

**RELI 207: Christian Ethics and Modern Society**  
**Vassar College / Spring 2016**  
**M/W 1:30-2:45**  
**Blodgett Hall 105**

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Office Hours: Tues 4:30-6, Weds 9-11 or by appt.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to Christian ideals of faith, conduct, character, and community. At heart we will ask, as Christians ask: What difference does Christ make to ethical and moral reflection on questions, such as, of gender, race, sexuality, war, and the environment? What do Christian beliefs imply about how to live in the modern world when faced with contested forms of political, economic, and social goods? How do Christians negotiate the emergence of modern values about rights, equality, and democracy? Our explorations will reveal the deeply variable and multiple ways Christians respond to these questions.

**REQUIRED TEXTS (ORDERED FROM THE VASSAR COLLEGE BOOKSTORE)**

- Robert Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (University of Notre Dame Press) 978-0268034917
- James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis) 978-1570758959
- Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound* (Counterpoint) 978-1582434865
- William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Eerdmans) 978-0802845610
- Sally McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Fortress Press) 978-0800662714
- Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* (Convergent Books) 978-1601427557

**OTHER READINGS**

- Additional readings for the course, as marked on the syllabus, will be found on Moodle or on the web through links on the course syllabus on Moodle.
- You must bring the essays to class either. I recommend downloading them and printing them out. Less ideal is bringing your laptop to class and reading from it.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Participation (15%)  
I hope to run this class as half lecture, half discussion. I ask of you this:
  1. you come to class *with* and *having read* the assigned material. I encourage you to mark up your texts with your own notes.

2. you contribute to class discussions: this is where your own markings from your reading time come in handy. Often a good way to contribute to discussion is to direct the class to a passage that you found intriguing, confusing, objectionable, etc.
  3. your contributions foster open and respectful exchange. You can and should consider this class a collective endeavor; your questions, preoccupations, and passions contribute mightily to our focus and learning.
- 3 Critical Responses 3-4 pages
  - Final paper: (35%) 7-8 pages. See syllabus for due dates
    - Late papers without extensions are subject to a penalty at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day
    - **Failure to complete/receive credit for any of the assignment will result in failure of the class.**

### **TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

You may not use any electronic devices in class. That means no phones, iPads, laptops, or any other electronic ephemera. I'm convinced that they distract us from each other and the matter hand. The only exceptions to this are for students with academic accommodations.

### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

"Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Director of Disability and Support Services as indicated in your accommodation letter."

#### *Introduction*

Wed Jan 27

- Carlos Frankel, "In Praise of the Clash of Culture" <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/in-praise-of-the-clash-of-cultures/>

#### *What is Christian Ethics?*

Mon Feb 1

- Hauerwas, 1-34
- William Cavanaugh, "God is Not Religious,"
- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 43-56, 69-73
- David Brooks, "If It Feels Right" <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/13/opinion/if-it-feels-right.html>

Wed Feb 3

- Karl Barth, "Christian Ethics" [M]
- Mere Jefferson Bethke, "Why I Hate Religion But Love Jesus"  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IAhDGYlpqY>
- Kevin DeYoung, "Does Jesus Hate Religion? Kinda, Sorta, Not Really"  
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2012/01/13/does-jesus-hate-religion-kinda-sorta-not-really/>
- Kevin DeYoung, "Follow up Post"  
<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2012/01/14/following-up-on-the-jesusreligion-video/>
- David Brooks, "How to Fight the Man"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/03/opinion/brooks-how-to-fight-the-man.html?src=tp&smid=fb-share>

### *Reading Jesus*

Mon Feb 8

- Matthew (all), Acts 9, 2 Cor 1-10, Thess 4-5 (NRSV BIBLE:  
<http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>)
- Stanley Hauerwas, 72-95 from the *Peaceable Kingdom*

Wed Feb 10

- William Placher, "Is the Bible True?" <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=5>
- Wendell Berry, "The Burden of the Gospels"
- Ellen Davis, "Critical Traditioning"

### *Power and the State*

Mon Feb 15

- R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 1-48
- John Yoder, "The Constantinian Sources of Christian Ethics"

Wed Feb 17

- Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 49-69
- Stanley Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America"
- Michael Baxter, "God Is Not American"

### *Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism, and Obama's Nobel Prize*

Mon Feb 22

- Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church is not Pacifist"
- Niebuhr, "Augustine and Christian Realism"
- Barack Obama, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech:  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>

Wed Feb 24

- Andrew Sullivan, "The Tragedy of Hope": <http://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2009/12/the-tragedy-of-hope/193096/>
- George Packer, "Peace and War": <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/12/21/peace-and-war>
- David Brooks, "Obama's Christian Realism": <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/15/opinion/15brooks.html>

### *Feminist Ethics*

Mon Feb 29

- Peter Boyer, "The Big Tent" [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/08/22/050822fa\\_fact\\_boyer?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/08/22/050822fa_fact_boyer?currentPage=all)
- Margaret Bendroth, "Fundamentalism and the Family" (ER)
- Marie Griffith, "The New Evangelical Feminism of Bachmann and Palin" [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marie-griffith/evangelical-feminism\\_b\\_891579.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marie-griffith/evangelical-feminism_b_891579.html)
- Mary Daly, "The Spiritual Revolution: Women's Liberation as Theological Re-education" "
- Barbara Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics"
- Beverly Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love"

Wed Mar 2

- Mary C. Segers, "Feminism, Liberalism, and Catholicism" (ER),
- Lisa Cahill, "On Being a Catholic Feminist"
- Mary Douglas, "A Modest Proposal: A Place for Women in the Hierarchy" <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/modest-proposal>
- Sallie Purvis, "A Common Love: Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family"

### *Optional*

- Nancy Bauer, "Lady Power," <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/lady-power/>
- "Is Lady Gaga a Feminist" <http://blogs.britannica.com/2010/07/is-lady-gaga-a-feminist-5-questions-for-philosopher-nancy-bauer/>

### *Abortion*

Mon Mar 7

- ["On Being" with Krista Tippett: Abortion dialogue](#)
- Beverly Harrison, "Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice"
- Marjorie Maguire, "Personhood, Covenant, and Abortion"
- Stanley Hauerwas, "Abortion: Why the Arguments Fail"

### *Tal Lewis: Guest Lecturer*

Wed Mar 9

- Lewis, "Ethical Formation and the Ordinary Life in the Modern West"

## SPRING BREAK

### *Christianity and Capitalism*

Mon Mar 28

- Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*

Weds Mar 30

- Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*

### *Race and Liberation*

Mon April 4

- Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*

Wed April 6

- Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*
- Alice Wallker, "Womanist"
- "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective"

Mon April 11

- FILM: "A Time For Burning"
- Berry, *The Hidden Wound*

Wed April 13

- Berry, *The Hidden Wound*

### *What's a Body For?: Sexuality and Marriage*

Mon April 18

- Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace"
- Augustine, from "The Good of Marriage"
- David Matzko McCarthy, "The Relationship of Bodies: A Nuptial Hermeneutics of Same-sex Unions" **[M]**
- **Video--Dan Savage debates President of National Organization of Marriage: <http://jezebel.com/5937079/watch-dan-savage-debate-the-president-of-the-national-organization-for-marriage-at-his-own-dinner-table>**
- Andrew Sullivan, "Alone Again, Naturally: The Catholic Church and the Homosexual" and "Unnatural Law: We're all sodomists now" **[M]**
- In *Doing Right and Being Good*: Karen Lebacqz, "Appropriate Vulnerability"  
Luke Timothy Johnson, "Debate and Discernment, Scripture and Spirit", Sallie Purvis, "A Common Love"

- Richard Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies,” in *Homosexuality and the Church*
- Gene Rogers, “Trinity, Marriage, Homosexuality,” in *Authorizing Marriage* by Mark Jordan

Wed April 20

*A Christian Environment*

Mon April 25

- Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*
- Wendell Berry, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation”
- Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis”
- Charles Mathewes, “Religion and the Environment”

Wed April 27

- Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*

*Radical Christianity*

Mon May 2

- Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*

Wed May 4

- Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*

Mon May 9

- Jennifer and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “The Final Conversion of Pope Francis”: <http://clas.berkeley.edu/research/religion-final-conversion-pope-francis>