

The Drama of Christian Ethics
WYT2912HS
Online 2015
Course Syllabus

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Words of Welcome

Hello and welcome to class! My name is Patrick McManus and I'm currently a full-time Anglican priest in the Diocese of Algoma all the way up in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario at St. Matthew's. I've been married to my wife, Renée for twelve years and we have two small boys, William (10) and Felix (6). I'm also a Th.D. candidate at Wycliffe College working in political theology and looking at how certain theologians and philosophers read St. Paul's language of 'powers and principalities' with a focus on developing an apocalyptic moral theology.

I look forward to the next number of months as we get to know each other and as we learn together along the way.

Introduction

This course is designed as an introduction to the field of Christian ethics, not as a cerebral and academic discipline but as a lived, embodied Christian reality. It is designed with the intent of providing the student with a framework through which to understand what it means to live as the church within the complexities of the social, moral, and political world of the 21st century. The themes of drama, narrative, acting, and especially the theatrical art of "improvisation" provide the conceptual lens through which we will engage various ethical complexities such as genetic-bio-ethical issues, sexuality, family and marriage, pacifism and war, ecological ethics, globalization and political ethics, church/state relations, etc. This will be an online course with a written lecture format, weekly readings, and student participation in weekly discussion questions. There will also be minor assignments, and a final major paper. This year we will also have video introductions to each unity as well as a longer introduction to the course itself.

Purpose and Learning Outcomes

The purpose of this course as an introduction to the field of Christian ethics is to provide the student with the tools necessary to think theologically about and critically engage the ethical complexities of the 21st century. By the end of the course, the student ought to meet the following projected learning outcomes:

- The student will display a basic knowledge of key persons, events, and philosophical/theological concepts within the field of ethics.
- The student will employ the critical tools learned throughout the course and bring them to bear responsibly during weekly discussions.
- The student will be able to distinguish and clarify the uniqueness of “Christian” ethics from general moral theory/practise.
- The student will engage one area of ethics through their research paper and will be conversant with that topic to a greater depth than other areas.
- The student will learn to think theologically about a broad area of human activity and their implications and how they bear on the life of the contemporary church in the world.
- The student will demonstrate their ability to read critically and follow an ethical argument through the writing of précis and short reflection papers.

Learning Online & Expectations

Learning online is a unique experience that has its own set of unique issues. We meet each other in the virtual world of the internet and we trust that platform to function as the classroom for us. That can be the cause of frustration for some because they may feel as if their own questions and concerns won’t get the attention they would face to face. The discussions that we will engage in each week are the key tools where we bounce ideas off each other, where we display that we have been paying attention to our readings, and where we experience “communal” learning. Please be collegial with each other and respect each other’s opinions. We will be dealing with some delicate areas of intellectual debate and I expect everyone to be sensitive to that dynamic.

I welcome feedback throughout the course as I know you will as well. I will, without the help of a TA, try to be on top of your marking and get feedback to you asap. Deadlines are solid and anything late will be docked marks as per Wycliffe College’s criteria. If, for whatever reason (presumably a good one), you require an extension, email me or call me and we can work something out.

I also intend to hold Skype office hours for those of you who want some “face to face” time and with the technological capabilities to do so. That information is found at the top of the syllabus under contact information. If, during office hours, I’m not picking up, chances are I’m with one of your classmates. Just call back.

Course Outline

Week of Jan 5th: Introduction

- Rowan Williams, “Making Moral Decisions” (online pdf)

Week of Jan 12th: *The Nature of Christian Ethics*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (intro., chap. 1-2)

- Stanley Hauerwas, “On Doctrine & Ethics” (online pdf)
- Samuel Wells & Stanley Hauerwas, “How the Church Managed Before There Was Ethics” (Blackwell Companion, 39-50)
- Lecture

Week of Jan 19th: *Narrative and the Drama of Christian Ethics*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 3-4)
- Stanley Hauerwas, “A Story-Formed Community” (online pdf)
- Lecture

Week of Jan 26th: *Virtue, Character, and the Christian Life*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 5-8)
- Jean Porter, “Virtue Ethics” (online pdf)
- TBA
- Lecture

Week of Feb 2nd: *The Gift of Scripture: Authority and Community*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 9-10)
- Stanley Hauerwas, “The Moral Authority of Scripture: the Politics and Ethics of Remembering” (online pdf)
- Jim Fodor, “Reading the Scriptures: Rehearsing Identity, Practicing Character” (Blackwell Companion, 141-55)
- Lecture

Week of Feb 9th: *Christianity, Violence, and the Politics of Jesus*

- Stanley Hauerwas, “September 11, 2001: A Pacifist Response” (online pdf)
- Reinhold Niebuhr & H. Richard Niebuhr: brothers debate war & pacifism (online pdf)
- Gerald Schlabach, “Breaking Bread: Peace and War” (Blackwell Companion, 360-74)
- Stanley Hauerwas, “Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial” (online pdf)
- Lecture

Week of Feb 16th: Reading Week!

Week of Feb 23rd: *Marriage, Sex, and Christians*

- Joel Shuman, “Eating Together: Friendship and Homosexuality” (Blackwell Companion, 401-13)
- Joseph Mangina, “Bearing Fruit: Conception, Children, and the Family” (Blackwell Companion, 468-80)
- TBA
- Lecture

Week of Mar 2nd: *The Politics of Reconciliation*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 11)
- William Cavanaugh, “Discerning: Politics and Reconciliation” (Blackwell Companion, 196-208)
- Bernd Wannenwetsch, “Liturgy” (online pdf)
- Lecture

Week of Mar 9th: *The Church, Medicine, and Suffering*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 12-13)
- Hans Reinders, “Being Thankful: Parenting the Mentally Disabled” (Blackwell Companion, 427-40)
- Stanley Hauerwas, “Salvation and Health: Why Medicine Needs the Church” (online pdf)
- TBA
- Lecture

Week of Mar 16th: *Creation and the Ethics of ‘Earth Care’*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (chap. 14)
- Norman Wirzba, “Caring and Working: an Agrarian Perspective” (online pdf)
- Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation” (online pdf)
- Lecture

Week of Mar 23rd: *Political Theology, the Economy and an Ethic of Globalization*

- Timothy Gorrige, “Invoking: Globalization and Power” (Blackwell Companion, 346-59)
- William Cavanaugh, “The Myth of Globalization as Catholicity” (online pdf)
- TBA
- Lecture

Week of Mar 30th: *By Way of an Improvised Conclusion: An Ethic of Witness*

- Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (epilogue)

- Michael Cartwright, “Being Sent: Witness” (Blackwell Companion, 481-94)
- Rowan William, “Afterword” (Blackwell Companion, 495-98).
- Lecture

Assignments & Grading

1. Students will each be required to respond to the discussion questions posted each week as well as to at least one (1) of their peer’s answers. This ongoing discussion will count as your classroom participation. **(20%)**
2. Students will write a 500 word précis of each of Samuel Wells’ first four (4) chapters. **This is due by midnight Friday, Jan. 23rd (EST). (15%)**
3. Students will write two short theological reflection papers (1000-1200 words) that engage one module of study from before the reading week (week 2-6) and one module of study after the reading break (week 8-13). **The first paper is due by midnight Friday, Feb. 13th (EST). The second paper is due any time after the reading break and no later than midnight Friday, Mar 27th. (25%)**
4. Students will write one major paper (10-12 page) on a topic covered in the course of your choice. This will be a research paper that engages the materials from the class and beyond. I insist that you research beyond what is presented in the classroom using your trusty library skills through ATLA, etc. **This paper will be due no later than midnight Mon. Apr 6th (EST). (40%)**

As you can see, the second short paper and the final paper are both due at the end of the semester. Please structure your time accordingly.

Texts

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: the Drama of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004.

Hauerwas, Stanley & Samuel Wells, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Articles as posted online.

Both texts are available from CRUX Books on campus. 416-599-2749 or email: sales@cruxbook.com