

Theo 5130: Christian Ethics
North Park Theological Seminary
Fall 2017
Thursdays 1:30-4:15 pm
(3 credit hours)

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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.” (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. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, Samuel Wells (Brazos Press: 2004), ISBN: 1587430711.
2. *Augustine’s Confessions*. Translated by Maria Bouldings (Vintage), ISBN: 0375700218.
3. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Miroslav Volf (Eerdmans: 2006), ISBN: 0802829899.
4. “My Name is Child of God...Not “Those People”: A First Person Look at Poverty, Julia Dinsmore (Fortress: 2007), ISBN: 9780806656243.
5. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Rebecca Skloot (Broadway Books, 2011), 9781400052189.
6. *Lost Innocence: The Life of a Juvenile Lifer*, Marcos Gray (Unpublished - To Be Distributed)
7. *Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict over Gay Relationships*, Tim Otto (Cascade Books, 2014). ISBN: 978-1-62564-976-8

8. *Remaking Citizenship: Latina Immigrants and the New American Politics*, Kathleen Coll (Stanford University Press, 2010). ISBN: 0804758220
9. *Reimagining the Cardinal and the Deadly*, Karl Clifton-Soderstrom (Cascades, 2015).
10. Additional articles and links on moodle. See calendar below.

Recommended

1. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, James Brownson (Eerdmans, 2013) ISBN: 0802868630.
2. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis, Open Media Series, 2003.

Assignments

1. **Preparation and participation** (10%). Come to class having done the reading and prepared to discuss material. Plan to take notes with paper/pencil or pen – no electronics in this course (with a couple exceptions that will be noted by instructor). Participation is based on the following: how you speak, how you listen, how you show up, how you read, and how you grow in the course in your discussion skills. Demonstrate intellectual curiosity! I will ask you to evaluate your participation and also how much of the reading you have done. Participation Evaluation Due: Dec. 7. Submit through moodle.
2. **Final Exam** (10%). The final exam will consist of short answers based on the course texts and themes. It will assess both knowledge of content as well as integration and application of knowledge through a response to a case study. More information will be given in class.
3. **Short Papers** (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. See prompts and due dates on calendar below. See NPTS Writing Handbook for formatting. Submit through moodle.
4. **Debate** (20%). Work with a group of classmates (TBD based on class size) to construct an argument in debate style on one of two topics: 1. Peace/Just War, or 2. Marriage Equality. You will have a format to follow, and each person in the group must present at some point during the debate. During the debate in which you are not participating, you will serve as judge. Strong debates will make a clear argument, will incorporate a discussion of virtue, and respond directly to critiques raised by the other position. Grading will be based on preparation, presentation, and strength of argument. **To be turned in the day of your Debate and submitted through moodle:** a summary of your main arguments, critiques of the opposing side, and critiques or weak points of your argument. Length of written work is 1000-1200 words and it can be in summary or outline form as long as your ideas are clearly communicated (so not bullet points!) See due dates on calendar below.

Topic 1. Pacifism/Just War Debate Teams:

A: Just War is the most virtuous path to protecting life and preserving peace in some international conflicts.

B: Pacifism is the most virtuous path to protecting life and preserving peace in all international conflicts.

Topic 2. Marriage Equality Debate Teams:

A: Celibacy is the most virtuous path for all Christians who are gay.

B: Marriage is the most virtuous path for some Christians who are gay.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS: PLEASE POST ASSIGNMENTS ON MOODLE. DO NOT EMAIL ASSIGNMENTS. ALL COMMENTS WILL BE RETURNED THROUGH MOODLE GRADEBOOK.

Calendar

Week 1 Aug. 31

Christian Ethics: Who are we and where did we come from?

Read: Wells' *Improvisation* Part I, Clifton-Soderstrom chaps 1-4

Week 2 Sept. 7

Ecclesial Ethics & Sacred People

9/8 – Jud Curry guest

Read: Wells' *Improvisation* Part II, Clifton-Soderstrom chaps 5-8

Week 3 Sept. 14

Reincorporating the Gospel (Wells), What about sin and evil?

Read: Augustine Books I-VII

Week 4 Sept. 21

Conversion/Formation

Read: Augustine Books VIII-X; Volf (Parts One-Two)

Week 5 Sept. 28

Memory

Read: Volf (Part Three)

Due Sept. 30: Short Paper 1

Argue for or against Volf's 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 address memory in the context of both Augustine and Volf. How does each talk about memory and remembering? How is memory related to Christian Ethics? Support your position.

Week 6 Oct. 5

I was in prison and you visited me....(Mass incarceration)

Read: Gray (all); Criminal Justice Resolution (article), "A Demanding Reconciliation" (article), "Revelation at Angola" (article).

Week 7 Oct. 12

I was hungry and naked and you fed and clothed me...(Poverty)

Read: Dinsmore (all)

Week 8 Oct. 19 Reading Week (No Classes) Read Ahead!!

Week 9 Oct. 26

I was sick and you visited me...(Health and Bodies)

Read: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacs (all); Lysaught (moodle)

Due Oct. 28: Short Paper 2 Choose ONE of the three options below.

- A. You preach a sermon on freeing the prisoners, and after the sermon, one of your members approaches you and says, "With all due respect, pastor, the best way to be free is to follow the law and listen to authorities." Respond to your parishioner integrating discussion points, documentary, and readings on incarceration. You must address power and privilege in your paper.
- B. Discuss the meaning of Julia Dinsmore's title "My Name is Child of God...Not 'Those' People" and why it has gospel meaning for Christians. Use examples from her book (NO LONG QUOTES!) to underscore your points. You must address power and privilege in your paper.
- C. What questions about the intersections between bodies, power and privilege does Henrietta Lacs story raise? Your paper must interact with a focused question that is raised through her story and make relevant applications to power/privilege.
- D. Choose a scenario from any of the above three stories. Describe the scenario as it raises a significant ethical question and then offer a solution or good outcome through one of the following moral philosophies: utilitarianism, deontology, or virtue ethics. E.g., Is the use of Hela cells justified for the common good? (If you don't understand this question, don't answer it.)

Week 10 Nov. 2

Pacifism and Just War

Read: Bell, "Just War as Christian Discipleship" (article); "Faith Matters (article); "The Challenge of Peace" (article); MLK, "The Sword that Heals" (article); Cavanaugh "Terrorist Enemies..."

Week 11 Nov. 9

Debate

Read: ECC Resolution on Human Sexuality (moodle); Guidelines for Covenant Ministers Regarding Human Sexuality (moodle); Celibacy and Singleness (moodle).

Week 12 Nov. 16

Family, Celibacy, Marriage, Sexuality

Read: Otto (all)

Week 13 Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving Week - no class)

Read:

Due Nov. 22: Short Paper 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? (see article in additional readings!)
- C. You hear that one of your gifted 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. (I know you actually wouldn’t write a letter in this situation, but it’s an easy mode for me to see your moral reasoning.)
- D. Choose a current ethical topic, come up with a prompt, and write about it. Utilize the course readings.

Week 14 Nov. 30

Debate

Read: *Remaking Citizenship* (all)

Week 15 Dec. 7

Immigration: Global and Local

Due Dec. 7: Participation Evaluation

Week 16 Dec. 14

Final Exam

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 two will lower your course grade. Students who miss more than three weeks of class should not expect to pass the course. Make every effort to notify 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 (you must **note that this is your grace extension on the top of your paper** when you turn it in). **All other late papers will be reduced one letter grade per week, unless permission is given by instructor.**

Statement of Inclusive Language. We are committed to being inclusive in language and imagery in an effort to eliminate prejudice, whether gender, racial, ethnic, national, religious, denominational, cultural, or physical. This way of proceeding in no manner seeks to deny personal identity; rather, it guards against any use of word or phrase that tends to exclude people. (Adapted and revised from the Board of Publication Policy, the Evangelical Covenant Church, 1987).

Plagiarism: Any attempt to represent the words or ideas of another (whether published or unpublished) as one’s own. Examples of such activities include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Using the words of a published source in a written assignment without appropriate documentation.
2. Presenting as one’s own the ideas and/or arguments from another source, including an Internet source.

Accommodation for Disabilities. NPTS accommodates students with special needs that affect capacity to complete a program of study. The student must submit a letter, documenting the disability, from his or her physician, other approved professional, or authorized agency, to the Seminary Academic Services Office during the first month of his or her first semester. If a student is in need of housing accommodations, the recommendations stated in the documentation must clearly state the housing needs and requirements of the student. Specific arrangements are made in discussion with the student, the Academic Dean, Academic Services personnel, and relevant instructors. In any semester, the Seminary Academic Services Office must be notified at least two weeks in advance in order to pursue needed accommodations or services.