

## History of Christian Ethics

CHR 344

3 hours credit

MWF 8-8:50 a.m; Jennings 212

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### **I. Course Description**

An exploration of the heritage of Christian moral reflection, from the early church through the modern era, with attention to a wide range of Christian traditions, thinkers, and movements.

### **II. Course Objectives**

- A. To gain insights useful for the development of a sound Christian ethic through a study of the history of both Christian moral thinking and Christian moral behavior.
- B. To develop a basic understanding of the most important historic Christian approaches to moral thinking and moral action as well as an appreciation for the insights to be gained by Christian ethics today.
- C. To improve in the ability to interact with diverse Christian moral traditions and their adherents.
- D. To integrate incidents of grave Christian moral failure, as well as moral faithfulness, into one's understanding of Christian history and use both as motivation for faithful Christian discipleship today.
- E. To become familiar in a more advanced way with the academic discipline of Christian ethics.
- F. To grow in the capacity to interpret Scripture responsibly for the Christian moral life through exposure to the heritage of Christian interpretation of Scripture.
- G. To achieve personal moral growth--toward sound character, responsible decision-making, honorable personal conduct, and passion to serve Jesus Christ as Lord.

### **III. Textbooks and Assigned Reading**

A. The two required texts are the following:

Wogaman, J. Philip. *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*. Westminster, 1993.

Wogaman, J. Philip and Douglas M. Strong, eds. *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Sourcebook*. Westminster, 1996.

You will also need to bring a modern translation of the Bible.

B. Of the following seven classic 20<sup>th</sup> century texts in Christian ethics, you will need to obtain one for a book review. Original publication date listed.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster, 1937.

King, M.L. *Strength to Love*. Fortress, 1963.

Murray, John Courtney. *Religious Liberty*. Westminster John Knox, 1993.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Scribner's, 1932.

Pohl, Christine. *Making Room*. Eerdmans, 1999.

Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. Westminster, 1907.

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Word, 1997.

I am open to considering a proposal from you to review a different classic work in Christian ethics if that is of interest to you. Just approach me with the title and we will discuss it.

C. Suggestions for further reading, and a number of handouts, will be given throughout the semester.

You are responsible for reading assigned material *before* coming to class. This reading will be evaluated on the exams, in your reading reports, and in your participation grade.

### **IV. Method of Instruction**

A. Class time will be spent partly in lectures and partly in student-led discussion of the common reading. All students will need to be well-prepared for class conversation. This is a reading-based class, and we will follow the reading very closely all term.

B. Exams are considered part of the instructional process as well as testing measures.

## V. Course Requirements and Methods of Evaluation

A. Your grade for the term will be determined as follows:

1. Midterm Exams.....200 points
2. Written/Oral Reading Report.....50 points
3. Service Learning.....50 points
4. Book Review.....100 points
5. Final Exam.....100 points
6. Extra Credit.....up to 25 points
7. Participation/Attendance.....see policy statement

The official Union University grading scale will be used in the course. Translated into point values, it goes like this:

475-500 A                      425-474 B                      375-424 C                      325-374 D                      0-324F

B. Here is a description of each course requirement:

### 1. *Midterm Exams (10/6, 11/10)*

These exams will include material covered in the reading and in class for each section of the course.

### 2. *Written/Oral Reading Reports (most days)*

Students will offer 1 written (4-5 page) and oral (10-12 minutes) report on the daily primary readings in the Wogaman/Strong textbook as they come up during the semester. These reports should include the following: summary of content, listing of main ethical issues addressed, the most important insights or claims offered, one or two key things you learned that apply today, and a favorite quotation.

### 3. *Service Learning*

Ethics is about the moral practice of the Christian faith. Therefore it is a way of life that must be lived, not just a field of study. For this reason 12 hours of service over the course of each semester, preferably in activities shared with members of the ethics program, is now a requirement of all upper-level ethics courses.

### 4. *Book Review (due 12/6)*

Selecting one of the seven classic texts listed above (or an alternative we agree upon), you will write a 8-10 page review/engagement. These reviews should include the following: author information, summary of contents, discussion of main ethical issues addressed, critical engagement with the most important insights or claims offered by the work, and several things you learned that will affect your thinking about ethics. Consider and answer: why is this a classic work in Christian ethics? What makes it relevant today?

### 5. *Final Exam*

This exam will employ a similar format to the other exams. The objective section will cover the material in the last portion of the course, while the essay section will include a comprehensive dimension.

### 6. *Extra Credit*

A variety of extra credit opportunities will be presented this term. I am usually open to offering potential credit for writing 3-4 page response papers related to major guest speakers and events on campus. We will also have a movie night. You may do one extra credit project only, with a value of up to 25 points. It must be turned in by 5 pm on the last day of class, December 8.

### 7. *Participation/Attendance*

I assume that you will attend class unless illness or other emergency prevents your attendance, and that you will participate attentively and vigorously. Very poor attendance can result in automatic failure of the class. See below for my official statement of attendance policies.

## **ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS**

*On Papers and Their Presentation:* I prefer to receive papers in 12-point Times New Roman font, printed on a well-functioning printer, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, no plastic covers needed. Term papers should be double-spaced, follow the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian) or MLA style, with a full bibliography including all works cited. While small variations in referencing style are common, be consistent with whatever form you employ throughout the paper. Paper grades include consideration of both literary/presentation quality and substantive content. Use inclusive language with reference to human beings.

*On Plagiarism:* Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which a writer passes off someone else's words as his or her own, either intentionally or unintentionally (through inadequate quotation use and footnoting). While intention is sometimes hard to judge, intentional plagiarism is expressly forbidden and will result in automatic failure, as discussed in the Union catalog. All other forms of cheating are, of course, forbidden as well.

*On Late Work:* All papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date assigned. Papers lose 5 points credit for every day that they are late, excluding Sundays. Papers turned in after the start of class are treated as if turned in the next day. If you turn in a late paper, be sure to note on the paper the date and time it was turned in. The *only* exceptions to this policy include family emergencies and bereavement. Absence from class due to official college functions does not constitute grounds for a no-penalty

extension on a paper, nor do computer problems, relationship hassles, or other common stresses of university life. Remember that reading papers cannot be turned in after the start of class on the days they are due. NO PAPERS OF ANY TYPE WILL BE RECEIVED AFTER 5 p.m. ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL EXAM.

*On Lost Papers:* Students are wise to keep both a hard copy and a computer version of every paper they write. If a paper turns up missing in this class, you are responsible for turning in a replacement version as soon as we discover the paper is missing.

*On Attendance and Participation:*

A. Regular class attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. The student is expected to attend classes regularly in accordance with Union's attendance policies. See catalog for official policy statement.

B. Class absences will be considered in two categories: excused and unexcused.

C. Excused absences include the following: emergencies, bereavement, or official college functions approved by the Academic Affairs Office. The professor reserves the right to determine the validity of all absences.

D. Request for an absence to be excused must be made *in writing* either in advance of the absence or at the next class attended after the absence. Verbal communication of the absence or its reasons is insufficient.

E. If an exam is missed because of an excused absence, it may be made up. If the absence is unexcused, the student receives a 0 on that exam. This includes exams missed due to oversleeping. Whenever a student has advance knowledge that an exam must be missed due to an excused absence, the professor should be informed so that arrangements can be made.

F. Excessive absences by a student will be reported to the appropriate officials for counsel with the student.

G. Attendance and participation generally will be evaluated as follows:

0-1 absences-	great job	2 absences -- -10 points
3 absences -- -15 points		4 absences -- -20 points
5 absences -- -25 points		6 absences -- -30 points
7+ absences—automatic F		

*The professor reserves the right to adjust these attendance grades based on the quality of class participation.*

H. Tardiness--arrival in class at any point after it starts--will be counted against the attendance grade. *Three tardies=one absence.*

I. Participation--The criteria of quality participation include the following: obvious completion of reading prior to coming to class, intelligent, alert, and informed participation in classroom discussion and any assigned projects or tasks, evidence of note-taking and active listening, and general quality of demeanor, engagement, and enthusiasm for course activities.

## VI. Course Schedule

Key: CE=Christian Ethics, RCE=Readings in Christian Ethics  
chs=chapters, pp=page numbers; RCE assignments are listed by *reading* number (1-70).

### *SURVEYING THE TERRAIN*

- 8/30 Syllabus and organization
- 9/1 The historical dimension of Christian ethics (CE, intro; RCE, intro)
- 9/4 *Labor Day--Ponder the ethical significance of the labor movement!*
- 9/6 The Jerusalem Strand: Biblical legacies for Christian ethics (CE, ch. 1)  
The Athens Strand: Philosophical legacies for Christian ethics (CE, ch. 2)

### *EARLY CHRISTIANITY*

- 9/8 Early Christian ethics: The formative years (CE, ch. 3)  
Lecture
- 9/11 Seminal thinkers and transitions (CE, pp. 37-44, RCE 1-3)  
Presenter:
- 9/13 The Didache (handout)  
Class discussion
- 9/15 Seminal thinkers (RCE, 5-9)  
Presenter:
- 9/18 Seminal thinkers (RCE, 10-11)  
Presenter:
- 9/20 The Constantinian watershed (CE, pp. 45-50, RCE 12-13)  
Lecture
- 9/22 Augustine as Moral Theologian (CE, ch. 5)  
Readings in Augustine (RCE 14bc)  
Presenter:

### *MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY*

- 9/25 Monastic and mystical contributions (CE, ch. 6, RCE 15-18)

Presenter:

9/27 The confessional (CE, ch. 7, RCE 19)

Presenter:

9/29 Moral Failures: Crusades and Inquisitions (handouts)

Lecture

10/2 Thomas Aquinas (CE, ch. 8, RCE 20a,b)

Presenter:

10/4 Late Medieval Forerunners (CE, ch. 9; RCE 21-23)

Presenter:

10/6 **Midterm Exam I**

*THE REFORMATION ERA*

10/9 Martin Luther and John Calvin (CE, ch. 10)

Lecture

10/11 Readings in Luther (RCE 24a,b,c)

Presenter:

10/13 Readings in Calvin (RCE 28)

Presenter:

10/16 The Radical Reformation (CE, ch. 12; RCE 26-27, 31-33)

Presenter:

10/18 Catholic humanism and the Counter-Reformation (CE, ch. 11; RCE, 25,29,30)

Presenter:

10/20 *Fall Break*

10/23 The Wars of Religion (handout)

Lecture

*18TH AND 19TH CENTURY RATIONALISM, EVANGELICALISM, AND SOCIAL ISSUES*

10/25 Rationalism (CE, pp. 148-151; RCE 34-35)

Presenter:

10/27 Wesley and evangelical revival (CE, pp. 152-160, RCE 36a-d)  
Presenter:

10/30 Schliermacher and 19th century ethics (CE, ch. 14; RCE 37-40)  
Presenter:

11/1 Slavery (CE, 180-186, RCE 41-44a,b)  
Presenter:

11/3 Early feminism (CE, 186-191, RCE 45-49)  
Presenter:

### *20TH CENTURY CHRISTIAN ETHICS*

11/6 Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel (CE, ch. 16; RCE 50a-c)  
Presenter:

11/8 *Class cancelled—Day of Remembrance, please serve our community*

11/10 **Midterm Exam II**

11/13 Early Catholic social encyclicals (CE, ch. 17; RCE 57-58)  
Presenter:

11/15 Major Protestant ethicists: Barth and Bonhoeffer (CE, ch. 18; RCE 53-54)  
Presenter:

11/17 Major Protestant ethicists: Tillich and Niebuhr (RCE 55-56)  
Presenter:

*11/20-26 Class cancelled/Thanksgiving Holidays*

11/27 Modern Catholic ethics: The Vatican II watershed (CE, 19, RCE 59-60)  
Presenter:

11/29 Ecumenical social ethics (CE, ch. 21, RCE 62-63)  
Presenter:

12/1 Liberation ethics and African American ethics (CE, ch. 20, RCE 65-66)  
Presenter:

12/4 Feminist and Womanist ethics (RCE 67)

Lecture

12/6 Evangelical ethics (handout, RCE 68-69)

Lecture

**Book Review due**

12/8 The Future of Christian ethics (CE, ch. 22-23; handout)

Lecture

TBA **Final Exam**