

**THINKING THEOLOGICALLY IN THE CHURCH**  
Course Syllabus, © 2007 Laurence H. Kant, All rights reserved  
Spring, 2007, Tu, Th, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

<b>Professor:</b>	Dr. Laurence H. Kant	<b>Office:</b>	209
<b>Phone:</b>	252-1232 (work) 278-3042 (home)	<b>Hours:</b>	Tu, Th 1-3:30 p.m.
<b>E-Mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:dblk2@qx.net">dblk2@qx.net</a>		

*No amount of energy will take the place of thought. A strenuous life with its eyes shut is a kind of wild insanity.* (Henry Van Dyke, *Joy and Power*, 1902)

*Few people think more than two or three times a year; I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking once a week.* (attributed to George Bernard Shaw, 1856-1950)

*Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.* (attributed to Edmund Burke, 1729-1797)

*Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.* (Lorraine Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun*, 1959)

*The unexamined life is not worth living.* (Socrates in Plato's *Apology*; Socrates lived 469-399 B.C.E.; Plato lived c. 429-347 B.C.E)

- A. **PREREQUISITES:** None
- B. **DESCRIPTION:** This course will assist in training students to act as reasoning, thoughtful, and responsible interpreters of scripture, culture, tradition, and experience so that they can help others to live meaningful and purpose-filled lives. Students will begin to think imaginatively and logically and to ask meaningful questions. They will have the opportunity to begin to learn theological thinking skills: recognition, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as used in both explicit and implicit religious contexts. "Thinking Theologically in the Church" will introduce students to the fundamental necessity of theological thinking in their seminary education and in their professional lives as pastors and religious leaders and to apply theological thinking to various activities: conversing, advising, reading, interpreting the Bible, film viewing, interviewing, researching, writing, and meditation and prayer.

**Theme: “A Meaningful Life.”** To achieve course goals, we will focus especially on the way humans assess and evaluate the meaning of their lives. Paying particular attention to those who are in the process of looking back at their lives, we will view people as they strive to make sense of prior events and relationships. We will examine how individuals and communities construe meaning in their day-to-day existence, whether drawing inferences, forming worldviews, making attachments and commitments, learning lessons, developing ideas about God (or even rejecting God), and creating structure and purpose.

**What Is Theological Thinking?** “Theological” can refer to God, a higher power, scripture, doctrine, or organized religion. Such components represent one facet of theological reflection. At the same time, “theological” can also refer to questions of existential significance and the meaning of life, as especially captured by Paul Tillich’s phrase, “matters of ultimate concern.” Further, “theological” pertains to the exploration of the fundamental, sacred forces that underlie, permeate, animate, and nourish all creation. In these two latter categories, “theological” refers to any topic or subject that impinges on a variety of sacred matters: the spiritual depths of human relationships; the profound emotions and thoughts that define everyday life; the centrality of loving kindness as a force for good in the world; reflections on human limitations and mortality; the search for meaning in the tragedy and suffering inherent in human existence; the nobility of human endeavor even in failure; exploration of the human capacity for bodily, intellectual, and spiritual presence; the awareness of holiness in the smallest aspects of our lives; the recognition of sacred spaces and moments; acknowledgement of the sacred feminine and masculine energies that inhabit all creation; the perception of light and energy as transcendent manifestations; a sense of purpose and order in the universe and in life; an awareness of one’s connections to others and to all creation; the recognition of the false cultural narratives that define much of human social and private existence; the occurrences of compassion, empathy and decency among some people; mystic sensibilities; the belief in something greater than oneself, etc.

“Theological thinking” refers to the use of thought, reflection, argumentation, intuition, and imagination in matters of theological concern. Thinking indicates that the individual is using a process that involves careful observation, detailed and logical analysis, the synthesis of diverse data, and the assessment of likely scenarios. High-order “theological thinking” involves integrating diverse components--the intellectual, the intuitive, and the experiential; the metaphysical and the existential; faith and reason; scripture and tradition; the theoretical and the applied; logic/reason and prayer/meditation organized religion and individual spirituality, etc. Fundamentally, “theological thinking” indicates that the practitioner is using his or her intellectual and integrative faculties to make intelligent, independent interpretations and judgements of meaningful events in the world.

In the final analysis, “theological thinking” is also tied to action, in that reflection and thought must lead to some kind of movement of energy in the world. Only when tied to an active purpose can thought affect the world in positive and meaningful ways. That is why student reflection needs to move beyond the classroom. Through two assignments in this course and through field education, students will have an opportunity to think through some of these topics in a more applied fashion.

**Presumptions:** Students should understand that theological thinking in this course presumes the Enlightenment assumption of the existence of a reality external to particular individuals and groups, as well as the presence of elements of a common human nature. At the same time, theological thinking also appreciates the Postmodern insight that one must first examine human embodiment and cultural specificity before extrapolating any general truths about human experience. While rejecting the radical relativism of some recent thinkers, the course strives to model the centrality and value of diversity and pluralism in both local and global contexts.

C. **CLASS PROCEDURES:**

*Traveler, there is no road. You make the road by walking.*  
(Antonio Machado, 1875-1939)

Class time will consist of both short lectures by the professor and sustained conversations. The format will be that of a graduate seminar, with extensive give-and-take between the professor and students. This will include a **Socratic form of dialogue**, in which the instructor directly engages individual students, and groups of students, with questions (often difficult ones) to which the students must respond.

The professor expects students to engage in theological questioning and thinking. Active participation is crucial and presumed. Reading materials prior to class, the willingness to think under pressure, and the capacity to communicate in a clear and persuasive manner are all important. Informed debate is part of the process. Disagreeing with one another and the professor is perfectly acceptable and encouraged, as long as we all maintain civility and mutual respect and engage in thoughtful discourse.

**Students should have read all books and essays, and viewed all films, before the beginning of the class period, in which we are discussing that text or movie.** When discussion of a book or film extends over two class periods, students must complete the reading or viewing assignment before the beginning of the first class period. Books are all available from Cokesbury, while both books and films are available on the Bosworth Memorial Library reserve shelf. When viewing films in another language, make sure that the English subtitles are turned to the “on” position.

Since this is a graduate course, the professor does not give lectures that simply reiterate or paraphrase the information found in the books. Instead, the classroom should function as a place for guidance, clarification, experimentation, and practice. At the same time, most learning should optimally take place outside the classroom as students study and converse with one another. We are adults, and the most important thing for adults to learn here is **to learn how to learn**. The professor is ideally your guide and mentor. Information is readily available from encyclopedia articles, books, videos, or even lectures, but not everyone has the opportunity to learn to think, study, do serious research, and make intelligent judgements on his or her own. One of the essential tools that students should expect to acquire at a seminary, if they have not already, is this: **Learn to be independent, self-starting theological thinkers and learners.**

The concept of independent learning ties in with another procedure. If students have questions or inquiries, do not understand a reading, find an assignment confusing, or need clarifications on any other matters (dates, grading, etc.), the student should consult the professor. This can take place during class time or outside of class (during a break, in the hallway, in the office, or over the telephone). This is the only way that the professor can know what assistance students might need.

Remember what Paul said: “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ; I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.” (1 Cor 3:1-2, NRSV). This course presumes that students are “ready for solid food.”

**Advice:** Let go of your preconceptions and open yourselves to a different way of viewing the world. Working hard will increase your comfort level and your confidence. Allow yourselves to think in a way that may not come naturally. You may find the results surprisingly positive.

**Collaborative Learning:** Each person will pick a partner and will work with that partner on two of the five assignments to produce joint papers. Each of these assignments is labeled **COLLABORATIVE**. Collaborative projects are an essential component of ministry and lay leadership. Most students will eventually work in contexts where no single individual obtains personal credit for a project. This is an opportunity to begin to obtain a crucial skill.

The assignments must reflect the contributions of both students. Each participant in these assignments must read the relevant texts (G6 below), involve themselves in the interview (G4 below), and participate in the writing process. Contributions may include research, note taking, question formulation, analysis, oral components of an interview, etc.. Students should compare their own responses to, and impressions of, texts and interviews and include any salient differences in their papers. For example, if two students have a different understanding of a particular text or interview component, the paper should include both points of view and some kind of analysis of the divergent reasoning.

**D. COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students will:

- 1) Begin to read actively, critically, and thoughtfully.
- 2) Begin to converse in an intelligible and rational manner about difficult and painful subjects (the art of conversation).
- 3) Learn to ask insightful, illuminating, and thought-provoking questions
- 4) Begin to think theologically about philosophical texts, literature (novels, short stories, plays, and poems), films, and biblical texts.
- 5) Begin to treat learning and study as spiritual disciplines;
- 6) Be able to write papers that display the rudiments of theological thinking.
- 7) Learn to do some research and a basic annotated bibliography.
- 9) Engage in thoughtful debate about a particular topic.
- 10) Begin to connect life experience with theological questions and problems.
- 11) Begin to understand the relationship among diverse disciplines of theological study.
- 12) Recognize that religious leadership demands continual thinking, hard work, and voracious reading.
- 13) Begin to learn to work collaboratively on projects

**E. REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS**

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima*

Marcus Aurelius, *The Emperor's Handbook (The Meditations)*

Miriam Engelberg, *Cancer Made Me a Shallower Person*

Ian McEwan, *Atonement*

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Nuala O'Faolain, *Are You Somebody?: The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman*

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*

An NRSV Study Bible (e.g. Oxford, HarperCollins, New Interpreters)

William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed.

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*

We will use two additional texts: 1) an essay by Stephen Asma on the difference between American students and those in the Third World--"Lessons Taught, and Learned, in Phnom Penh"; and 2) James Joyce's short story, "The Dead," from *Dubliners*.

### **REQUIRED FILMS FOR VIEWING**

*Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, 1987)  
*Blue* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993)  
*Born Into Brothels* (Zana Briski, 2004)  
*Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004)  
*Ikiru* (Akira Kurosawa, 1952)  
*Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000)  
*Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001)  
*Ordet* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1955)  
*The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957)  
*Sunshine* (Istvan Szabo, 1999)  
*Waking Life* (Richard Linklater, 2001)

F. **RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND READINGS:** TBA  
Nancey Murphy, *Reason and Rhetoric in Religion*

G. **ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS:**

**1) All papers will explicitly cite at least five foundational questions that the author (or authors) have used in their analysis.**

Foundational questions share certain crucial components: i) They focus on what, how, why, where and when (not yes/no); ii) they address specific issues (not vague generalities); iii) They address a topic or issue of significance (i.e. Who Cares?); iv) they are based on careful observation and listening; v) they are stimulating and encourage one to ask further questions; and vi) they lead to new and original ways of examining a topic.

**2) Except for the final paper, students may submit rewrites of papers. The submission should include the original paper and the revised paper. Students receiving a "B-" or below on an assignment could potentially raise their grade to a "B." The professor will return these papers with minimal comments.**

**3) Attendance and informed class participation** are required. **Informed class participation** refers primarily to two categories of contribution: a) the effort that students make in reading texts and seeing films, bringing the requisite materials to class, thinking about them before class, and communicating that knowledge in the classroom; b) participation in class discussion by asking good questions, making intelligent and insightful comments, offering thoughtful arguments and comments, providing useful information, and listening to others attentively and respectfully. Quality of oral communication, not quantity, equates with the excellence. **Poor performance in this area can lead to the a substantial diminution of the final grade. Exemplary attendance and class participation can significantly increase the final grade.**

4) **Students will take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This will help the instructor to assess the learning styles of students in order to conduct the course in as effective a way as possible. This is not a test, but simply an instrument to assist the instructor. Completed MBTI answer sheets are due by February 13.**

5) **Students will complete an annotated bibliography in which students develop bibliographic resources (in the Bosworth Memorial Library, the University of Kentucky, and on the World Wide Web) and offer brief summaries and analysis of the various texts under consideration.** Students have two options here: either to compose an annotated bibliography on a subject related to this course or to pick a subject for a paper in another course. Students may meet with the following members of the library staff for advice: Tim Browning, Charlie Heaberlin, Robert Howard, Barbara Pfeifle. **This paper should be approximately five pages in length and is due February 22. Entries should be detailed enough for a relatively full description of each item (probably six to eight sentences in one paragraph).** Entries will include a summary of the contents, a description of the argument, as well as an analysis and evaluation of the argument as it pertains to the student's topic and the subject matter of the course. Evaluation of the bibliography will be based upon the quality of the entries, as well as the caliber and relevance of the references selected by the student. **This is worth 15 percent of the final grade.**

6) **Students will summarize the contents of a book or film, analyze its themes and arguments, present its theological worldview, and evaluate that theological worldview in approximately five pages.** For an understanding of "theological worldview, please see "What is Theological Thinking?" above. "Summary" does not mean a precise recitation of every single component of a text or film, but rather a selective encapsulation that reflects thoughtful decisions about what is most important to include. "Summary" and "analysis" do not have to exist in separate sections, but may occur in an integrated format in the same section. **This is due March 8.** Anyone who does not receive a grade of "B-" or above will be required to rewrite their paper. They will then resubmit their paper (along with the original paper) to the instructor. Those who resubmit can receive no higher than a "B" on this assignment. **This is worth 15 percent of the grade.**

7) **COLLABORATIVE: Analysis and Brief Argument: Students will construct an analysis of Galatians 2:1-14 and Acts 15:1-35 (no more than five pages) and then propose a brief one-to two-page argument defending the student's historical reconstruction of the event discussed (or "Council of Jerusalem"). The analysis should consist of a thorough and detailed list of the similarities and differences in the two accounts, with a summative analysis of the data. The argument should utilize this information to develop a coherent and persuasive case for whatever position the student takes. This is worth 20 percent of the grade and is due April 3.** See "Collaborative Learning" above on p. 3 for further information.

**8) COLLABORATIVE. Students must interview at least twice someone who has experienced suffering in a profound way or someone who works with such people.**

This does not include members or facilitators of self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Al-Anon. It can include the following kinds of individuals or those who work with them: those who have experienced, or are in the midst of, a serious or terminal illness; combat veterans; civilian survivors of war and organized violence; victims of natural disasters; victims of spousal or child abuse; victims of crime (including hate crimes); those who have experienced the death of a child, a spouse, or a parent at a young age; the homeless the elderly in nursing homes; parents of autistic or terminally ill children; etc. **Students may consult Dr. Steve Monhollen or Dr. David Sharrard for advice on possible interviewees and for the interviewing process. Students will write a paper on this experience of approximately five to seven pages that will present a summary of the interview, an analysis of the themes and arguments that emerge from it, a description of the theological worldview of the subject, and an evaluation of that worldview. Students will attempt to do this in a coherent, rational, and clear fashion.** By way of reflection, students will include brief analysis of at least one book and one film. **This paper is due April 19. This is worth 20 percent of the final grade.** See “Collaborative Learning” above on p. 3 for further information.

**9) Students will write a final paper on one of the following two topics:**

a) You are a minister in a congregation or a lay leader. An earthquake occurs in which many adults and children are killed. One couple who lost all three of their children is depressed and angry. After a period of six months, the husband and wife come to you and say that life has no meaning, that God has failed, and that there is no point in continuing to live. What can you say that will explain what has happened and will relieve their pain? What possible meaning is there in a life that produces such sorrow and grief? That same couple talks with their friends and family. Other congregants begin to ask you the same questions. They want to know why they’re going to church and what possible solace a God can give, a God who allows such anguish, misery, and random horror. A crisis erupts and the entire congregation begins to doubt the value of scripture, church, and theology. Drawing on your readings, film viewing, and interviews, you will present an argument that can persuade congregants of the value of the Christian message. You may do this in the form of a letter, speech, sermon, class lecture, letter, or essay, but you must show your ability to think logically, analytically, and synthetically. You will need to draw on your readings, your film viewing, and your interviews as you begin to construct a theological worldview that is clear, makes sense, is imaginative, and shows the depth of your understanding of the human condition. You will demonstrate how the Gospel gives meaning to our existential situation. You should also suggest several action items that describe concrete activities for implementation. These activities will help your community to go through the grieving process, integrate that grief, and move on to function on an even higher spiritual plane. Remember: exhortation and comfort are important elements, but for this exercise you must emphasize reason, logic, intuition]



rooted in knowledge, argumentation, imagination, and theological thought. Explanations and strong cases have a way of lasting with parishioners. Assume that your audience can think critically and theologically.

b) You are a minister in a congregation or a lay leader. Much of your community depends upon a factory that has just closed to move to another part of the world where labor is less expensive. After a period of six months, one couple comes to you depressed and angry. They have insufficient funds to feed their children, to purchase health insurance, and to pay their mortgage. The husband and wife come to you and say that life has no meaning, that God has failed, and that there is no point in continuing to live. What can you say that will explain what has happened and will relieve their pain? What possible meaning is there in a life that produces such sorrow and grief? That same couple talks with their friends and family. Other congregants begin to ask you the same questions. They want to know why they're going to church and what possible solace a God can give, a God who allows such anguish, misery, and injustice. A crisis erupts and the entire congregation begins to doubt the value of scripture, church, and theology. In fact, they view these as frivolities in a world of relentless pain. Drawing on your readings, film viewing, and interviews, you will present an argument that can persuade congregants of the value of the Christian message. You may do this in the form of a letter, speech, sermon, class lecture, letter, or essay, but you must show your ability to think logically, analytically, and synthetically. You will need to draw on your readings, your film viewing, and your interviews as you begin to construct a theological worldview that is clear, makes sense, is imaginative, and shows the depth of your understanding of the human condition. You will demonstrate how the Gospel gives meaning to our existential situation. You should also suggest several action items that describe concrete activities for implementation. These activities will help your community to go through the grieving process, integrate that grief, and move on to function on an even higher spiritual plane. Remember: exhortation and comfort are important elements, but for this exercise you must emphasize reason, logic, intuition rooted in knowledge, argumentation, imagination, and theological thought. Explanations and strong cases have a way of lasting with parishioners. Assume that your audience can think critically and theologically.

**This paper will make extensive reference to the readings, film-viewing, interviews, and scriptural references in the course. You may use your knowledge of scripture from other courses as well. It should be no more than 10-12 pages and is due May 3. This is worth 30 percent of the final grade.**

10) We will have an **IN-CLASS DEBATE** on a topic TBA on **May 8**. This will factor into the class participation of the grade.

- H. **GRADES:** Grades follow the standard numerical breakdowns (93-100 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B; 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+; 73-76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 67-69 = D+; 63-66 = D; 60-62 = D=; 0-59 = F). “A/A-” means work of the highest quality and is a very difficult grade to achieve. A satisfactory grade is somewhere between a “B-“ and a “C+.” Anything “C+” and below means passable work, but of low quality. “F” indicates that the student did not meet the requirements of the course by not attending a sufficient number of classes, by not submitting passable work, and/or by failing to submit all work. Grades are based on work at a graduate level.

**The ability to write with clarity, correct grammar and syntax, correct spelling and punctuation, good communication skills, some style, and in an organized fashion, is essential. In written assignments, students must also demonstrate the capacity to think on their own and generate their own coherent and convincing arguments. Where appropriate, students must further display research skills such as the following: intelligent use of secondary literature, thoughtful sifting of data, and deft handling of footnotes. Grades will in part reflect student writing skills. Remember also: GOOD WRITING IS AN EDITORIAL PROCESS that almost always involves multiple drafts and rewrites.**

**Students should realize the importance of writing for their careers in ministry and in other religious professions. For example, writing an application for a position requires good writing skills. Ministers and others will have to write correspondence, sermons, newsletters, pastoral letters and essays, etc. Recipients will expect you to have the ability to communicate clearly, succinctly, imaginatively, and in an organized fashion.**

**If students are uncertain about their writing, the professor strongly encourages them to see Dr. Margie Ralph, the Director of the Writing Center, for assistance. The professor may also decide to recommend that certain students see Dr. Ralph, in which case the student is obligated to see Dr. Ralph.**

**Everyone should read and always have near their computer William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.). I also recommend that everyone read Deborah Core, *The Seminary Student Writes*. It will not only help students in this course, but in others at LTS as well.**

**For assistance with editing papers, students should consult someone with good writing skills. An on-line service that some institutions of higher education use is Smarthinking ([www.smarthinking.com](http://www.smarthinking.com)), available to individuals for a reasonable fee.**

I. **ABSENCES:** Class attendance is essential. Unexcused absences will result in automatic lowering of the student's grade at the discretion of the instructor. Excused absences (which do not include circumstances over which one has personal control) are allowed, but three or more absences may lead to lowering of the grade at the discretion of the instructor. **Please do not telephone the instructor about an impending class absence or a prior class absence, but send an e-mail describing the situation.**

J. **OTHER POLICIES:**

- **Assignment Due Dates:** All assignments are due on the dates listed. Late assignments will receive a significant reduction in grade at the discretion of the professor.
- **Paper Format:** Turabian style or the University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 15th ed., is preferred; most important is **consistency** of citation.
- **Cell Phones:** Cell phones should be turned OFF or put on silent mode during class.
- **Inclusive Language:** Students should be aware of the Inclusive Language Policy of LTS and adhere to it in their class discussions and written materials.
- **Respect:** In classroom discussion, participants should show respect to one another by listening and paying attention before speaking.
- **Integrity:** For papers and exams, please adhere to the rules of honesty and integrity as outlined in the Student Handbook policies on cheating and plagiarism. Serious breaches of ethics may result in class failure and/or suspension or expulsion from the seminary. Needless to say, LTS expects students, as potential pastors and religious leaders, to adhere the highest ethical and moral standards.

K. **DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:** Lexington Theological Seminary complies with the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you believe you have a condition which will require accommodation, please refer to the *Student Handbook* and follow the procedures outlined. Please review this syllabus carefully and make an appointment with the professor to discuss any assignment for which you believe you will need accommodation according to the arrangements made with the dean.

L. **CLASS SCHEDULE** (The professor reserves the right to alter this schedule or assignment, if learning needs or time constraints require it)

January 25

Introduction

January 30

James Joyce, "The Dead"

Plato, *Euthyphro*

February 1

Plato, *Crito*, *Apology*

February 6

Continue discussion of Plato

February 8

*Ikiru*

February 13

Marcus Aurelius, *Emperor's Handbook (The Meditations)*

**MBTI answer sheets due**

February 15

*Sunshine*

February 20

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

February 22

*Mulholland Drive*

**Annotated Bibliography due**

February 27: Argument

Steven Asma, "Lessons Taught, and Learned, in Phnom Penh"

Weston, *Rulebook*, Chapters 1-5

March 1: Argument (cont.)

March 6

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima*

*Waking Life*

March 8

*Blue*

**Paper analyzing and summarizing a book or film due**

March 20

*Ordet*

March 22

*Atonement*

March 27: Argument

Weston, *Rulebook*, Chapters 6-10

March 29: Argument (cont.)

April 3: Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal

**Argument paper due**

April 5:

*Seventh Seal*

April 10

*Crash*

April 12

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

April 17

*Babette's East*

April 19: Discussion of Interview Paper

*Cancer Made Me A Shallower Person*

**Paper due reflecting on your interview experience outside of class**

April 26

*Mememto*

May 1

*Memento*

*Born Into Brothels*

May 3

*Are You Somebody?*

**Final Paper Due**

May 8

Debate