

Christian Morality

Theo 215 (section 3)
Fall 2010

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Normal office hours*:

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:45 – 3:15 p.m.

Wednesdays, 11 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Other times by appointment

* *Appointments are not required but are welcome, even during normal office hours. This helps insure that I don't get called away to another meeting, and avoids scheduling conflicts with other students.*

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the principles, methods and topics of Christian theological ethics. The following themes will be addressed: the relation of Christian faith to moral reflection and decision making (both individual and social); the contribution of the Christian tradition to the understanding of the human person (including freedom, sin, conscience, character and grace); the role of the believing community in its relation to culture; and the connection of worship and spirituality to the Christian moral life. Some application will be made to selected issues in personal, professional and social ethics.

Objectives

1. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view *through...*
 - *close reading of texts – both biblical and contemporary.*
 - *respectful engagement and debate between diverse voices in the Christian tradition, public square, and our own classroom*
2. Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories, *especially ...*
 - *what difference it makes if we emphasize rules, consequences, virtues, etc.*
 - *what difference it makes if we emphasize biblical sources vs. "natural law" sources*
 - *what difference Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God makes*
3. Learning to apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions *by...*
 - *learning to draw on multiple sources of wisdom and information*
 - *regularly working through real-world case studies in the classroom.*
4. Developing skill in expressing oneself orally and in writing *through ...*
 - *two major writing assignments.*
 - *classroom discussion*
5. Developing a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values *through...*
 - *honest, conscientious, and respectful participation in all of the above!*

Course Readings & Resources

- Scharen, Christian. *One Step Closer: Why U2 Matters to Those Seeking God*. GrandRapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Stassen, Glen H. *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Wadell, Paul. *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007.
- **PLUS:** [On-line course packet](#), article handouts and/or library reserve readings.

Assignments & Evaluation	Assignment	Due	%
	Sermon on the Mount study guides	as we complete each unit	10
	300-500 word case study	22 or 24 September	10
	3-page essay on a paradox of happiness	19 October	15
	4-5-page essay – various options	9 December	20
	Midterm Exam	21 October	17½
	Final Exam	17 December	22½
	Participation	consistently	5

Writing assignments:

- **Sermon on the Mount study guides:** A standard one-page study guide will provide an opportunity for you to record your first reactions and further learnings as we study Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Ten of these will be due throughout the semester, and may not be handed in late. *Please note additional comments about this policy in the paragraph below.*
- **300-500 word case study:** During the third week of class, you will have a one-on-one conversation with the professor about (1) what you consider to be the moral challenges facing people of your generation, especially Christians, and (2) your writing goals for the semester. In preparation for this conversation, you will write a case study that narrates a specific situation which requires a moral decision.
- **Three-page essay on the paradox of happiness:** During the first month of the class we will be encountering various perspectives on the question of happiness. This essay will require you to reflect on whether and how these perspectives fit together, as well as possible implications for your own life. While your essay may be personal, it must be polished writing in classic essay format. I.e. it must be well structured, with a thesis, point-by-point argument using specific evidence, and conclusion. Include references and a bibliography or works cited page. You must cite at least one source that is neither a class reading nor an internet-only document.
- **Four- or five-page essay:** There will be three options for this assignment:
 1. Some of your colleagues’ case studies will be posted online. Write an essay about how a Christian should respond to one of these specific situations.
 2. Throughout the course, the rock group U2 and its lead singer Bono will provide an ongoing case study concerning the relation of Christian faith to popular culture. Write an essay illustrating about how other Christians need to navigate the experience that U2 captures in their songs "Vertigo" and "Acrobat."
 3. Write an essay that assesses U2's relationship to the Christian community or church, assessing whether their "thin ecclesiology" is adequate for the moral challenges that they name in their songs. Again: essay must be well structured, with a thesis, point-by-point argument using specific evidence, conclusion, references and a bibliography or works cited page.

Note: all case studies and essays must be submitted electronically via the Blackboard Drop Box or as an email attachment.

Study guides and “extra credit”: All study guides must be handed in at the end of class on the date assigned. No exceptions will be granted except for extended and documented medical or family emergencies – period. However, you can have a low or absent study guide score thrown out by attending certain special events and handing in your notes. Your professor will announce these events. This is the

only “extra credit” opportunity that will be available.

Exams: The midterm exam will test terms and concepts introduced in the units that you are completing at the time. The final exam will do the same for the second half of the course but will also require you to synthesize the course as a whole.

About attendance: Significant absences will affect your grade. Because this class relies heavily on classroom discussion and participation it is not really possible to “make up” for missed classes. If you must miss a class, you (not your professor) are responsible to compensate as best you can by borrowing notes or handouts from other students.

About participation: Constructive participation in discussions is the key to a good “participation” grade. Students learn in different ways, however. Some learn by thinking out loud, some need to listen a while before forming their own conclusions, and some feel more comfortable conversing on-line. Even for more reserved students, classroom discussion is an important way to think through questions and ideas, so all students are expected to participate in classroom discussions regularly. Students who are more comfortable sharing on-line can solidify their participation grade by participating in the Discussion Board for this class on Blackboard. Wherever you engage in discussion, reserved students are hereby assured (and assertive students hereby warned) that well-reasoned and respectful contributions to class will value more than the sheer quantity of a student's interjections.

About promptness: My policy is to reduce the grade on any late assignment by half of a letter grade per day late, except in cases of documented medical or family emergencies.

About academic integrity: The requirements of academic integrity preclude the unacknowledged use of other people’s words and ideas in one’s own writing. Such use is known as “plagiarism.” Information on [UST policies regarding academic integrity](#) is available in the [student handbook](#). It is your responsibility as a student to understand these policies, recognize plagiarism and avoid it. As applied to this class, academic integrity does **not** preclude discussions on readings, brainstorming, or mutual assistance in formulating approaches to assignments. Collaboration must end, however, when each student begins writing. Your written work, quizzes and exams must be your own.

For students with disabilities: Qualified students with documented disabilities who may need classroom accommodations should make an appointment with the Enhancement Program – Disability Services office during the first two weeks of the term. Telephone appointments are available to students as needed. Appointments can be made by calling 651-962-6315 or 800-328-6819, extension 6315. You may also make an appointment in person in O’Shaughnessy Educational Center, room 119. For further information, you can locate the Enhancement Program on the web at <http://www.stthomas.edu/enhancementprog/>.

Grading scale	94-100	A	74-76.99	C
	90-93.99	A-	70-73.99	C-
	87-89.99	B+	67-69.99	D+
	84-86.99	B	64-66.99	D
	80-83.99	B-	60-63.99	D-
	77-79.99	C+	<60	F

Course Outline & Schedule

Your professor reserves the right to make changes in this schedule of topics, readings, and tasks. Any changes will be minor and announced in advance.

Date	Topic	Reading / Assignment
9 Sept	Introductions The four “sources” of Christian morality	This syllabus! Stassen, preface Scharen, introduction Wadell, preface
14 Sept	God’s healing purpose (a quick review of the biblical drama)	Gospel of Matthew, chapters 1-4 Stassen, chapter 1 Scharen, chapter 1
16 Sept	<i>...continued</i> (with an overview of the Sermon on the Mount)	Matthew 5-7 (overview reading) Stassen, chapter 2 Scharen, chapter 2 S. on the Mount study guide due (chapters 1-7)
21 Sept	The question of happiness Why we’re confused	Scharen, chapter 3 Gertner, "The Futile Pursuit of Happiness" (online)
23 Sept	Jesus! Now we’re <i>really</i> confused! (The Beatitudes)	Matthew 5:1-12 Stassen, chapter 3 Wadell, chapter 1
<i>22 or 24 Sept</i>	1-on-1 conversation with professor	Case study due by the time of your appointment. Provide both hard and electronic copies.
28 Sept	Happiness – quest or a gift? ... solitary or communal?	Wadell, chapter 2 Hawk & Schlabach, “A Short Primer on Ethical Theory” (online) S. on the Mount study guide due (5:1-12)
30 Sept	God’s healing community Escaping our vicious cycles	Matthew 5:13-26 Stassen pp. 63-70
5 Oct	From vicious cycles to lives of virtue	Wadell, chapter 3 S. on the Mount study guide due (5:13-26)
7 Oct	Sexual ethics What is Jesus saying?	Matthew 5:27-32 Stassen pp. 71-81 Winner, “Sex in the Body of Christ” (online)
12 Oct	What then is freedom?	Rosenberger, “A World Without Bearings” (online) Wadell, chapter 5 (not chapter 4) S. on the Mount study guide due (5:27-32)
14 Oct	Personal integrity Talk and walk	Matthew 5:33-37 Stassen, pp. 82-88 S. on the Mount study guide due (5:33-37)
19 Oct	Scenic overlook #1: Christian views of the S. on the Mount Plus: midterm review session	Due: 3-page essay on one of the paradoxes of happiness

		<i>Midterm exam</i>
21 Oct		
26 Oct	Security in a world of us-vs.-them Made in God's image – but are they?	Wadell, chapter 4
28 Oct	Just peacemaking	Matthew 5:38-48 Stassen, pp. 89-105 Baxter/Cahill "Is This War Just?" (online) S. on the Mount study guide due (5:38-48)
2 Nov	Scenic overlook #2: Where to place one's trust?	Wadell, chapter 6 Scharen, chapters 6 - 8
4 Nov	NO CLASS, but read →	Scharen, chapters 4-5
9 Nov	True worship, truthful worship At the center of the Sermon on the Mount	Matthew 6:1-18 Stassen, chapter 6
11 Nov	At the center of the Christian life	Wadell, chapter 7 S. on the Mount study guide due (6:1-18)
16 Nov	Wealth & poverty Treasure, conscience and prudence	Matthew 6:19-34 Stassen, chapter 7 Beaudoin, "Consuming Faith" and "Six Ways to be a Conscientious Catholic Consumer" (both online)
18 Nov	God's new economy	Wadell, chapter 8 Cavanaugh, "Consumption, the market, and the Eucharist" (online) Scharen, chapter 9 S. on the Mount study guide due (6:19-34)
23 Nov	Making judgments Is tolerance a Christian virtue?	Matthew 7:1-13 Stassen, chapter 8 Scharen, chapter 10 Gray, "Giving Up the Gift" (online)
25 Nov	Thanksgiving	
30 Nov	Discerning the shape of love	Stassen, chapter 9 Wadell, chapter 9 S. on the Mount study guide due (7:1-13)
2 Dec	Christian vocation in the world Where to stand?	Matthew 7:13-29 Stassen, chapter 10
7 Dec	What to do?	Wadell, chapter 10 S. on the Mount study guide due (7:13-29)
9 Dec	Scenic overview #3: Discipleship and acrobatics Plus: Final exam preparation	Scharen, chapters 11-12 + epilogue Due: 4-5- page essay
17 Dec	Friday, 10:30a-12:30p: Final exam	

