

Theo 7220: Christian Ethics
North Park Theological Seminary
Spring 2013

Tuesdays/Thursdays 1-2:15pm

(3 credit hours, Prerequisites: Theo 6330 or Theo 5330, *Syllabus subject to minor changes)

Instructor:

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Catalogue Description: An introduction to the methods and topics of moral reflection and action in their biblical, historical and theological context. The course focuses on new life in Christ as embodied in the church for the world.

Additional Description: Paul says in II Corinthians 5:17-19, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” New life in Christ is based on the gift of faith and the life and work of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated in the event of being baptized into the body of believers and manifest in an ongoing life of faith. New life in Christ includes the experience of God’s love and forgiveness; it includes the practices of love and justice as central to Christian moral formation; it includes drawing from scripture and the tradition to help us live creatively. This course will use the framework of new life in Christ and the church’s ministry of reconciliation to explore Christian ethics as both Christian formation and the church’s response to “the least of these,” including widows, orphans, children, aliens, prisoners, the sick, the hungry, the poor, and the thirsty (Matt. 25).

The themes of the course will be presented and discussed in light of the gifts of scripture and the traditions of the church including the sacraments, the rhythms of liturgy and worship, and our life together.

Texts

1. Bible, NRSV.
2. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, Samuel Wells (Brazos Press: 2004). ISBN: 1587430711. (Read chapters 1-10)
3. *Augustine’s Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: 1991). ISBN: 0192817744. (Read books I-X)
4. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Miroslav Volf (Eerdmans: 2006). ISBN: 0802829899 (Read chapters 1-10)
5. *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians*, Julie Hanlon Rubio (Georgetown, 2010). ISBN: 9781589016392.
6. *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*, Lisa Sowle Cahill (Fortress: 1994). ISBN: 9780800627003.

7. *My Name is Child of God...Not "Those People": A First Person Look at Poverty*, Julia Dinsmore (Fortress: 2007). ISBN: 9780806656243.
8. *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus*, Allen Verhey (Eerdmans: 2011), ISBN: 9780802866721.
9. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, M. Daniel Carroll R., forward by Samuel Rodríguez (Baker Academic: 2008). ISBN: 0801035661. (Read all)
10. Additional articles on moodle.

Assignments

1. **Preparation and participation** (10%). Come to class having done the reading and prepared to discuss material. There will be days when I assign informal writing exercises – those will be collected but not graded. Last, we will make a field trip to the Juvenile Detention Center – two options will be available and one is part of the required participation.
2. **Lenten Discipline and Reflection Paper** (15%). Choose a discipline that you will take up over the season of Lent. In a paragraph, describe the parameters of how you will practice this discipline throughout the season. **(Due: 1/31)** Reflect on your Lenten Discipline. In your reflection, include the paragraph you submitted on 1/31 and answer the following questions: What habit(s) were you hoping to cultivate? Toward the end of what virtue? How would you connect your discipline with the season of Lent? How does this take shape in the season of Easter or what was your experience of Easter in light of your discipline? What did you learn? Why is the liturgical season important for Christian Ethics, or not? (Note: Your instructor thinks it is very important!) Guidelines: 1000-1200 words, **Due 4/12**.
3. **Essays** (20% each). Write three essays that integrate the reading, lectures, and critical/creative thinking. See Schedule for prompts. Guidelines: 1000-1200 words in length; double spaced, 12 point font please!, minimal (if any) footnotes as this is not a research paper. Submit through moodle. **Due dates: 2/15, 3/7, 5/3**.
4. **Debate** (15%). Work with a group of 5 classmates to construct an argument in debate style on the topic of death/dying or peace/just war. You will have a format (details) to follow, and each person in the group must present at some point during the debate. During the debate that you are not participating, you will serve as judge. Grading will be based on preparation, presentation, and strength of argument. Nothing written needs to be turned in. **Due dates 3/26 OR 4/4**.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS: PLEASE POST ASSIGNMENTS ON MOODLE UNDER THE WEEK THEY ARE DUE. DO NOT EMAIL ASSIGNMENTS TO ME. YOU MAY ALSO TURN ASSIGNMENTS IN AS HARD COPY IN CLASS OR IN MY CAMPUS MAILBOX. ALL COMMENTS WILL BE RETURNED THROUGH MOODLE GRADEBOOK.

Policies

Grading in this course will follow the standards of the *Student Academic Handbook*, which sets A as the mark for exceptional or excellent work, B as the mark for meritorious or above average work, C as the mark for “work that is without marked merit or marked defect” in fulfilling the assignment, D as the mark for deficient work that nonetheless partially fulfills the assignment, and F as the mark for no work or for work that does not even partially fulfill

the assignment. Academic dishonesty will produce failure on a given assignment or failure of the entire course.

Absences beyond the third will lower your course grade. Students who miss more than six class sessions should not expect to pass the course. Make every effort to notify an instructor ahead of time about any absence. Being habitually late is both discourteous and poor training for ministry. Students who are consistently tardy should expect a grade penalty.

Late Papers. Students may have a one week extension on one paper without grade penalty. All other late papers will be reduced one letter grade per day.

North Park Theological Seminary provides services for students with documented disabilities to ensure equal access to programs, services, facilities, and activities. Students with a disability who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Seminary Academic Services as soon as possible. If desired or necessary, discussion pertaining to documentation and accommodation can take place at another suitable location or by telephone. Further information about the American Disabilities Act Services is found in the Student Academic Handbook.

Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 15, 17)

Topic: Baptism, Identity, and Why Do Ethics?

Reading: Augustine's *Confessions* (Bks I-II)

Week 2 (Jan. 22, 24)

Topic: Scripture, Conversion, Good & Evil

Reading: Augustine's *Confessions* (Bks. III-IX)

Week 3 (Jan. 29, 31)

Topic: Improvisation, Story and Ethics

Reading: Wells, *The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Parts 1 & 2)

DUE Lenten Discipline Paragraph Description: Thursday, 1/31.

Week 4 (Feb. 5, 7)

NO CLASSES (Covenant midwinter conference)

Week 5 (Feb. 12, 14) Ash Wednesday

Topic: Sin & Forgiveness, Memory & Forgetfulness

Reading: Augustine's *Confessions* (Bk. X); Volf, *End of Memory* (Parts One and Two)

DUE Essay 1: Friday, 2/15 .

Respond to this thesis: “Memories of suffered wrongs will not come to the minds of the citizens of the world to come, for in it they will perfectly enjoy God and one another in God.” In your response, you must utilize both Augustine and Volf, and you must argue either for or against the thesis, and support your position with themes discussed in class, good theology, and creative thinking.

Week 6 (Feb. 19, 21) Season of Lent

Topic: “I was hungry and you gave me food...thirsty and you gave me something to drink...naked and you clothed me...”

Reading: Dinsmore, *My Name is Child of God* (all)

Week 7 (Feb. 26, 28) Season of Lent

Topic: “I was in prison and you visited me.”

Reading: Begin Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying*.

FRIDAY, MAR. 1: Field Trip to Juvenile Detention Center, 8:45am-1:30pm. Meet in front of the library at 8:35am sharp. Bring photo ID and dress business casual (no jeans, no dresses/skirts).

Week 8 (Mar. 5, NO CLASS Mar. 7) Season of Lent

Topic: Discussion of Juvenile Detention field trip.

DUE Essay 2: Thurs. 3/7.

Choose one of the social topics listed below and write a newsletter for your church or article for your nonprofit organization. You must address power and privilege in some way in your essay. You may formulate it in terms of a question within the topic or you may write more generally. Your essay should be written from the standpoint of theological ethics, meaning that you employ theological and ethical categories to discuss your topic (as opposed to biblical exegesis, law, scientific data, etc.). Topic Options: mass incarceration, immigration, environmental ethics, or poverty.

Week 9 (Mar. 12, 14) Season of Lent

NO CLASSES, SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (Mar. 19, 21)

Topic: “I was sick and you took care of me...”

Reading: Verhey *Christian Art of Dying*; Therese Lysaught “Anointing of the Sick” (pdf article available on moodle)

Week 11 (Mar. 26, NO CLASS Mar. 28) Holy Week

Reading: Cahill, *Love Your Enemies* (chaps 1-7)

DUE Debate Death/Dying: Tuesday 3/26.

Week 12 (Apr. 2, 4) Season of Easter

Topic: Nations, Sheeps, and Goats

Reading: Cahill, *Love Your Enemies* (chaps 8-11)

DUE Debate Just War/Pacifism: Thurs. 4/4

Week 13 (Apr. 9, 11) Season of Easter

Topic: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."

Reading: Carroll, *Christians at the Border* (all)

DUE Lention Reflection Paper: Fri. 4/12.

Week 14 (Apr. 16, 18) Season of Easter

Topic: Sex and Gender

Reading: Hanlon Rubio, *Family Ethics* (part 1)

Week 15 (Apr. 23, 25) Season of Easter

Topic: Marriage and Celibacy as Vocation

Reading: Heinz on celibacy and singleness (moodle); Hanlon Rubio (part II)

Week 16 (Apr. 30, May 2) Season of Easter

Topic: Open

Reading: Matzko McCarthy (2 articles, moodle); Optional articles on children, widows, barrenness.

DUE Essay 3: Fri., 5/3.

Write on ONE of the following essay questions:

- A. A single woman in your congregation has almost completed the screening process for adoption. The chair of the family ministries committee comes to your office to talk about it. Sam says "Pastor, you know that God intends for children to have a mother and a father. I don't think we should support the creation of single parent families." Write out your response in a position paper for the entire family ministries committee.
- B. A barren couple comes to you seeking advice. How do you counsel them? What kind of support do you offer? What recommendations do you give regarding medical intervention?

- C. You hear that a popular senior high volunteer youth leader is living with his girlfriend and sees no problem with it. What do you think about that? Write a letter to the volunteer that clarifies the church's teaching on this matter, and your own thinking and response to the situation.
- D. Choose a current ethical topic and write about it. Utilize the course readings.

Week 17 (May 7) Season of Easter/Ascension May 9

Topic: Reconciliation and Peace

Reading : Volf, *End of Memory* (Part Three); Augustine's *Confessions* (Bks. 11-13)