Christian Vocation and the Search for Meaning (I)

REL 100 – WEC
Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN
WEC, Spring Trimester, 2011

Instructor: Dr. Michael Brands
E-mail: brands@augsburg.edu
Out-of-class assistance is encouraged with prior arrangement

SYLLABUS

A. COURSE PURPOSE

Course Description: This course explores meaning, faith, ethics, and vocation, amidst life and culture(s). This exploration features resources that the biblical vision and Christian faith bring to this human quest for meaning. This process will also engage dialogue with other religions and various contexts in life and culture(s). Throughout, this purpose seeks insight into why faith matters in life and the world.

Learning Objectives: With the above purpose in mind, this course develops various specific themes or units, to challenge and equip students to…

– Our Quests for Meaning: Seek meaning, reflect on personal journeys, understand Christian vocational perspectives, and explore why faith matters
– The Biblical Story as Life Vision: Deepen their understanding of Christian faith – by exploring the biblical-Christian story as a life-vision, and major aspects of Christian faith, with some reference to Christian historical and contemporary heritage
– Religious Dialogue: reflect on relationships and engage in dialogue between the three monotheistic faiths – between Jews, Christians, and Muslims
– The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth: Explore the life and meaning of the original Jesus
– Faith in Life and Culture: Explore the nature and significance of Christian-biblical perspectives for hope, culture(s), and social ethics

The Essential Study Guide: Students should use this syllabus repeatedly throughout the course as the primary study guide – e.g., for what priorities, objectives, ideas, and issues to focus on, in their reading, in completing assignments, and in participating in class.

B. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

A Study Bible – choose one of the following:

Harper-Collins Study Bible – New Revised Standard Version, with study notes
Lutheran Study Bible – English Standard Version, with study notes
NIV Study Bible – New International Version, with study notes
– Note: If students seek further recommendations regarding various Bible translations and Study Bibles, please consult with the Instructor

Students are expected to bring their Bible to class sessions

Feiler, Bruce. Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths.
Wright, N. T. *The Challenge of Jesus.*
Roberts, J. Deotis. *Bonhoeffer And King: Speaking Truth To Power*

Choose one from the following two:
- Lewis, C. S. *The Silver Chair.*
- Buechner, Frederick. *The Sacred Journey.*

C. COURSE ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

✧ **Class Participation:** Students are expected to participate in all class sessions. Missed sessions will generally result in a reduced grade. It is a student’s responsibility to make up work corresponding to missed sessions.

✧ **Regular Study and Assignments – Reading Log:** Students are expected to complete ALL readings and assignments in ADVANCE of the class/topic for which they are listed in the course schedule. Students will maintain and submit by the end of the course a Reading Log reflecting how they have completed reading assignments.
  → Further instructions and a form for this Reading Log will be distributed.
  *The due date for the Reading Log is listed on the course schedule:*

✧ **Three Reflection Papers**

A) Papers – Required Topics
- 1st and 2nd papers: Each student will write a reflection paper on the two following course units, with the **due date for each listed on the course schedule:**
  - The Biblical Story as Life Vision
  - The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth
  → IMPORTANT: Each of these papers is expected to reflect on the chosen topic in light of biblical texts, other readings, and class discussions assigned and scheduled for that unit in the course schedule below. In doing so, each paper should deal with a notable breadth and depth of resources an issues.
- 3rd paper: Each student will write a reflection paper on the course unit of Our Quests for Meaning, especially focusing on Personal Vocation. This paper is **due by the last class period**
  → IMPORTANT: Since this paper serves in place of a final exam, it is expected to integrate a wide breadth and significant depth of course units, assigned scripture texts, assigned readings, and class discussions.

B) Papers – Style and Format
- Style: Written assignments are to be submitted in a clear and effective style of writing in English, including acceptable grammar, correct spelling, and with citations for all material drawn from other sources
- Format: Each paper will run 3 pgs. minimum in length, with 1-inch margins, double-spaced, in a 12-pt font.

C) Papers -- Submission Requirements
- IMPORTANT: All written assignments are to be typed and submitted by e-mail, as described just below. *It is crucial that students meet this requirement from the beginning of the course through to its completion.* Students encountering any
technical problems should contact Augsburg College’s computer assistance service for students immediately.

The typed paper is to be sent as a file attachment to an e-mail message, as per the following steps:

1st – the document of your paper needs to be saved in your word processor in Microsoft Word format – though NOT in MS Word 2007, but rather needs to be saved in MS Word 2003 or earlier format. E.g., do this as follows:
- Go to the equivalent of a “Save As” command
- Then find the equivalent area or field for file formats
- Then access the list of options
- Finally, select the MS Word 2003 format.

2nd – this file is to be attached to your e-mail message, and is to be sent to the Instructor by the due date for this written assignment.

→ Additional instructions for papers may be set forth in class or distributed as relevant

✧ **Student Group Presentations:** All students are expected to participate in small group discussions and presentations as such projects are assigned in class at various points throughout the course. More details will be explained in class and/or distributed.

### D. GRADING

**Weight of Assignments** in final course grade:
- **Class (presence / participation):** 30%
- **Readings – Reading Log:** 25%
- **Three Reflection Papers (together):** 30%
- **Small Group Discussion and Presentation Projects:** 15%

**Grading Guidelines** generally follow such considerations as the following:
- A/4.0 = Excellent work (e.g., generally in a wide range of course elements)
- B/3.0 = Good work (e.g., generally in various course elements)
- C/2.0 = Satisfactory work (e.g., generally in a satisfactory range of course elements)
- D/1.0 = Minimal passable work (e.g., generally in a minimum range of course elements)
- F/0.0 = Insufficient work to receive academic credit or public recognition for having completed this course of study and learning

Note that regardless of weighted percentages mentioned above, failure to complete basic essential requirements (including regular class presence) can amount to not completing the course, which can result in a failing grade for the course.

### E. COMMUNICATIONS AND POLICIES

**Communications**
- **Out-of-class assistance** from the Instructor, by meeting with the student(s) just previous to class meeting times, is available and encouraged – by prior arrangement.
- **E-mail.** Students are strongly encouraged to utilize e-mail for communicating with the Instructor, especially as quickly as possible if questions arise. Also, it is most helpful if e-mails
communicate particular concerns as specifically as possible.

Policies

**Academic Policies:** All Augsburg College academic policies apply to this course.

**Accessibility:** Any student with a documented disability who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations should contact the Instructor and the appropriate Augsburg College disabilities services as soon as possible. Please do not hesitate to submit such a request as needed.

**Student concerns:** If a student has a question regarding an evaluation of her/his work, the student should raise such a concern with the Instructor as soon as possible. It is hoped that this will result in a fair understanding. If a student should then wish to make further appeal, relevant Augsburg College academic policies and procedures must be followed.

**Course Adjustments:** The Instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to this syllabus, course, and schedule as deemed important and/or necessary.

F. COURSE SCHEDULE with Related Topics and Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Unit (Topics)</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 1 – April 8</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Our Quests for Meaning</td>
<td>Read the Syllabus. Bring questions to class. Plan ahead for the activities of this course and completing assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Seeking Meaning</td>
<td>Select and listen to one episode of <em>Being</em>, the NPR show on religion, hosted by Krista Tippet – you can find previous episodes at: <a href="http://being.publicradio.org/programs">http://being.publicradio.org/programs</a> (or by searching online by the key words: [Being, Tippet], possibly plus [NPR])</td>
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<td>– Why Faith Matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Vocation</td>
<td>Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Psm 57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-Religious Conversations</td>
<td>Assignments will be made in class for student group presentations, to be done in class during session 3</td>
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<td>Read – Scriptue texts, with Study Bible notes: Gen 11-12</td>
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<td>Read – Feiler, <em>Abraham</em>:</td>
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<td>- Rock of Abraham; Home</td>
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<td>- Chaps. 1-2 (Birth; Call)</td>
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<td>The Biblical Story as Life Vision</td>
<td>Read – Scriptue texts, with Study Bible notes: Gen 1-2; Matt 5:1-16</td>
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<td>session 2 – April 15 (1 week after last session)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our Quests For Meaning</td>
<td>Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Psms 13; 22; 139; Matt 6:19-34; 15:10-20; 22:34-40; Acts 17:16-34; Rom 12:1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Personal Journeys</td>
<td>Read one of the following:</td>
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<td>– Christian Vocation</td>
<td>– Lewis, <em>Silver Chair</em>, chaps. 1-5</td>
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<td>– Buechner, <em>Sacred Journey</em>, Introduction (pgs. 1-8) and chap. 1 (Below a Time)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-Religious Conversations</td>
<td>Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Gen 1-12; Psms 46; 104; Isa 11:1-10; 42; 53; Matt 4:12–5:20; 5:38–6:18; 12:15-21; 28:16-20</td>
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<td>Read – Feiler, <em>Abraham</em>:</td>
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<td>- Chaps. 4-5 (Isaac; Jews)</td>
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<td>- Chap. 6 (Christians)</td>
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<td>Session 3 – April 29</td>
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| Inter-Religious Conversations  > **Student Group Presentations** | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: John 1; 3; Rom 2-3; 8; 13; 1 Cor 1:18–2:16; Revel 5; 13; 22:1-5  
Read – Feiler, *Abraham*:  
- Chaps. 3, 7 (Ishmael; Muslims)  
- Chap. 8 (Legacy)  
- Blessings |  |
| The Biblical Story as Life Vision | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes – major movements in the biblical story:  
- Creation – Gen 1-2; Psm 104  
- Fall – Gen 3; Isa 1; Rom 2-3  
- Renewal, Israel – Gen 12; Isa 11:1-10; Isa 53  
Read – Wright, *Jesus*, chaps. 3-4 |  |
| The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes:  
2 Sam 7; Isa 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 42; 53; Dan 7  
Matt 1-2; 4:12-17; 5:17-20; 12:15-21  
Luke 2; John 1; Heb 1; Revel 1  
Read – Wright, *Jesus*, chaps. 1-2 |  |

**Session 4 – May 13**

| The Biblical Story as Life Vision | **Reflection Papers** on the course unit *The Biblical Story as Life Vision* are due by class time of session 4  
Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Gen 1; Isa 11:1-10; 42; 53; 61; Amos 5:9  
| Faith in Life and Culture – Foundations of Peace, Justice, and Action  > Assignments will be made in class for student group presentations, to be done in class during session 7 | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes:  
Matt 26-27; John 3; 18-19; Philip 2:1-11; Revel 5  
Read – Wright, *Jesus*, chaps. 3-4 |  |
| The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Prov 3; 8; 139; 2 Tim 3-4  
Read one of the following:  
- Lewis, *Silver Chair*, chaps. 6-10  
- Buechner, *Sacred Journey*, chap. 2 (Upon a Time) |  |
| Our Quests For Meaning – Personal Journeys  – Christian Vocation | Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Matt 28; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1; Revel 1  
Read – Wright, *Jesus*, chap. 6, 7 |  |
| Session 5 – May 20 (1 week after last session) |  |
Faith in Life and Culture – Vision, Ethics, Action, and Transformation


View Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace, contemporary feature film, portraying the life of the German pastor who gave his life in the Nazi resistance movement

Read – Roberts, Truth, chaps. 6-10

Session 6 – June 3

The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth

Reflection Papers on the course unit The Life and Career of Jesus of Nazareth are due by class time of session 6

Our Quests For Meaning

– Personal Journeys
– Christian Vocation

Read one of the following:
– Lewis, Silver Chair, chaps. 11-16
– Buechner, Sacred Journey, chap. 3 (Beyond a Time)

Read – Wright, Jesus, chap. 8

Faith in Life and Culture – Hope in Action Amidst Crisis

Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes: Isa 11:1-10; 53; Matt 24:1-14; Revel 21:1-5; 22:1-5

Read – Roberts, Truth, chaps. 11-14 and Conclusion

Session 7 – June 17

Course Readings

Reading Logs, including for readings assigned for and through session 7, are due by class time of session 7

Our Quests for Meaning

Reflection Papers on Personal Vocation are due by class time of session 7

Faith in Life and Culture – Hope and Action in a Troubled World

Group Presentations

Our Quests For Meaning – Legacies

Read – Scripture texts, with Study Bible notes:
Psms 34; 57; 139

May the blessings of God's renewing shalom be with you!

"The one who was seated on the throne said,
'See, I am making all things new.'"

--Revel 21:5a (NRSV)