

Critical Reflections:  
Ignatian Pedagogy, Online Course Design, and Literature of the End of the World

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### **Background: Reflections on Ignatian Values in the Context of Mentoring Relationships**

In the Fall of 2019, my first semester as a Xavier University faculty member, I had the opportunity to join the Ignatian Mentoring Program and the privilege of learning from, collaborating with, and building community and camaraderie with my Ignatian mentor Jenny Tighe. At our lunch meetings, we discussed Ignatian pedagogy and Jesuit values; our teaching interests, challenges, and useful strategies; and perhaps most importantly, our backgrounds, families, passions, and lives. Once assigned online classes for the Summer and Fall of 2020 as part of my maternity leave package, Jenny also shared her expertise and experiences teaching in online environments. We began to focus on integrating Ignatian pedagogy in an online learning environment. Jenny's emphasis on knowing and caring for the whole person, on reflection, and on solidarity and kinship at our lunch meetings helped set the stage for my online course design that similarly privileges these Ignatian values.

### **Literature and the Moral Imagination: Apocalypses and Revelations**

#### ***Overview***

Literature and the Moral Imagination is a sophomore-level English course that fulfills the Core Curriculum's Ethics/Religion and Society requirement. This course encourages students to examine and explore personal and social ethical issues through literature, and each course focuses on a particular topic. I decided to center my online class on Apocalypses and Revelations. As a class, we will read apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic short fiction to examine what these texts reveal about society, history and the present, the human condition, and human nature. We will specifically focus on issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and the environment.

As a class, we will explore varying definitions of apocalypse; consider how apocalyptic events (real and imagined) offer critical knowledge and understanding and, at times, hope and new beginnings; and reflect on our own lived experiences through the lenses offered to us from apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction.

My online Literature and the Moral Imagination: Apocalypses and Revelations course is divided into six engaging modules, each centered on particular concepts and questions. Below, I have provided a brief overview of each module and describe how Ignatian pedagogy has guided my decisions in course content and structure.

#### ***Modules***

Module 1, titled "It's the End of the World as We Know It': Definitions of Apocalypse," familiarizes students with various definitions of "apocalypse," the potential revelations apocalypses expose, and common characteristics of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction.

Module 2, "Looking to Entertainment for Truths: What Do Apocalypses Reveal?" continues our exploration of how writers of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature use genre conventions and thematic concerns to comment on contemporary events, with particular emphases on literary representations of race, ethnicity, gender, and class issues.

Module 3, “Looking in the Ruins for Hope: What Do Apocalypses Reveal?” further expands our hypothesis that apocalyptic events reveal important and often unacknowledged truths, and we will consider how post-apocalyptic readings offer hope to both characters and readers.

Module Four, “Holding on to Humanity: Is Survival Enough?” focuses on the differences between survival and thriving, and we will question if survival in post-apocalyptic worlds and in our own world is “enough.”

Module Five, “Why Are Communities Important?” asks students to reflect on the importance of building and maintaining communities in real and imagined post-apocalyptic worlds, as well as in our daily lives.

Module Six, titled “New Beginnings: Rebuilding after the Apocalypse,” focuses on rebuilding efforts in real and imagined post-apocalyptic worlds, and students will reflect on the importance and challenges of rebuilding after an apocalyptic event.

### ***Ignatian Pedagogy through the Critical Crafting of Assignments***

My incorporation of Ignatian pedagogy corresponds to my use of technology to engage students with course content and to assess their learning. Below, I have included brief descriptions of major assignments as a means of illustrating my use of Ignatian pedagogy. In addition to the assignments discussed below, students also contribute to weekly word clouds on assigned readings and complete online quizzes and other informal assignments to further engage with the material and to demonstrate critical thinking on course material.

### **Discussion Posts and Responses**

Students will complete multiple discussion posts and responses throughout the summer session. I ask students to make connections between imagined literary representations, their own lived experiences, and current events and to consider ethical questions concerning race, ethnicity, gender, class, et cetera. One prompt, for instance, asks students to discuss the privatization and commodification of water in Paolo Bacigalupi’s “The Tamarisk Hunter” and to relate this fictional representation to Nestle’s commodification of water in Michigan and its impact on indigenous groups, economically disadvantaged communities, and the environment. Discussion posts and students’ responses to their peers’ posts allow for solidarity and kinship in an online course, and by providing open-ended prompts that allow students to choose their ultimate focus and approach, I aim to encourage students’ “responsibility and independence,” an important aspect of Ignatian pedagogy that contributes to the challenging, rigorous, and personally fulfilling nature of students’ education at a Jesuit university (“Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy”).

### **Digital Mind Maps**

Students are also asked to create digital mind maps using the web site *MindMeister*. These assignments engage students in course content and encourage critical thinking and creativity. One mind map based on Richard Kadrey’s “Still Life with Apocalypse” and Christopher Barzak’s “A Beginner’s Guide to Survival Before, During, and After the Apocalypse,” for instance, focuses on the tools, activities, items, relationships, interactions, et cetera needed for a person or community to survive and/or thrive in a post-apocalyptic world. Students will share their maps and comment on their peers’ creations. The blending of web technologies and independent and collaborative work allows students to think critically about the assigned literary texts, our course concepts, and their own lived experiences—rigorous and challenging tasks undoubtedly—engagingly and reflectively.

### **Midterm Paper**

In lieu of a traditional midterm exam, students write a midterm paper that facilitates synthesis and analysis of primary and secondary texts. Students are asked to consider how writers—Junot Díaz in “Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal,” Octavia Butler in “Speech Sounds,” and Ann Aguirre in “Foundation”—define “ruins,” and how their texts offer hope. This emphasis on the hope offered to readers of post-apocalyptic fiction and to witnesses of apocalyptic events, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, allows personal reflection and discernment, as well as an “attentiveness, reverence, and devotion to reveal truths and wisdom.” Students are asked to think critically, to synthesize and analyze material from fiction and nonfiction texts, and to cite sources ethically, all of which makes this assignment “challenging and rigorous” and encourages students’ “responsibility and independence” (“Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy”).

### **Creative, Research-Based Project**

Students’ creative, research-based group project, drawn from Assistant Professor of Sociology Alia R. Tyner-Mullings’s assignment titled “Rebuilding after the Apocalypse,” is interdisciplinary in nature and encourages students to collaborate, think critically and creatively, reflect on social issues and institutions, and apply the ideas we have focused on in our emphasis on real and imagined apocalyptic events and post-apocalyptic worlds. I have selected and revised two out of four of Tyner-Mullings’s assignments in this project: a newspaper and a proposal for the rebuilding of a social institution. The newspaper, to be completed during Week 5, will consist of a research-based news article discussing how a particular social issue caused or contributed to an imagined apocalyptic event and two group-selected texts commonly found in newspapers. The proposal, which students will work on in the sixth week of the course, communicates the group’s plan to rebuild a self-selected social institution.

This multi-part group project fulfills the principles of Ignatian pedagogy in multiple regards. For instance, it nurtures solidarity and kinship while also embracing “the unique qualities of each student” as students can use their strengths and interests to contribute in important ways to the newspaper and proposal. Further, this project is “challenging and rigorous” and “interdisciplinary,” “makes use of novel teaching methods and technologies,” “encourages student responsibility,” and “emphasizes eloquentia perfecta,” the latter in various genres of composition. Significantly, this collaborative, multi-part assignment also “encourages students to discern what is truly good for themselves and society through a process of discernment” (“Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy”).

### **Conclusion**

I look forward to teaching two sections of this course in the Summer of 2020 and of expanding and rethinking this course for the Fall of 2020. Designing this course with the support and guidance of my Ignatian mentor Jenny has contributed to my development as a student-centered educator at a Jesuit university who is committed to caring for and “educating the whole person, promoting the common good, and serving others”; perhaps, most importantly, I truly believe my course will contribute to Xavier University students’ growth as “people of learning and reflection, integrity and achievement, in solidarity and with others” (“Xavier’s Vision and Mission Statements”), and I am grateful to the Ignatian Mentoring Program for the opportunity to reflect on and incorporate Ignatian Pedagogy in my teaching.

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### **Works Cited**

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