

Houston Graduate School of Theology

PH 551 Introduction to Christian Ethics

Spring 2014 (Thursdays, 1:30-4:00 pm)

Benjamin S. Wall, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology

The mission of Houston Graduate School of Theology is empowering spiritual leadership through the intellectual, spiritual, and vocational development of men and women in order to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

I. Course Description

A study of ethical systems and theories in light of biblical and traditional Christian perspectives and moral norms, with reflection upon several contemporary social issues.

This course offers an opportunity for students to faithfully explore the moral features of the Christian faith—entailing moral/ethical commitment/convictions, character, virtue(s) and practices—by way of participating in the Christian tradition of moral reflection, examining the ways in which moral questions have been resolved by the main thinkers in the Christian tradition. In this course students will gain "practical" knowledge on the ways in which moral questions have been approached by the main thinkers within the Christian moral tradition. Students will engage in moral reflection alongside these main thinkers on then prevailing and current emerging moral/ethical issues/dilemmas in the light of Christian faith as they engage and participate with Christian moral thought left by the wrestling of Christians of different ages with specific ethical questions (such as Christian theological-ethical commitments on Christian love/charity, discipleship, citizenship, Christian participation in the military, war, property, the death penalty, natural law, political involvement, virtue(s), or truth-telling to name a few).

II. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Identify and describe basic vocabulary of Christian ethics (e.g., ethical systems and theories in light of biblical and traditional Christian perspectives and moral norms).
2. Identify and describe the main thinkers in the Christian tradition
3. Explain the ways in which moral/ethical theory applies to actual moral/ethical questions

III. Required Texts

[\$17.00] St. Augustine. *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*. Modern Library edition with Intro by Thomas Merton. ISBN: 0679600876

[\$5.00] Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics* III.4 <http://www.christianbook.com/>
CBD Stock No: WW564426.8

[\$26.00] Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethics*. Fortress Press, 2008. ISBN: 0800683269

- [\$37.00] Cameron, Andrew. *Joined-up life: A Christian account of how ethics works*. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011. **ISBN:** 9781844745159
- [\$2.50] *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1982.
ISBN-10: 0814612725
- [\$19.50] Neibuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. **ISBN:** 0664235395
- [\$23.00] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works Volume 45, Christian in Society II. Fortress Press, 1962. **ISBN:** 0800603451

Course Packet: Other required readings are misc. chapters and articles. Hard copies of these readings will be available in a bound packet at the beginning of the course. Students will be assessed a token charge to cover the photocopying costs of these materials. This **Course Packet** includes the following readings/texts:

Didache text: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>

Clement of Alexandria “Who is the Rich Man who is Being Saved?”

Clement text: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-richman.html>

Tertullian, “De Corona”

Tertullian text: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0304.htm>

Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologia*

Readings: 2a2ae (Second part of the Second part) Questions 64-67, 77-78

Important background to this discussion in *Summa Theologia*, 1a2ae, qq.55-67 and 90-97

Text: It would be best if students worked with printed volumes, from the library, in which it is often easier to find references. If this is impossible, see:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>

John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. III. chs. 6-10

Text: It would be best if students worked with printed volumes, from the library, in which it is often easier to find references. If this is impossible, see:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.toc.html>

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay: ‘Good and Evil’...

Text: http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/GenealogyofMorals.pdf

Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ch. 31

John M. Staudenmaier, *Electric Lights Cast Long Shadows: Seeking the Greater Good in a World of Competing Clarities* <http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/7/>

_____. *Elegant design not enough*

http://www.udmercy.edu/faculty_pages/staudenmaier_sj/files/Elegant%20Design%20Not%20Enough.pdf

IV. Course Requirements

- A. Class Preparation:** Students are expected to have read assigned texts and readings prior to the class meeting in which they are to be discussed, and to participate in seminar discussions. Students must demonstrate evidence of having read the assigned reading(s) and be prepared to discuss it in class. As proof that students have read, critically reflected, and digested the assigned reading(s), **each Tuesday, students should come prepared with a written one-page response to the reading(s).** This can express critical questions, substantive summary reflection(s), observations, constructive criticism(s), praise, and/or a more formal summary essay in which the student demonstrates theological engagement with the assigned texts/readings. **The point is to crystallize at least two to three clear impressions of what you've read.**

Students will occasionally be asked to complete outlines of the reading that will be due at the beginning of the class in which the assigned text/readings will be discussed. These outlined will be reviewed by the Professor, be part of the student's participation grade, and serve as the basis for seminar discussion (for which reason it is recommended that students bring copies of their responses with them to seminar)

These responses, critical questions, substantive summary reflection(s), observations, constructive criticism(s), praise, and/or formal summary essays combined with student participation in the class discussion will together comprise 30% of the students overall mark. The main component of this mark is the evidence shown of having completed the reading each week.

- B. Seminar Presentation(s):** Every student will be responsible for at least one 35–45 minute presentation introducing/identifying, summarizing/analyzing one of the week's topics as well as assigned text(s)/readings in the course schedule/outline. This presentation will open the week's discussion, and should cover at least three points. These points could include (but are not limited to) the following:
- What is the theological argument made by the author(s) in question?
 - What are the major theological moves the author has proposed?
 - What is the author's primary aim in writing?
 - What moral issues, questions, and/or particulars does the author(s) address?
 - What is the author's primary context and why have they chosen to put their contention/ideas/claims forth in the manner they have?
 - What resources are provided and/or questions raised for Christian ethics today?

The presentation must be accompanied by a two-page handout, provided for each of the other students in the class, that guides the rest of the class through main points of the presentation.

This presentation will count 30% toward the final mark***

*****The professor of record reserves the right to adjust the way(s) in which the Seminar presentation component takes shape as the course develops.*****

C. **Essay:** Due Date 1:30pm, Thursday, March

Students are required to prepare one essay of approximately 2500 words in length on one of the following questions:

- Choose a concrete theological question/topic/issue relating to Christian ethics dealt with in at least two of the main thinkers we have examined thus far in the course. Outline and assess the arguments, issues, main contentions used to derive a conclusion about appropriate Christian behavior in the light of the prevailing moral issue/question(s) related to the context of these main thinkers writing(s) and life.
- Identify, critically reflect on, and analyze the theological and ethical positions of the early Church writings we examined during the first weeks of this course (Household Codes in the New Testament, Didache, Christus Hymn(s), Tertullian and Clement).
- Identify, critically reflect on, and analyze the theological/ethical account of property in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, Aquinas, and Barth. Of what relevance are their treatments for modern Christians?
- What does contemporary Christian ethics have to learn from the *Rule of Saint Benedict*?

*****You are more than welcome to make an essay proposal for this course. To do so you can either email me a full one-page proposal outlining your flow of thought, thesis, and relevancy of your research idea.**

A well-written essay will contain the following:

- A clear grasp of the theological framework of the chosen topic, issue, author(s), theology as well as the ways in which this framework demands the theological/ethical conclusion proposed.
- A comparison of the chosen topic, issue, author(s) position (claims, ideas, contentions) with another theological treatment of the same theological/ethical question. How and why do the different theological arguments shape the ethical conclusion reached? (A list of constructive theological/ethical texts may be utilized for comparison is included at the end of this syllabus.)

NOTE: Well-written papers and presentations will not rely on Internet resources. Research in this class will require the close reading of *books*, or at least printed texts. A bibliography of secondary materials is attached, that does not even exhaust the full range of research materials held in the library. Essays that show evidence of too much reliance on the Internet will be marked down accordingly. Consider this an invitation to read,

mark, and inwardly digest and then re-read your primary texts in order to formulate your own opinions

This essay will count 40% toward the final mark.

- V. Unless otherwise specified, one copy of your essay, complete with signed coversheet, should be submitted to Professor Benjamin Wall on or before the due date. The second copy must be submitted electronically via email to wall_benjamin@yahoo.com utilizing Microsoft Word (e.g., .doc or .docx). **No essay will be accepted and graded until and unless you have submitted both copies.**

Papers written in anything but Times New Roman, 12-point type, will not be graded. Please do not double-double space or use additional spacing between paragraphs. Use citations as necessary and third-person writing throughout.

VI. Grading Scale

Course Preparation (See details above)	30%
Seminar Presentation(s) (See details above)	30% [% may be divided per # of pres.]
Essay (See details above)	40%

VII. Policies

- A. Regular attendance and submission of assignments on due dates in syllabus is expected. Each student must talk to the instructor about circumstances affecting his or her ability to attend class and complete assignments. Attendance is required at scheduled classes and at the scheduled start time. The student could lose as much as a letter grade for excessive tardiness. Excessive absence without justifiable reasoning can cause a major deduction of grade, no credit, and/or extra work required.
- B. All work is expected on the due dates. Students should expect a grade reduction of up to one letter grade on late essays.
- All assignments are due on the due dates indicated for each class deliverable. Assignments posted after the indicated due dates will be subject to a loss of 10% of the available points for each day late. Similarly, assignments posted after their specified due dates are subject to a late penalty of 10% of the available credit per day.
 - **No assignment can be accepted for grading after the final day of class unless a prior arrangement for the grade of “Incomplete” has been granted due to extenuating circumstances.**
- C. **Turnitin.com**
1. All written assignments are subject to required submission to www.turnitin.com to check for originality and style. The assignments that are required for submission will be described in the syllabus.

2. Students will create an account at www.turnitin.com. After doing so, the student will join the course page with the code and password supplied by the instructor. A list of assignments and due dates will be available on the course page.

3. Students will submit assignments by the due date and time, but they will still submit the assignments in a hard copy format. **See submission details concerning the final essay submission (re. submission via “hard” and “electronic” copy)**

D. **Electronic Equipment Usage in Classrooms**

It is expected that students will use technology (cell phones, laptop computers, iPads, etc.) during classes only for the purposes of class work. Therefore, students should turn off cell phones and refrain from texting and using laptop computers during classes except for the purposes of taking notes or doing research specifically authorized by the course instructor. Students who have emergency needs not covered by this policy must ask for an exception from the course instructor.

E. **Incompletes**

In cases of extenuating circumstances, and at the discretion of the instructor, a student may request and apply for an extension on all required assignments, which are not completed by the end of the semester or term, subject to a 5-point grade reduction on the final grade of each assignment. If an extension is granted, the instructor will record a grade of “I” (Incomplete) and set an extension of time, not to exceed thirty calendar days from the end of the class, within which to complete the work. Additional extensions may be granted only by the Academic Dean or Associate Dean and only after a student has petitioned the Dean in writing. If the course work is not completed within the extended time allotment, the grade of “I” will be converted to the grade earned by the student up to that point. The student is responsible to ensure that all necessary paperwork is submitted to the registrar’s office by the deadline published in the school calendar.

F. **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is presenting the work of another person as one’s own without giving proper credit for the use of the information. Students must not quote books, articles, essays, or Internet sites without giving proper credit to the author(s). Students should guard against plagiarism by crediting the original author through use of proper citations. Internet plagiarism is a particularly easy and tempting form of intellectual theft. Cutting and pasting sentences and paragraphs from the Internet without citations is plagiarism. Failure to cite Internet sources is plagiarism. Any student who is found guilty of plagiarism is subject to a range of consequences as outlined below.

1. If a faculty member suspects plagiarism, the instructor will investigate. If suspicions are confirmed, the faculty member will present the evidence to the appropriate Associate Dean as a record of the offense. If the Associate Dean concurs with the allegations, the following procedures should be implemented as applicable:
 - The faculty member may discuss the offense with the student following consultation with the Associate Dean, but the student will meet with the Associate Dean.

- For a first offense, the faculty member, in consultation with the Associate Dean, may give opportunity for a rewrite of the assignment or may assign a grade of zero for the plagiarized assignment.
 - For a particularly egregious case of plagiarism on a major assignment, the consequences could result in automatic failure of the course.
2. The student may appeal the above-mentioned decisions of the faculty member in writing to the Academic Dean.
 3. The second confirmed offense will result in expulsion from school. The student will be notified by a letter from the Academic Dean. His or her only opportunity for appeal will be to the President in writing. The President's decision will be final.

G. Library Usage

A student's ability to get the most out of library resources will enhance the possibility of earning a high grade in this class. Therefore, students should consider using, in addition to the HGST library, one or more of the following libraries.

1. *Houston Public Library*— Any resident of Texas can obtain a free Houston Public Library card. Library cardholders have access to all of the books in the library system as well as the use of free interlibrary loans, meaning that HPL cardholders can borrow almost any book available. Cardholders can use the library's website, www.houstonlibrary.org, to search the catalog and manage interlibrary loans. The website also contains links to WorldCat and other online databases that will enhance your research. The HPL location that is closest to HGST, the Collier Regional Branch (832-393-1740), is located at 6200 Pinemont, which is less than three miles from campus. A better option would be the newly expanded and renovated Central Library (832-393-1313), which is located downtown at 500 McKinney. In addition, HPL has many other locations. The HGST library can give you an application for an HPL library card, or you can print the application form from their website.
2. *Fondren Library at Rice University*— The Fondren Library (713-348-5113) is located at 6100 Main. Please visit www.rice.edu/fondren for more information. The procedure for borrowing books at the Fondren Library is, first, go to the online catalog [www.rice.edu/fondren] to search for available books; second, go to the HGST library and fill out a form, signed by HGST library personnel, to take with you to the Fondren Library for each book; third, retrieve the book(s) yourself; fourth, take the book(s) and the signed form to the circulation desk to complete checkout (return the yellow copy to the HGST library; when the book(s) are returned to the Fondren Library, they will indicate so on the pink and gold copies; return the pink copy to the HGST Library and keep the gold copy for your records).
3. Lanier Theological Library is a new resource for scholarly theological research in the Houston area. The library is open to the public, Monday, Wednesday-Friday, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM, and Tuesday, 9:00 AM - 9:00 PM. The library is a research library with no circulation privileges. Nonetheless, students should consider Lanier Library to be a valuable research option. The catalog of Lanier Library is available online: <http://alexandria.lanierlibrary.net/#>.
4. *Cardinal Beran Library at St Mary's Seminary*—the home of an extensive theological library, St Mary's Seminary (713-686-4345) is located at 9845 Memorial Drive, only 4.6 miles from HGST. For more information, please visit

- <http://beran.stthom.edu>. The Doherty Library on the main campus of University of St Thomas is also an option.
5. *Library of the Presbytery of the New Covenant* – as an HGST student you have borrowing privileges at this library located at 1110 Lovett Blvd, Houston. To search their online catalog, go to <http://www.pbyofnewcovenant.org/cgi-bin/rqm/rqm.cgi>.
 6. Other options include Harris County Public Library (www.hcpl.net) and the libraries at the University of Houston and Houston Baptist University.

VIII. Notes for Writing Assignments

- A. Writing assignments should conform to Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th Edition. This includes matters of style and format. Counseling students should pay particular attention to the *Manual* guidelines on submission of academic papers.
- B. The instructor requires the use of footnotes for documentation. The student should number pages. According to Turabian, page numbers should be in the upper right hand corner, except for the first page of the paper (not counting the title page). Margins should be one inch on all four sides, except where major headings require a two-inch top margin.
- C. The student should utilize 12-point Times New Roman font throughout. The instructor prefers that the student **not** use presentation or report binders or folders. She prefers submission of papers with staples or binder clips.
- D. Critical or formal writing differs from colloquial writing or spoken English at several points. The student should note the following guidelines for critical writing. The instructor expects students to follow these guidelines strictly. Failure to do so will be penalized.
 1. Avoid 1st or 2nd person references (“I,” “we,” or “you”). Keep the written projects objective and professional. The student must remember that imperative forms are second person.
 2. Never use contractions.
 3. Avoid passive voice construction (i.e. The student should write “God chose Joshua” rather than “Joshua was chosen by God.”). Some exceptions are necessary, but limiting the use of passive voice is a good policy.
 4. Be sure that number and tense always agree (i.e., Do not write in one place that “Brueggemann argues . . .” and at another place “Brueggemann argued . . .”). Subject-verb agreement is imperative.
 5. Spellcheck! Spellcheck! Spellcheck! Professor Wall does not tolerate misspelled words. Failure to spellcheck will result in a substantive reduction on the grade for written assignments.
 6. Grammar check works as well!
 7. All pronouns should have clear antecedents. Avoiding “it is” and “there is” in the paper removes much of the ambiguity of pronoun usage.
 8. Sentence fragments are unacceptable. Every sentence must have a subject and a predicate.

IX. Class and Reading Schedule

All readings should be completed prior to class discussion on the topic

Week 1 (Jan. 23) Ethics as Worship: A Christian account of ethics how it works

Readings: Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 1:15-22; and chp. 3; Eph. 5:21-6:9; 1 Cor. 10:31; 2 Cor. 5:11-21
Cameron, "Joined Up Life" (pp.9–25)

Haustafeln – “Household Codes” and *Didache*

Col 3:18—4:1; Eph. 5:21—6:9; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Peter 2:18—3:7.

Didache: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>

After having read and reflected upon these texts begin to respond to the following inquires:

- Which groups are addressed in each of these texts?
- What are they told to do?
- How is Ephesians 5:21—6:9 different from Colossians 3:18—4:1?
- What motivations are added and/or made more explicit in Ephesians as to why certain groups should act in the ways the author recommends?
- To which particular groups of people within Christian families or "households" are these instructions intended?
- According to these household codes, in what ways should each group treat other members of their household?
- Why were/are these texts considered "household codes"?
- In the light of these “household codes” texts what differences and/or similarities emerge between first century Christian households and the predominate understanding of the role of the *pater familias* – "father of the family" and his household (slaves, wife, children) within the Roman Empire?

Week 2 (Jan. 30) Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria

Readings: Tertullian: “De Corona” <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0304.htm>

Clement of Alexandria: “Who is the Rich Man who is Being Saved?”

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-richman.html>

Week 3 (Feb. 6) Augustine of Hippo

Readings: *City of God*, books 1 (entire); 14 (chapters 1-4, 6-7, 9-17, 21-28) and 19 (chapters 5-8, 10-17, 19-20, 24-27)

Cameron, “Joined Up Life” (pp.42–45)

Augustine, “Against Lying” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.v.vi.html>

Week 4 (Feb. 13) The Rule of Saint Benedict

Readings: The Rule of Saint Benedict

Cameron, “Joined Up Life” (pp.26–40; 148–155; 173–182)

Week 5 (Feb. 20) Natural Law and Virtue(s)

Readings: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, 2a2ae (Second part of the Second part)

Questions 64-67, 77-78: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>

*****Vital background to this discussion in *Summa Theologia*, 1a2ae, qq.55-67 and 90-97

Week 6 (Feb. 27) Desire(s), Systems of Inclusion, Flesh, Moral Complexity, Amorality

Readings: Cameron, "Joined up Life" pp.47–80

Week 7 (March 6) Martin Luther: *Oeconomia, Politea, Ecclesia*

Readings: "Exposition of Psalm 127, for the Christians at Riga in Livonia"

Week 8 (March 13) Ethics: Located in the work of God

Readings: Cameron, "Joined up Life" (pp. 81–127)

John Calvin *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III. Chapters. 6–10

Text Online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.toc.html>

***** Spring Break: March 15-23 (no classes)*****

Week 9 (March 27) Christian Ethics: Moral necessity (Five Things)

Readings: Cameron, "Joined up Life" (pp. 141–182)

Week 10 (April 3) On Good and Evil

Readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Essay: 'Good and Evil' ...

http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/GeneologyofMorals.pdf

Week 11 (April 10) Locating ethics within God's command

Readings: Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, "The 'Ethical' and the 'Christian' as a Topic"

Week 12 (April 17) Creation's claim on Christian moral action

Readings: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.4, Paragraph 54 (pp. 116-323)

Week 13 (April 24) Recovery of Christian Ethics

Readings: Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chp. 3

Essay: Due Date 1:30pm, Thursday, April 24, 2014

Week 14 (May 1) Abortion and Bioethics

Readings: Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, chp. 31

Cameron, "Joined up Life" (pp. 299–304)

Week 15 (May 7) Christian Ethics and Technology

Readings: John M. Staudenmaier, *Electric Lights Cast Long Shadows: Seeking the Greater Good in a World of Competing Claritys* <http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/7/>

John M. Staudenmaier, *Elegant design not enough*

http://www.udmercy.edu/faculty_pages/staudenmaier_sj/files/Elegant%20Design%20Not%20Enough.pdf

The professor of record reserves the right to adjust classroom topics as the course develops.

IX. Bibliography

The following texts address specific ethical issues in a theologically constructive way and are suggested as possible contrasting treatments for the essay (in addition to the thinkers covered in the course discussions):

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Ethics*
 Brock, Brian, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture*
 Brunner, Emil, *The Divine Imperative: A Study of Christian Ethics*
 Grisez, Germain, *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Christian Moral Principles* 3 vols.
 Guroian, Vigen, *Incarinate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*
 Gustavson, James, *Can Ethics be Christian?*
 Fergusson, David, *Community, Liberalism, and Christian Ethics*
 Hauerwas, Stanley, *The Hauerwas Reader*
 Hays, Richard, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*
 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*
 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, 2nd edn.
 Maurice, F. D., *Reconstructing Christian Ethics: Selected Writings*
 McClendon, James, *Systematic Theology: Ethics*
 Meilander, Gilbert, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics and The Theory and Practice of Virtue*
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*
 O'Donovan, Oliver, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*
 O'Donovan, Oliver, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theory*
 Ramsey, Paul, *Basic Christian Ethics*, and *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics*