

Rel 370: Senior Seminar in Religion

“Christian Ethics: Disrupting the Status Quo”

Instructor: Kelly Denton-Borhaug; Office: Comen. 109; phone 610-625-7104

Monday/Wednesday; 1:10 – 2:20; PPHAC 103

Office Hours: M/W 12 – 1 pm; F 3-4 pm

Course Description: The Senior Seminar in Religion is a writing/reading intensive, interdisciplinary course that draws on multiple themes and methods for religious study, and offers juniors and seniors who are majoring in Religion the opportunity for collaborative and in depth study, conversation, questioning and learning. This year’s senior seminar will focus on Christian ethics. We will study some introductory material that provides an entry to this discipline (especially for those members of the class who haven’t had much experience in this particular area), and then we will focus on two very different examples of this kind of work. First we will study a classic, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, by Reinhold Niebuhr; then we will delve into a contemporary example of “liberationist Christian ethics,” by Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*. Students will draw upon the methods and skills they learn throughout their study to interview a local religious leader about a troubling and intensive ethical issue the leader has faced, studied, thought about and attempted to address through his/her own religious ethical framework. Students will then analyze their interviewee in terms of everything they have learned and present their findings to their peers in class.

Course Objectives by semester’s end:

- 1) *Students will recognize basic elements, methods and skills that are used in Christian ethics, and be able to use them to analyze a contemporary practice of Christian ethics on the ground.*
- 2) *Our cross-cultural awareness and appreciation will grow.*
- 3) *Reading, writing, thinking, interpersonal and analytical skills all will be challenged.*

Required Course Books:

Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women’s Lives Matter*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006

Denton-Borhaug, Kelly, *U.S. War-culture, Sacrifice and Salvation* London: Equinox, 2011.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, first published in 1932 by Charles Scribner’s Sons – Additional articles, chapters and other material will be made available through Blackboard documents, Reeve’s library reserve, and/or as handouts.

Course Requirements:

- 1) *Careful advance reading, attendance and participation* in class and at extra-class events. A seminar course such as this requires the careful preparation and the active participation of every student. Read every assigned text carefully well in advance of class. Don’t use a highlighter to mark your text, but with pen or pencil write your reactions and questions in the margins and note the development of the author’s argument. Underline what you think are the key points, ideas and reflections, and come to class ready to discuss, share and raise questions. **Bring whatever text(s) we are reading with you to class every time! We will regularly use them and read aloud from them in our seminar! Students who wish to receive a high participation grade also will**

bring their notebooks with them every class period, take copious notes, ask pertinent, thoughtful and challenging questions, and respond intelligently, graciously and energetically to their peers and professor. 5 % of total grade, but with additional penalty for missing class, see below:

Religious holidays, serious illness and family emergency are the only accepted reasons for missing class. ***Students with more than one unexcused absence will lose at least a letter grade*** (those students who need to miss classes because of religious observance will have the option to make up what they have missed – if you fall into this category, please inform me immediately!). *In case of excused absences, please contact me and let me know (in advance of class!).* In any event, you are responsible for every class session’s material, notes and assignments.

- 2) Four papers as listed in the schedule of classes. Additional guidelines and expectations will be posted in Blackboard. Each paper is worth 20% of your total grade.
- 3) Oral presentation of your interview findings and analysis, using the tools and methods you gain from study of Christian ethics. Worth 15% of total grade.

Preliminary guidelines to get you thinking about the interview project: Individually or in pairs, you will choose a local religious leader to interview in depth about a particular ethical issue he/she has faced (while this may be related to their own person, their ethical deliberation also should be intertwined with their religious leadership). The examples of such ethical work in West’s book, Chapter Five, are your example for this project. FIRST: You will want to understand the particular issue in depth, and also engage in serious conversation with this leader regarding his/her own ethical method, resources, deliberation, praxis, struggle, and findings/outcomes. Note: Students will use HIRSB protocol for this project, and *may not* proceed with their interview before receiving approval. Students should plan on requesting at least one hour and up to two hours from this leader for this in depth conversation. You may need to have preliminary conversations with a number of leaders to determine whether they are willing to engage this with you. SECOND: You will analyze the findings from this interview with respect to everything that you have studied in this class. Deliberate on the ethical method, process, resources, and more utilized by this leader. What have you learned from this concrete example of “ethics on the ground?” How might this example of ethical deliberation and leadership be improved upon, that is, achieve greater ethical scope, depth, inclusivity and integrity? Your presentation in class will be to 1) very briefly describe the first step above; and 2) expound with much greater depth on your own intellectual/ethical analysis of the second step.

- *Additional notes:*
- Students are responsible for adherence to Moravian College’s Academic Honesty Policy, found in the Student Handbook.
- Any student who wishes to disclose a disability and request accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for this course first **MUST** meet with either Mrs. Laurie Roth in the Office of Learning Services (for learning and/or ADD/ADHD) or Dr. Ronald Kline in the Counseling Center (for all other disabilities). You also may contact Elaine Mara, assistant

director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

- Please be alert to any changes we may find we need to make to the syllabus along the way of our course.

Schedule of Classes:

Aug. 27 Introduction to class; some building blocks for Christian ethics

Aug. 29 Read: Robin Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide*, pp 9 – 79
(on library reserve: please make your own copy for reading, notations, and bring it with you to class)

Sept. 3 (no class: Labor Day)

Sept. 5 Read: Robin Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide*, pp 9-79
(we will divide this reading into two days work in class)

Sept 10: Niebuhr: Introduction to his life and work; reading TBA
Due: 5 page paper: fundamentals of Christian ethics (guidelines posted in Blackboard)

Sept 12: Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, Chapter One

Sept 17 Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society*, Chapter Two

Sept. 19 Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, Chapter Three

Sept. 24 Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, Chapter Four

Sept. 26 Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, Chapter Five

Oct. 1 Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, Chapter Six

Oct. 3 Introduction to Traci West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*

Due by Friday, Oct. 5: Hard copy of 7 page paper on Niebuhr due by 4 pm in prof's office door box (guidelines posted in Blackboard)

Oct. 8 West: *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, Preface through Chapter One

Oct. 10 West, Chapter Two

Oct. 15 West, Chapter Three

Oct. 17 Meredith L. Ralston, Chapter 2: "Criticisms of Welfare Services," Chapter 3: "The Women's Explanations for Their Experiences," *"Nobody Wants to Hear Our Truth": Homeless Women and Theories of the Welfare State*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996. (posted in Blackboard)

Selection from Wally Lamb, Ed. *I'll Fly Away: Further Testimonies from the Women of York Prison*, Harper, 2007.

Oct. 22 *Due at beginning of class: 7 page West paper (guidelines posted in Blackboard)*

Oct. 24 Introduction to reality of war-culture/ppt slides from Denton-Borhaug's research
Read: Kathryn Tanner, "How my mind has changed"

Oct. 29 Denton-Borhaug, Introduction and Chapter One

Oct. 31 Denton-Borhaug, Chapter Two

Nov. 5 Denton-Borhaug, Chapter Three

Nov. 7 (no class; prof away at conference)

Nov. 12 Denton-Borhaug, Chapter Four

Nov. 14 Denton-Borhaug, Chapter Five

Nov. 19 (no class; prof away at conference)

Due by email to prof this day: the choice of your interviewee, plus a one page statement about why you think this individual will be a good religious leader to interview

Nov. 21 Preparation and Review for final paper

Due this day: completion and submission of IRB forms to Prof. Ginny O'Connell

Nov. 26 **Due: 7 page paper on Denton-Borhaug**

Nov. 28 Ethics and Religion on the Ground: Student Presentations

Dec. 3 Ethics and Religion on the Ground: Student Presentations

Dec. 5 **Final Class, Wrap up and Course Eval**