

## **Christian Ethics and War, Rel 292, Spring 2006**

Tues/Thurs. 12:50 – 2:00 PM; Main Memor 301

Instructor: Kelly Denton-Borhaug, Comenius 404

[kdenton@moravian.edu](mailto:kdenton@moravian.edu); 610-625-7104

Office Hours: Monday afternoons; TR 2-4 PM

You're welcome to stop by, call or email for office appt. I encourage students to make time to speak with me regularly.

**Course Description:** What do Christians think about the urgent and simultaneously perennial human problem of war? Is war-making inherently compatible or incompatible with Christian faith? How have Christian thinkers contributed to broader societal understandings, values and practices related to conflict and war? This course will introduce students to the study of Christian ethics through focus on this social issue. Students will be exposed to Christian thinking about pacifism, non-violent action, just war theory and the development of Christian realism, as well as other forms of Christian response to the reality of war. Emphasis will be on careful and deliberate reading to deeply understand the trajectories of various authors' thinking. We'll also make use of film in our class, field trips (if we can arrange it!) and possible guest lecturers.

### **Course Goals:**

- 1) Students will gain an introductory understanding of the complexity of Christian thought in relationship to the reality of war.
- 2) Students will have the opportunity to develop their own philosophical/religious/moral frameworks in response to this social reality.
- 3) Students will improve their critical thinking, reading and writing skills.

### **Required Course Books for Purchase:**

Shannon E. French, *Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present*

Robert Jay Lifton, Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half Century of Denial*

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*

Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*

#### **Books on Reserve in Reeves Library**

Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace*

Arthur Holmes, Ed., *War and Christian Ethics*

*Note: Additional resources will also be on reserve in the library or may be accessible through Blackboard..*

### **Required Films:**

*Munich*, 2005, Dreamworks

*The Fog of War*, 2004, Columbia Tristar (seen in class)

*Scott Ritter: War with Iraq: A Catastrophe in the Making*, Mission Helper Productions, 2002 (seen in class)

*Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped,*” videorecording, ABC News, 1998 (seen in class)

## Required Extra-class Experiences

Jan. 19, 8:00 pm showing of *Munich* at AMC Tilghman Sq 8 Theatre (carpooling with other class members)

Mar. 27, 7:00 pm presentation of activist Hannah Mermelstein here at Moravian (location TBA)

## Course Requirements

- Prepared class participation (with readings thoughtfully prepared prior to each class period). Please be in class on time and ready to go. ***Bring whatever text we are reading with you to class!*** Read with a pen in hand, underlining key passages and writing your own shorthand in the margin with questions, notations, etc. Unexcused absences will mean a serious detraction in your grade. Your participation also includes your active, engaged presence in class. This includes:
  - participating in discussion, asking questions, taking lead and letting others provide the direction;
  - listening actively and showing understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas;
  - volunteering willingly in small group work and carrying your own share of the small group responsibilities, helping the group to stay on track.If you feel uncertain about speaking up in classroom settings, come and see me in the first week or two of our semester – I can help! The only excused absences are for serious illness, family emergency or religious observance and must be cleared with me in advance of the class you miss. Please make plans now to attend the various experiences I've planned for our semester together; speak with your employer and/or coaches if you need to be excused from other responsibilities in order to attend. 25% of grade.
- Periodic response papers, as indicated in the syllabus, and one 7-8 double-spaced paper. Your papers will not require any additional research outside course materials, but demonstrate your own thoughtful and critical grappling with this material. Please plan on coming into my office at least once to talk about one of your papers with me (and/or anything else you wish to discuss). Your 4 short response papers will each be worth 8% of your grade; your longer Niebuhr paper will be worth 18% of your grade. **Unless you have made prior arrangements with me (and have an acceptable excuse related to those for excused class absence), NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.**
- Final exam, take home, covering all of the readings, films, field trips, class discussions, etc. of this course. This take-home will give you the opportunity to draw on the authors we have read, the films we have seen and everything you have learned in order for you to develop your own ethical response to the question: how shall human beings respond to the perennial problem of human conflict and war? 25% of grade.

*Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.*

**Important Note:** Various course resources will be posted on Blackboard. Students are advised to become familiar with this Moravian online course resource. Let me know if you need assistance.

**Additional Note:** This syllabus will be posted on Blackboard, and updated with any changes we find we need to make as we progress through the semester.

### **Week 1 Getting Started**

Jan. 17 Course Introduction: What is Ethics?

Jan. 19 Read: *Engaging the Powers*, Introduction and Chapter One, “The Myth of the Domination System”

**Due at beginning of class: 2-page double-spaced response paper, addressing all the reading of this week and class discussion, lecture, etc: What is the “myth of the domination system,” according to Wink? What are the diverse ethical resources Wink draws upon to analyze such a myth?**

**\*\*\*On Thurs., Jan. 19, we will gather at the AMC Tilghman Sq. 8 Theatre to view *Munich*, the new film directed by Stephen Spielberg. We will discuss carpooling in class. Please be prepared to purchase your own ticket (\$7.50). This is a required outside event for this course!**

### **Week 2 Jesus and the Domination System**

Jan. 24 Read: *Engaging the Powers*, Chapter 4, “The Nature of the Domination System,” and 5, “Unmasking the Domination System”

In class: discussion of *Munich* in combination with Wink’s exposition

Jan. 26 Read: the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Mt. 5:1-7:28; Lk 6:17-7:1) – then re-read these sermons again – what do they tell you about Jesus of Nazareth and his early followers’ response to the perennial problem of human conflict and violence?

Also read: *Engaging the Powers*, Chapter 6, “God’s Domination-Free Order: Jesus and God’s Reign”

### **Week 3 Nonviolent Engagement**

Jan. 31 Read: *Engaging the Powers*, Chapter 8, “To Wash Off the Not Human,” and 9, “Jesus’ Third Way: Nonviolent Engagement”

**Feb. 2 Due: 4 page response paper, addressing all of the readings, class discussion and lecture (since your 1<sup>st</sup> response paper): What is Jesus’ “third way,” according to Wink? How does it differ from the “other two ways”? What ethical resources does Wink draw upon in his exposition? Where do you agree and/or disagree with Wink, and why? Drawing upon your viewing, and thinking through of *Munich* in combination with our reading of Wink, do you think that nonviolent engagement is feasible in a world of conflict such as our own? Why or why not?**

In class: Introduction to Just War Theory

**Week 4** *Just War Theory ancient and modern*

Feb. 7 Read: “The Theory of the Just War in the Christian Roman Empire,” *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Roland Bainton (on reserve; make your own copy of reserve documents so that you can write on them and bring them with you to class).

Feb. 9 (no class: professor away at conference)

Read: Arthur F. Holmes, *War and Christian Ethics*, Introduction, pp 1-9; and selections from Augustine, pp 61-83.

**Week 5** *Just War continued*

Feb. 14 (no class: professor away at conference)

Read: “Principles of a Just war” in

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pol116/justwar.htm>

Also read: “Beyond Just War and Pacifism,” *Engaging the Powers* (Chapter 11); and read: The Summa Theologica, Part II, Question 40, Aquinas (found on the internet at <http://ethics.acusd.edu/Books/Texts/Aquinas/JustWar.html> )

Feb. 16 **Due: 3-page response paper: What are the primary ethical concerns behind Augustine’s development of a Just War ethic? What IS the Just War Doctrine? Tell of at least two important insights regarding the development of this doctrine you learned from reading Bainton; and discuss at least one addition to the doctrine contributed by Aquinas. How do you respond to this ethical framework; what in it is worthwhile, what is not and why?**

**Week 6** *Just War Theory, in Contemporary Times*

Feb. 21 Read: “Suicide Bombers: The Just War Debate, Islamic Style,” John Kelsay, *The Christian Century* Aug. 14, 2002; and “Just War Divide: One Tradition, Two Views,” David P. Gushee, *The Christian Century* Aug. 14 2002 (in Blackboard documents)

In class: viewing of the film, *Scott Ritter: War in Iraq: A Catastrophe in the Making*

Feb. 23 Read: “*Engaging the Powers*,” Chapter Eleven, “Beyond Just War and Pacifism,” and “Is the War Against Terrorism Just?” in *Just War Against Terror*, Jean Bethke Elshtain (on library reserve)

In class: group activity that will depend upon your comprehensive reading of materials for this week!

**Week 7** *Moral Man, Immoral Society*

**Feb. 28** Read: Niebuhr, Introduction and Chapter One

Due in class: Niebuhr study sheet (study sheets available on Blackboard)

In class: Introduction to Reinhold Niebuhr and *Moral Man, Immoral Society*

Key Question: What is the best possible response to the human reality of conflict/war?

Mar. 3 Read: Niebuhr, Chapter Two and Three

Due in class: Niebuhr study sheet

(spring recess: read ahead in Niebuhr over the break!)

**Week 8**

Mar. 14 Read: Niebuhr, Chapters Four, Five and Six

Due in class: Niebuhr study sheet

Mar. 16 Read: Niebuhr, Chapters Seven and Eight

Due in class: Niebuhr study sheet

### **Week 9**

Mar. 21 Read Niebuhr, Chapters Nine and Ten

Due in class: Niebuhr study sheet

Mar. 23 Conclusions and questions about paper

### **Week 10**

Mar. 28 **Due in hard copy at the beginning of class!** Niebuhr Assignment: In 7-8 double-spaced pages, answer the following questions with your own elegant, cogent and intelligent essay: What are the resources, according to Niebuhr, that humans may draw upon to provide some sort of ethical framework for the reality of conflict/war? Outlining the main facets of Niebuhr's argument, and keeping in mind the theological/philosophical underpinnings of Niebuhr's portrayal, assess from your own perspective the validity of his conclusions regarding the ethical resources he investigates. In your mind, what parts of his argument "hold water," what parts do not, and why? How if at all can Niebuhr's ideas assist people facing contemporary situations of conflict and war?

In class: view the film: *Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped*, videorecording, ABC News, 1998.

Mar. 30 Read: *Hiroshima in America: A Half Century of Denial*, Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, Introduction and part I, Chapters 1-4

### **Week 11**

April 4 (no class: Spring all-college day)

April 6 Read: *Hiroshima*, part I, Chapters 5-7

### **Week 12**

April 11 Read: *Hiroshima*, Part III, Chapters 1-3

April 13 Read: *Hiroshima*, Part III, Chapters 4-5; Part IV, Chapters 1-6

**Due in class: 3-page response paper, questions TBA**

**Week 13** *Juxtaposing Warrior Ethics, the analysis of denial, and theology of active nonviolence*

April 18 Read: *Warrior Ethics*, Forward, Chapters 1 and 3

April 20 Read: *Warrior Ethics*, Chapters 5 and 6

**Week 14** *One last look at Walter Wink's Engaging the Powers*

April 25 Read: *Engaging the Powers*, Chapters Ten and Twelve

April 27 Read: *Engaging the Powers*, Chapters Fifteen

Last day of class: handing out of take-home exam; evaluations; final musings

