off, or put away. Using a laptop or tablet for purposes other than taking notes or accessing information for class will result in a penalty to the participation grade for the day.

5. Email and Canvas

- a. All email communications will be sent to the student's Rivier University email address. It is recommended that you check this email account frequently.
- b. This course will rely heavily on Canvas, the learning management system. Students will be able to access readings and to submit assignments through Canvas. Unless otherwise noted by the instructor, paper copies or emailed copies of assignments will not be accepted.

Teaching and Learning Strategies:

The course is guided by the principle of *dialogue*. This means dialogue between students' knowledge and beliefs and the course material, between students and other students, and between students and the instructor. Therefore, discussion will be the basis for course instruction, supplemented when necessary by brief lectures during class meetings.

Discussion presumes that students and the instructor come to class prepared through required readings, regular reflection on that reading, and writing assignments that draw the readings into class discussions. Discussion also includes conversations led by the instructor, group activities involving course material and case studies, brief presentations by groups and individuals, and many other activities.

Course Requirements:

1. Preparation/Participation: 20% of the student's overall course grade is for attendance, preparation, and participation. This grade includes the following:
 - a. Attendance: As discussed in the Course Policies section of this syllabus, attendance at all class meetings is required. Unexcused absences and lateness will result in a lower preparation/participation grade.
 - b. Preparation: Students are expected to come to class prepared for the day's activities. This means that all reading is done before class and any assignments are submitted on Canvas by the due date/time.
 - i. Doing the assigned reading means engaging in a process of engaged reading. This means taking notes and highlighting (or underlining) as one reads and thinking critically about what one has read (a good question to ask yourself is: What does this mean and what do I think about what it means?)
 - ii. For some reading assignments, students will submit a "Reading Reflection" to the Canvas site before class meets. Instructions will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.
 - iii. When there is no reading reflection, students should expect some other assessment of engaged reading during class, such as a reading quiz or short writing assignment.
 - c. Participation: Students, having prepared for class ahead of time, are expected to engage actively in the discussions and other learning activities.

- i. On a day-to-day basis, this means being actively engaged in class: not being distracted by technology or student conversation, actively listening to other students and the instructor, responding to students and the instructor.
 - ii. Once during the semester, each student will participate in the leadership of a short discussion on an assigned reading. Instructions will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.
 - iii. A co-curricular activity: Students are required to attend a co-curricular activity and to offer a short reflection in response to a prompt provided by the instructor. The co-curricular activities are noted on the course schedule. Instructions will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.
- 2. Essays: The second major requirement, worth 40% of the final grade, is two essays (3-5 pages each). Instructions will be distributed and discussed in class and posted on Canvas at least two weeks prior to the essay's due date.
- 3. Final Project: Worth 20% of the grade, students will work in small groups to investigate one of the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching; each group will submit a Powerpoint presentation. Assignment of groups and research topics will happen in late October. The final powerpoint is due at the end of the semester. Instructions will be distributed and discussed in class and posted on Canvas.
- 4. Short Assignments: 20% of the student's grade comes from two short assignments that are designed to aid the student in learning how to work successfully at the college level.
 - a. The Library assignment: Students are required to attend a library session that will be conducted by library staff and to complete a short research assignment to demonstrate the research skill introduced in the session.
 - b. The First Year Seminar symposium: Students are required to attend the FYS symposium during our final exam timeslot; after viewing the presentations, students will submit an assignment based on this experience.

Required Course Textbooks:

Himes, Michael. (2004). The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to Catholicism. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press.

All other readings are posted on the Canvas site.

Grading:

Final Averages will be converted to letter grades in accordance with university policy:

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| A | = 4.00 (93-100%) | C | = 2.00 (73-76%) |
| A- | = 3.67 (90-92%) | C- | = 1.67 (70-72%) |
| B+ | = 3.33 (87-89%) | D+ | = 1.33 (67-69%) |
| B | = 3.00 (83-86%) | D | = 1.00 (63-66%) |
| B- | = 2.67 (80-82%) | D- | = 0.67 (60-62%) |
| C+ | = 2.33 (77-79%) | F | = 0.00 (0-59%) |

Course Schedule

Thurs, September 8: Introduction to the Course and the People

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| Unit One: Naming God |
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Tues, September 13: Why Study Theology?

What are some of the benefits of studying theology at the college level, even if you do not intend to major in theology or if you don't believe in God?

- Reading: Burton, Tara Isabella. "Study Theology, Even If You Don't Believe in God." *The Atlantic*, 30 Oct. 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/10/study-theology-even-if-you-dont-believe-in-god/280999/?utm_source=atlib.

Thurs, September 15: Laying the Groundwork

This class includes an introduction to the study of religion and theology and the terminology used by scholars in these fields.

- Reading: Saracino, Michelle. "Getting Oriented." *Christian Anthropology: An Introduction to the Human Person*. Paulist Press, 2015. (p. 13-21; 8 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection (submitted in Canvas by 9am)

Tues, September 20: Library Session

This class is an introduction to using encyclopedias in academic research. Report to Regina Library. Attendance will be taken.

Thurs, September 22: Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue

In a world that is increasingly diverse and interconnected, it is important to be able to engage in thoughtful and respectful dialogue with people from other religious traditions.

- Reading: Fitzgerald, Michael and John Borelli. "Theological Considerations on Pluralism." *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*. Orbis Books, 2006. (p. 36-45; 9 pages)
- Assignment due: Library Assignment (submitted in Canvas by midnight)

Tues, September 27: Faith and Reason

Christianity does not demand blind or unthinking allegiance; rather faith and reason work together to inform how we live our lives and what we believe to be true.

- Reading: Tilley, Terrance. "Misunderstanding Faith." *Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't*. Orbis Books, 2010. (p. 3-25; 22 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection
- Assignment due: Reflection Essay on the Co-Curricular Activity, option one: *Smoke Signals* (submitted in Canvas by midnight)

Thurs, September 29: God and the Trinity

Christians believe in one God and that this one God is three persons, traditionally named as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Reading: Himes, Michael. “Trinity.” *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to Catholicism*. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004. (p. 5-10; 5 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Tues, October 4: Revelation and the Bible

One of the most important ways that Christians come to know God is through God’s self-disclosure in the Bible. The Bible tells us about how God and God’s people have related to each other in the past and invites us into that relationship.

- Reading: Binz, Stephen. “The Bible As God’s Self-Revelation.” “The Word of God in Christian Life.” & “The Inspired Word of God in Human Words.” *Introduction to the Bible: A Catholic Guide to Studying Scripture*. Liturgical Press, 2007. (p. 1-14, 39-45; 20 pages)

Thurs, October 6: Revelation and the Tradition of the Church

Along with the Bible, Christians believe that God continues to be revealed to us in the life of the Church, as we all work to know God and be in relationship with God and others.

- Reading: Himes, “Tradition.” (p. 87-94; 7 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Unit Two: Being Human

Tues, October 11: Creation of the Cosmos

Christians believe that God created all that is – the whole universe and all that is in it – and that God created all of this as good. Humans are only one piece of God’s whole creation.

- Assignment due: Essay One (submitted in Canvas by midnight)

Thurs, October 13: Creation and Humanity

Humans are only one piece of God’s whole creation, but humans are an important piece of that creation. Christians believe that humans are created in the image of God.

- Reading: Edwards, Denis. “Human Beings within the Community of Life: ‘Made in the Image of God.’” *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. Orbis Books, 2006. (p. 7-26; 19 pages)
- Reading: Genesis 1-2

Tues, October 18: Sin and Suffering

Despite (or maybe because of) our status as created in the image of God, humans have a tendency to make mistakes and to experience the world as a place of hardship.

- Reading: Saracino, “Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again.” (p. 150-169; 19 pages)

Thurs, October 20: Grace

Christians believe that God is love – unconditional love. God’s unconditional self-giving love for humanity, as we experience it, is called grace.

- Reading: Himes, “Grace.” (p. 11-18; 7 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Tues, October 25: The Incarnation

Christians believe that God loves humanity so much that God took on our humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

- Reading: Himes, “Incarnation.” (p. 19-27; 8 pages)
- Reading: John 1
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection (on Himes)

Thurs, October 27: Salvation

Christians believe that God loves humanity so much that God wants to heal the divisions and suffering caused by sin. In Jesus Christ, we see God reaching out to humanity to restore us to right relationships with God and one another.

- Reading: Himes, “Salvation.” (p. 29-37; 8 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Tues, November 1: Our Vocation as Christians

When Christians choose to be in relationship with God, they choose to become members of a community of believers. This relationship is symbolized by the sacrament of baptism.

- Reading: Himes, “Baptism.” (p. 49-58; 9 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection
- Assignment due: Reflection Essay on the Co-Curricular Activity, option two: *4 Little Girls* (submitted in Canvas by midnight)

Thurs, November 3: The Church

Christians believe that being in relationship with God happens in a community. This community, called the Church, provides support, guidance, and love to all of its members.

- Reading: Himes, “Church.” (p. 39-48; 9 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

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| Unit Three: Living Together |
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Tues, November 8: Moral Theology and Ethics

As Christians struggle to live together, moral and ethical teachings provide some guidelines and parameters of what the Church has found to be good ways of living together in community.

- Assignment due: Essay Two (submitted in Canvas by midnight)
- Reading: Keenan, James. “Love.” *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*. Sheed & Ward, 2010. (p. 9-26; 17 pages)

Thurs, November 10: Catholic Social Teaching

Over the course of its long history, the Church has developed teachings about God’s particular care for those who are most mistreated by society. The Church calls us to work towards a better world in which no one experiences injustice.

- Reading: Evans, Bernard. “Catholic Social Teaching.” *Lazarus at the Table: Catholics and Social Justice*. Liturgical Press, 2006. (p. 1-10; 10 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Tues, November 15: Catholic Social Teaching

In its thinking about God's call to act for justice in the world, the Catholic Church has articulated seven principles to guide us in our thinking.

- Reading: Sullivan, Susan Crawford and Ron Pagnucco. "Catholic Social Teaching and the College Campus." & "Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Teaching: A Vision Statement." *A Vision of Justice: Engaging Catholic Social Teaching on the College Campus*. Liturgical Press, 2014. (p. xi-xviii, 193-199; 13 pages)

Thurs, November 17: Human Dignity (Poverty)

Catholic Social Teaching on the dignity of the human calls us to work to end the systemic causes of poverty and to help the poor in our communities.

- Reading: Day, Dorothy. "To Our Readers." "Scavengers." "Bedrooms." "Midwinter." "Security." & "Room for Christ." *Dorothy Day: Selected Writings* edited by Robert Ellsberg. Orbis, 2005. (p. 51-52, 57-59, 65, 69-70, 94-97; 12 pages)

Tues, November 22: Human Dignity (Racism and Sexism)

Catholic Social Teaching on the dignity of the human calls us to work to end the systemic causes of racism and sexism and to treat persons justly regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity.

- Reading: Considine, Kevin. "Do Black Lives Matter?" *U.S. Catholic*, 7 July, 2016, <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201607/do-black-lives-matter-answer-not-clear-30695>.
- Reading: "Is Feminism Another 'F Word'?" *U.S. Catholic*, April, 2002, <http://www.uscatholic.org/2011/01/feminism-another-f-word>.
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection (choose one article)

Thurs, November 24: Thanksgiving – NO CLASS

Tues, November 29: Dignity of Work

Catholic Social Teaching on the dignity of work calls us to ensure that our structuring of our communities is an on-going participation in God's creative activity.

- Reading: Day. "Labor." "Our Stand on Strikes." "The Disgraceful Plight of Migrant Workers." "Blood on Our Coal." & "Of Justice and Breadlines." (p. 235-253; 18 pages)

Thurs, December 1: Care for Creation

Catholic Social Teaching on the care of creation calls us to cooperate with God's plan for creation and to protect and sustain the world that we will leave to our descendants.

- Reading: Dillard, Annie. "On Foot in Virginia's Roanoke Valley." *The Abundance: Narrative Essays Old and New*. Harper Collins, 2016. (p. 133-150; 17 pages)
- Assignment due: Reading Reflection

Tues, December 6: Care for Creation and Preparation for FYS Symposium

This class includes a wrap-up of the discussion on care of creation, a summary of the semester's work, and preparation for the FYS Symposium.

- Assignment due: Powerpoint slideshow on a person of faith (submitted in Canvas by midnight)

Tues, December 13: FYS Symposium

Report to the assigned space for the FYS Symposium. Participation is required and attendance will be taken.

- Assignment due: FYS Symposium (handed in at the end of the symposium)

(Note: The above course objectives, teaching strategies, course requirements, assessments, course calendar and topic outline are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.)

