

Theo 5130: Christian Ethics

North Park Theological Seminary

Fall 2021

Thursdays 2:00-4:45 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)

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. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Rebecca Skloot (Broadway Books, 2011), 9781400052189.
5. "Creation of an Urban Soldier," Jamal Bakr (2019), Canvas.
6. *The Cardinal and the Deadly: Reimagining the Seven Virtues and Seven Vices*, Karl Clifton-Soderstrom (Cascade Books, 2015), ISBN: 1610970012.
7. Additional articles by Christena Cleveland, Hauna Ondrey, Janet Fishburn, Therese Lysaught, videos, and links on CANVAS.

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! You will evaluate your participation and also how much of the reading you have done. Participation Evaluation Due: Dec. 9. Submit through canvas.
2. **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. For formatting, you must use the NPTS Writing Handbook. Submit through canvas.
3. **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. Politics/Economics. 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 canvas:** 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. Rubric will be provided.

Debate 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.

Debate Topic 2.

A: Democratic capitalism is the economic system that is most compatible with a Christian conception of a just society.

B: Democratic socialism is the economic system that is most compatible with a Christian conception of a just society.

4. 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.

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

Calendar

Week 1 Sept. 2

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

Read: Clifton-Soderstrom, *The Cardinal and the Deadly*, chaps. 1-4

Week 2 Sept. 9

Story: Formation and Malformation

Read: Augustine's *Confessions*, Books 1-X; Clifton-Soderstrom, *The Cardinal and the Deadly*, chaps. 5-8

Week 3 Sept. 16

Scripture and Ethics

Read: Wells' *Improvisation* Part I

Week 4 Sept. 23

Ethics as Improvisation (Guest: Alicia Reese)

Read: Wells *Improvisation* Part II; Volf (Parts One-Two)

Week 5 Sept. 30

Memory

Read: Volf (Part Three)

Due Oct. 2: 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. 7

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

Read: Bakr “Creation of Urban Soldier”; Criminal Justice Resolution (article), “A Demanding Reconciliation” (article), “Revelation at Angola” (article).

Week 7 Oct. 14

Immigration: Global and Local

Read: “Strangers No Longer” (canvas)

Week 8 Oct. 21 Reading Week (No Classes) Read Ahead!

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...”

Due Oct. 23: Short Paper 2.

Prompt: On her first international visit to Central America, Vice President Kamala Harris said in a speech, “As one of our priorities, we will discourage illegal migration. And I believe if you come to our border, you will be turned back...Do not come. Do not come. The United States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our border.” Analyze this statement from a Christian virtue ethics perspective drawing specifically on “Strangers No Longer” and Volf’s *End of Memory*.

Week 9 Oct. 28

Pacifism and Just War; I was sick and you visited me...(Health and Bodies; Medical Racism)

Read: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacs (all)

Week 10 Nov. 4

Health and Bodies (cont.)

Read: Lysaught (canvas); Watch [Ama](#) (we are working on renting it)

Due: Debate (Topic 1)

Week 11 Nov. 11

Sexuality

Read: ECC Resolution on Human Sexuality (canvas); Guidelines for Covenant Ministers Regarding Human Sexuality (canvas); A Liberation Theology for Single People (canvas); The Christian Life, Spirituality and Sexuality from *Confronting the Idolatry of Family* (canvas)

Week 12 Nov. 18

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

Read: Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (canvas); Capitalism and Christian Ethics (canvas); Three Cheers for Socialism (canvas); A Catholic Framework for Economic Life (canvas)

Due Nov. 20: 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 couple who is unable to conceive 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 Canvas)
- 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 13 Nov. 25 (Thanksgiving Week – no class)

Week 14 Dec. 2

Due: Debate (Topic 2)

Week 15 Dec. 9

Environment

Read: The Sacramental Cup (canvas); Is There a Connection between Scripture and Ecology? (canvas); Optional: Boff’s Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor? (canvas)

Due Dec. 9: Participation Evaluation

Week 16 Dec. 16

Due: Final Exam (Time TBD)

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).

Academic Integrity

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park University is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating will receive a failing grade on the assignment and are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – the use of another’s work as one’s own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from the internet.
2. Copying another’s answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one’s answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.

For additional information, see the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#), p. 25–27.

Student Resources

I am here to help you. If at any point you need clarification *beyond what is already stated in the syllabus* or want to discuss the reading, lectures, discussions, or assignments, please ask. I am happy to meet with you.

Accommodations

North Park is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this class related to a disability, contact the Center for Student Engagement by email at ada@northpark.edu or phone at 773-244-5737 to schedule an appointment with the Learning Specialist. You can also stop by the Center for Student Engagement, located on the first floor of the Johnson Center.

TITLE IX

Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against, or involved in sexual violence should contact the Dean of Students (773-244-5565) or Director of Human Resources (773-244-5599) for information about campus resources and support services, including confidential counseling services. As a member of the North Park faculty, we are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are available to discuss any concerns.

Faculty are legally obligated to share information with the University’s Title IX coordinator in certain situations to help ensure that the student’s safety and welfare is being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of sexual assault, relational/domestic violence, and stalking. Please refer to North Park’s [Safe Community site](#) for contact information and further details.