

## Christian Ethics and Modern Society

Religion 261  
Fall 2014  
Lecture Hours: T/Th 11:00-11:50AM  
Office Hours: TBA

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### Course Description:

An introduction to Christian ideals of conduct, character, and community, and to modern disputes over their interpretation and application. Are Christian virtues and principles fundamentally at odds with the ethos of liberal democracy oriented toward rights, equality, and freedom? What do Christian beliefs and moral concepts imply about issues related to feminism, racism, and pluralism? What is the relationship between religious convictions, morality, and law? Special emphasis on selected political and economic problems, sexuality and marriage, bioethics, capital punishment, the environment, war, terrorism and torture, and the role of religion in public life.

**Precept Objectives:** I hope that you find precepts not only helpful in understanding the lectures and the readings, but also a time to develop your capacity to engage difficult moral problems. This might involve making your own commitments more precise, and confronting different religious and secular traditions with self-questioning and self-criticism. There are strong and opposing opinions on ethical and religious issues. All members of a precept should feel comfortable expressing their views and respectfully engaging the views of others. This requires everyone to be prepared to listen to arguments they may find objectionable and to be intellectually vulnerable to arguments that potentially recommend that view. Precepts should be enjoyable and respectful, not a burden—even when the problems themselves are hard.

**Requirements:** Attendance at lecture and careful reading of the required materials each week. Regular, active, and thoughtful participation in precept discussions. Two five page critical reflection papers, a midterm, and a final examination. *Please note: failure to complete any one of these requirements can result in failure of the course.*

**Books For Purchase** (available at Labyrinth Books, Nassau Street)

Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*

Martin Luther King, Jr., edited by James M. Washington, *I Have A Dream*

**Course Packet**, available at Pequod (in the U Store)

### Grading Distribution:

Two Papers.....30%

Late papers without extensions are subject to a penalty at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day. Extensions must be requested at least three days in advance of the due date.

Midterm.....20%

Final.....30%

Precept.....20%

**A Note on the Readings:** Apart from the three assigned books, all readings are in the Course Packet (CP), E-Reserves (ER), or linked through Blackboard under Course Materials (B). In the interest of reducing costs, I placed several items on e-reserve that normally would be included in a course packet. It is your responsibility to print these materials, read them, and bring them to precept. Materials also are available on reserve at Firestone Library, and a copy of the course packet will be available in the Religion Department lounge, 1879 Hall. Exams and precepts will be limited to the required readings, but students are expected to read BOTH the required and recommended readings for their chosen paper topics. In addition, the preceptors and I will highlight readings that are best suited for discussion each week. *The course website includes several links and further readings, often updated—PLEASE USE IT!*

**Thursday, September 11**  
***Introduction and Overview***

**Required:** Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1-16, David Brooks, “The Organization Kid” (B)

*Recommended:* William Deresiewicz “Don’t Send Your Kid to the Ivy League” (B)

**Tuesday, September 16**  
***What is Christian Ethics? Traditions, Norms, and Sources***

**Required:** C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 43-56, 69-73 (CP), Glen Stassen & David Gushee, “Authority and Scripture” (CP), Alasdair MacIntyre, “Religion and Morality” (ER), William Placher, “Is the Bible True?” (B), Ellen Davis, “Critical Traditioning” (ER)

*Recommended:* Stephen Pope, “Natural Law and Christian Ethics” (ER), Thornton Stringfellow “Slavery in the Light of Divine Revelation” (B)

**Thursday, September 18**  
***Should we do evil to achieve good?***

**Required:** Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie From Altruistic Motives” (CP), Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw, “Persons, Means, and Ends” (CP), Kai Nielsen, “Against Moral Conservatism” (CP), Matthew 22 (B)

*Recommended:* Bernard Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (handout), “Strained by Katrina” (B)

**Tuesday, September 23**  
***Torture: A Case Study***

**Required:** Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Reflection on the Problem of ‘Dirty Hands’” (CP), Jean Porter, “Torture and the Christian Conscience” (CP), Alan Dershowitz, “The Torture

Warrant” (ER), Helmut Thielicke, “The Borderline Situation of Extreme Conflict” (CP), Augustine, *City of God*, 19.6 (B)

*Recommended:* Jeremy Waldron, “What Can Christian Teaching Add to the Debate about Torture” (ER), Nigel Biggar on Torture (B), Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Is Assassination Ethical?” (B), Gilbert Meilaender, “Stem Cells and Torture” (B)

#### **Thursday, September 25**

##### ***Euthanasia***

**Required:** John Paul II, “Euthanasia” (CP), Lisa Sowle Cahill, “A ‘Natural Law’ Reconsideration of Euthanasia” (CP), Gilbert Meilaender, “Euthanasia and Christian Vision” (CP), Michael Tooley, “An Irrelevant Consideration: Killing Versus Letting Die” (ER), Prayers for the Sick, *Book of Common Prayer* (B)

*Recommended:* Eric Gregory, “Religion and Bioethics” (ER), Vigen Guroian, “The Culture of Death” (ER), “Assisted Suicide: The Philosopher’s Brief” (ER)

#### **Tuesday, September 30**

##### ***Abortion***

**Required:** Phillipa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect” (ER), Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (CP), Gene Outka, “The Ethics of Love and the Problem of Abortion” (CP), Sidney Callahan, “Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism” (CP)

*Recommended:* Naomi Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls” (CP), Cathleen Kaveny, “Roe v. Wade at 40” (B), Richard John Neuhaus, “We Shall Not Weary, We Shall Not Rest” (B)

#### **Thursday, October 2**

##### ***Abortion and the Bible revisited***

**Required:** Stanley Hauerwas, “Abortion: Why the Arguments Fail” (ER), Nicholas Lasch, “Performing the Scriptures” (ER), H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 1-39, Matthew 25 (B)

*Recommended:* Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The New Biotech World Order” (CP)

#### **Tuesday, October 7**

##### ***Death Penalty and Punishment***

**Required:** C.S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment” (CP), Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Catholicism & Capital Punishment” (ER), James Cone, “Legacies of the Cross and the Lynching Tree” (ER)

*Recommended:* “A Culture of Life” (B), Joseph Bottum, “Christians and the Death Penalty” (B), Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

### **Thursday, October 9**

#### ***Just War and Pacifism***

**Required:** G.E.M. Anscombe, “The Justice of the Present War Examined” (ER), Paul Ramsey, “Justice in War” (CP), Reinhold Niebuhr, “Augustine and Christian Realism” (CP), Augustine, “Letter 189 to Boniface” (B), Romans 13 (B)

*Recommended:* J. Bryan Hehir, “The Moral Measurement of War” (ER), Moshe Halbertal, “The Goldstone Illusion” (B), George Weigel and Rowan Williams, “War and Statecraft: An Exchange” (B), James Turner Johnson, “Jihad and Just War” (B)

### **FIRST PAPER DUE: Tuesday, October 14**

#### ***After 9/11: Terror, Surveillance, and Drones***

**Required:** Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror*, 59-70 (ER), Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Reflections on Patriotism” (CP), John Patrick Diggins, *Why Niebuhr Now?* (CP), Nigel Biggar, “Burying the Past after September 11” (CP), David Bromwich, “The Snowden Case” (B), Barack Obama, Nobel Acceptance Speech (B)

*Recommended:* “Why Attack Iraq?” (ER), Samuel Rascoff, “Uncle Sam is No Imam” (B), David Luban “What Would Augustine Do? The President, Drones, and Just War Theory” (B), Jeff McMahan, “Gaza: Is Israel fighting a just war?” (B), F.M. Kamm, “Taking Just War Seriously in Gaza” (B), Eric Gregory, “What Do We Want from the Just War Tradition?” (B)

### **Thursday, October 16**

#### ***Just War and Pacifism (continued)***

**Required:** Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 135-151, John Howard Yoder, “What Would You Do If?” (CP), Dorothy Day, “We Are Un-American: We Are Catholics” (B), Matthew 5 (B)

*Recommended:* Stanley Hauerwas, interview on Syria (B), Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Griffiths, “War, Peace, and Jean Bethke Elshtain” (ER)

### **Tuesday, October 21**

#### ***Religious Pluralism and Christian Ethics***

**Required:** Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Religions from the Perspective of Christian Theology and the Self-Interpretations of Christianity in Relation to Non-Christian Religions” (ER), Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*, 139-145 (CP), William T. Cavanaugh, “God is Not Religious” (ER)

*Recommended:* Barack Obama, Speech in Cairo, June 4, 2009 (B), Alexander Schmemmann, “And Ye Are Witnesses of These Things” (ER), “The Pluralism Project” (B), Robert Wuthnow, “Responding to the New Religious Pluralism” (ER)

**Thursday, October 23**

**MIDTERM EXAM:** *NO ADDITIONAL READINGS*

**FALL BREAK**

**Tuesday, November 4**

***Animals and the Environment***

**Required:** Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation” (CP), Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis” (ER), Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 348-356 (CP), E.O. Wilson, “Apocalypse Now” (ER), Genesis 1 (B)

*Recommended:* Andy Crouch, “Letter to a Tenured Professor” (B), Charles Mathewes, “Religion and the Environment” (ER), “Scholars Explore Christian Perspectives on Animal Rights” (B), Charles Camosy, “Intellectual Strangers No More: Peter Singer and Roman Catholicism on Ecological Concern” (B)

**Thursday, November 6**

***Stanley Hauerwas: Narrative, Community, and Virtue***

**Required:** Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 17-134, T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 285-291 (CP)

*Recommended:* Stanley Hauerwas, “A Christian Critique of Christian America” (ER), Reinhold Niebuhr, “Democracy, Secularism, and Christianity” (CP), Walter Rauschenbusch, “The Kingdom of God” (ER), Stanley Hauerwas, “Go With God” (B)

**Tuesday, November 11**

***Popes, Politics, and Economics***

**Required:** Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 3-33, 116-120, 162-174 (CP), Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez” (CP), Michael Novak, “Liberation Theology and the Pope” (ER), Exodus 20 (B)

*Recommended:* Rebecca Blank, “Viewing the Market Economy Through the Lens of Faith” (ER), Alan Wolfe, “Liberalism and Catholicism” (ER)

**Thursday, November 13**

***Popes, Politics, and Economics (continued)***

**Required:** George Weigel, “Catholicism and Democracy” (ER), John Courtney Murray, “*E Pluribus Unum: The American Consensus*” (B), Peter Singer, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” (B), Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (B)

*Recommended:* Ross Douthat, “The Pope and the Right” (B), Tom Beaudoin, “Six Ways to be a Conscientious Catholic Consumer” (B), Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, #9 and #21-42 (B), Harvey Cox, “The Market as God” (ER)

**Tuesday, November 18**  
***Feminist Ethics***

**Required:** Mary Daly, “The Spiritual Revolution: Women’s Liberation as Theological Re-education” (CP), Barbara Andolsen, “Agape in Feminist Ethics” (ER), Emilie M. Townes, “To Pick One’s Own Cotton: Religious Values, Public Policy, and Women’s Moral Autonomy” (ER)

*Recommended:* “*Feminine Mystique* at 50” (B)

**Thursday, November 20**  
***Sexuality and Marriage***

**Required:** Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace” (CP), Richard Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies” (CP), Luke Timothy Johnson, “Debate and Discernment, Scripture and Spirit” (CP), Robert P. George, “‘Same-Sex Marriage’ and ‘Moral Neutrality’” (ER), Karen Lebacqz, “Appropriate Vulnerability” (ER), Eve Tushnet, “Homosexuality & the Church” (B), Galatians 3 (B)

*Recommended:* Anthony Ellis, “Casual Sex” (ER), Lauren Winner, “Sex in the Body of Christ” (B), Andrew Sullivan, “Unnatural Law: We’re all sodomists now” (ER), Ramsey Colloquium Statement (B), Jeffrey Stout, “How Charity Transcends the Culture War” (ER), Sherif Girgis, Robert George, and Ryan Anderson, “What is Marriage?” (B), Andrew Forsyth, “Defining Marriage” (ER), “Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church,” esp., 9-22 (“traditionalist view”) and 44-57 (“liberal view”) (B)

**Tuesday, November 25**  
***Feminist Ethics Revisited***

**Required:** Mary C. Segers, “Feminism, Liberalism, and Catholicism” (ER), Mary Douglas, “A Modest Proposal: A Place for Women in the Hierarchy” (ER), Ariel Levy, “Raunch Culture” (ER), “Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women” (B)

*Recommended:* Nancy Bauer, “Is Lady Gaga a Feminist” (B), Marie Griffith, “The New Evangelical Feminism of Bachmann and Palin” (B), Margaret Bendroth, “Fundamentalism and the Family” (ER)

**THANKSGIVING**

**Tuesday, December 2*****H. Richard Niebuhr: Types of Christian Social Ethics***

**Required:** H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 45-115 and 190-229, Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*, ix-xvii and 77-97 (CP)

*Recommended:* H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing Nothing" (B), Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?" (B)

**Thursday, December 4*****Race and Christian Ethics***

**Required:** Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have A Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, editor's introduction, xiii-xxi, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 54-62, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 83-100, "I Have a Dream," 101-106, "A Time to Break Silence," 135-152, "Black Power Defined," 153-165, "Where Do We Go from Here?," 169-179, "I See the Promised Land," 193-203, Barack Obama, Philadelphia Speech on Race, March 18, 2008 (B), Cornel West, "Dr. King Weeps from His Grave" (B)

*Recommended:* Stanley Hauerwas, "Remembering Martin Luther King Remembering" (ER), Cornel West, "Subversive Joy and Revolutionary Patience in Black Christianity" (CP), James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 63-66 and 119-124 (CP)

**Tuesday, December 9*****Multiculturalism, Political Liberalism, and Christian Ethics***

**Required:** Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*, 3-22 (ER), Stanley Hauerwas, "The Democratic Policing of Christianity" (ER), Richard John Neuhaus, "The Vulnerability of the Naked Square" (CP)

*Recommended:* Patrick Deneen, "Religious Liberty?" (B), Thomas Nagel, "Public Education and Intelligent Design" (ER), Robert Bellah, "Biblical Religion and Social Science in the Modern World" (B)

**SECOND PAPER DUE: Thursday, December 11*****Conclusion***

**Required:** Richard Rorty, "Religion As Conversation Stopper" (CP), H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 230-256, Barack Obama, "Call to Renewal Keynote Address" (B), Mario Cuomo, "Religious Belief and Public Morality" (B)

*Recommended:* Nicholas Wolterstorff, "An Engagement with Rorty" (ER), Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration" (ER), Eric Gregory, "Before the Original Position" (B)

**Winter Break Reading:** Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 25-47 (ER)