

RELS 455-901
CATHOLIC ETHICS & SOCIAL JUSTICE
SPRING 2007

Wednesdays 7-9:40 p.m.

Prof. Peter McCourt, M.T.S.

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Course Description: Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: six credits in religious studies. An exploration of the Catholic church's major theological, ethical, constitutional and strategic concerns, and an analysis of Catholic social teaching and its relation to current social issues such as abortion, peace and conflict, poverty, and human rights.

Course Goals: In addition to reflecting the appropriate purposes of a foundational course in Catholic Social Ethics, the goals for this course are:

1. Articulate a theological foundation for the Church's social mission
2. Identify and discuss the basic themes and critical moments in the historical development of modern Catholic social teaching
3. Identify and discuss several key political, economic, and cultural concerns which influence the work of the church
4. Develop a methodology for reflecting upon the "signs of the times" in order to bring theology into conversation with contemporary social issues.

Teaching Method: Classes will include lectures, discussions, various learning exercises and case studies. All in-class activities will draw upon readings to be completed prior to class meetings. Several hours of reading and out of class work is expected each week. Our Blackboard course page will be used frequently for communication and assignments as well as sharing resources and links of interest (shared by you for the greater good).

Required Texts:

A Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican, USCCB Publishing

Catholic Social Teaching: 1891-Present, Charles Curran, Georgetown University Press

Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret, 4th Revised and Expanded Edition, Edward DeBerri and James Hug

Catholic Social Teaching and Movements, Marvin Mich, Twenty-Third Publications

Course Requirements:

- A. **Class Attendance and Participation (25%):** A major component of this course is structured discussion in small and large groups, therefore, active participation and presence in class is critical to successful completion of the course. Active participation requires careful reading of the assigned texts, taking notes about the readings, prior to the class meeting.
- Students will be expected to prepare a 1-2 typed page listing 3-5 statements of major themes or critical points raised in the readings and 3-5 questions based on the readings, raised in the mind of the student. Questions may be for clarification, for further study, or for discussion. You are to include a reaction of dialogue or journaling on the topic presented, not on the ease or difficulty of the reading. These are due weekly, at the end of class and will be reviewed by the professor as a measure for grading your active participation in the course.
- B. **Mid-term Exam (25%):** A take-home exam will be distributed in class and due at the start of the following class. Late exams will not be accepted except for documented medical or family emergencies.
- C. **Topic Project – Class Presentation and Community Service (25%):** Students will participate in selection of a research topic from a proposed list and will begin assembling an **oral presentation** on the doctrine and teaching of the Catholic Church on that topic and how the contemporary church works on that issue. A full discussion on requirements of the research and presentation will occur at selection time. As part of the research, each student will be expected to **work with a local Catholic agency, institution, or group**, approved by the professor ahead of time, for a total of 5 hours, actively engaged in work related to your research. Oral presentations will be scheduled for the second half of the semester, following spring break. An **outline** of your presentation is due 2 weeks before your presentation is scheduled to take place. On the day of presentation, students are to submit an **annotated bibliography** of all items used for research (books, videos, articles, interviews, etc.) and an **outline or PowerPoint slides** of the presentation.
- D. **Final Exam - Bibliographic Research Paper (25%):** A 5-7 page paper, typed, double spaced, following MLA format and citation style guide, with endnotes, will serve as the final exam. This paper should present the student's position on their research topic, the official position of the church, and the position of 2 different scholarly opinions, gained from the research items of your Topic Project. The paper is to be turned in by May 12, 5 p.m., to my faculty mailbox at VCU, in a large manila envelope with the two scholarly articles copied and attached to the paper along with a Works Cited page. The envelope should be addressed to you for return via US mail in May.

Our Attendance Policy: Missing class at times is a fact of life. However, your presence is an indicator of your desire to succeed in this university. Therefore, if a student misses 5 or more weeks of class during the semester, an automatic F grade will be given at the end of the semester, regardless of grade earned. If a student misses 3 or 4 weeks of class during the semester, the final grade earned will be lowered by one letter grade. I accept all noted forms of excuse as discussed in the student handbook (doctor/hospital, court, police, religious, and dean of students); on the first day back in class following the absence.

VCU Honor System: See *VCU Resource Guide 2006* for full explanation at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/>

VCU Creed

Philosophy for an Academic Community

Academic institutions exist, among other reasons, to discover, advance and transmit knowledge and to develop in their students, faculty and staff the capacity for creative and critical thought. At Virginia Commonwealth University, members of the academic community should strive to exemplify the following specific ideals in addition to other worthy ideals:

1. **To demonstrate academic and personal integrity.**
One who is committed to this ideal respects and observes the VCU Honor System and practices honesty, loyalty and faithfulness in personal relationships.
2. **To respect the rights and property of others.**
A commitment to this ideal respects all aspects of the personal rights of others and refrains from all forms of theft, vandalism and destruction of the property of another.
3. **To be open to others' opinions.**
This ideal requires one to listen to the opinions of others and respect the right of all persons to a free and open exchange of ideas and opinions.
4. **To uphold academic freedom and freedom of intellectual inquiry.**
The University is committed to educating its students in an atmosphere of freedom of expression, critical thinking, intellectual curiosity and scholarship to permit students to realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment to learning and service.
5. **To appreciate diversity and to value and learn from the uniqueness of each person.**
The University values racial and cultural diversity in its community to enhance and enrich a stimulating environment for teaching, learning, research and creative expression.
6. **To uphold the right of all persons to be treated with dignity and respect and to refrain from all forms of intimidation, harassment and illegal discrimination.**
One who is committed to this ideal practices courtesy and consideration toward others and refrains from any action that denigrates another person.
7. **To demonstrate and respect intellectual courage in situations that demand it.**
Commitment to this ideal requires one to uphold the highest standards and ideals of teaching, scholarship, research and intellectual integrity.

Statements in bold are the approved VCU Creed. Statements in italics are for illustration only.