

Gonzaga-in-Florence
Summer 2012
RELI 310: Bible and Contemporary Christian Ethics***
Religious Studies Department

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Description

Moral and ethical dilemmas confront every society. Is killing acceptable, and if so, under what circumstances? Should the rich help the poor? Should women be given the same rights as men? Should gays and lesbians be allowed to marry? How loyal should one be to one's country? Biblical texts address multiple moral and ethical issues, often framing such issues as questions of justice or injustice. This class explores four contemporary moral/ethical issues by placing the personal narratives of individuals into mutually critical dialogue with biblical texts. We will analyze, in other words, the interplay between the treatment of morals/ethics in biblical texts and contemporary experiences of justice/injustice. This course focuses upon four contemporary issues: gender/sexuality; wealth/poverty; war/violence/peace; and nationalism/patriotism.

Due to our location in Florence, the course will give some attention to themes and materials that specifically relate to Italy. Such materials will include three New Testament texts that deal directly with Rome (Paul's letter to the Romans, Mark's gospel, and the book of Revelation); papal encyclicals/apostolic constitutions (*Rerum Novarum*, *Gaudium et Spes*), and readings from Italians (St. Francis of Assisi, Aldo Capitini). The course will also address Aldo Capitini, Wealth and Poverty in the early Roman Church; and the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust.

*Please note that this course satisfies the Gonzaga "Social Justice" (SJ) course requirement.

**Please note that this course is cross-listed with the WGST (Women's and Gender Studies) program.

Objectives

1. Articulate an informed understanding of the multiple (and often conflicting) perspectives in biblical texts regarding some specific issues of social justice, ethics, and morals.
2. Become acquainted with some critical tools and scholarship in biblical studies.
3. Reflect critically on the implications of biblical texts for issues related to contemporary social justice and ethics.
4. Reflect critically on the ethical, spiritual, and justice aspects in four personal narratives.
5. Construct a mutually critical dialogue between biblical texts and these personal narratives.
6. Explain what "social justice" is, and how to use specific critical tools to reflect critically on issues related to social justice.
7. Develop skills in close reading of texts.
8. Write clearly, concisely, and cogently.

Requirements

1. **Read and View** all assigned readings/viewings (including the syllabus) prior to the designated class lecture, and be prepared to discuss them thoughtfully in class.
2. **Quizzes (10%)**. There will be a brief quiz for each of the four personal narratives. These are designed to assess if you have read the books; they will be graded on a curve.
3. **Papers (60%)**. Four, 2 ½ page papers in which you place a personal narrative into critical dialogue with a biblical text. Details TBA.
4. **Participation (10%)**. In addition to in-class participation, each student is required to post one discussion post (150-200 words each) per week. Details TBA.
5. **Exam (20%)**. A final exam will assess your ability to synthesize and analyze key themes and motifs from the course.

Required Texts

- The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha. (New Revised Standard Version). Augmented Fourth Edition. Oxford Press. 2010.
- Mam, Somaly. *The Road of Lost Innocence: The True Story of a Cambodian Heroine*. Spiegel & Grau, 2008.
- Claiborne, Shane. *Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. Zondervan, 2006.
- White, Mel. *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America*. Penguin, 1995.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006 (originally 1958).

(I do not require that you use the New Oxford Annotated Bible, but I do require you to use a New Revised Standard Version (one of many English translations). If you already have a NRSV (such as the Harper Collins Study Bible), you do not need to purchase a new one.

In addition to the above texts, you will also be asked to read a few short excerpts from various readings (available on Blackboard and online), and to view a couple online video/audio clips.

Late Work Policy

All papers are due by the date and time indicated. Any late papers will be lowered by 5% each day they are late. Late discussion postings are not accepted.

Reading/Viewing Assignments

Assignments to be read or viewed are paired with every lecture. These assignments should, unless otherwise indicated, be read *prior* to that particular lecture. Assignments are not, in other words, listed as homework for the next lecture.

Grading

A	94-100	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	60-67
A-	90-93	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59
B+	88-89	C+	78-79	D+	68-69		

How to Do Well in This Class

1. Do not fall behind. This is even more important in a six-week course. Stay ahead with the readings and assignments as much as possible.
2. Proofread your papers, exams, and postings. Do assignments at the last minute only if you want to do poorly on them. Instead, write rough drafts and proofread. Writing clearly and concisely is a learned practice for most and unfortunately does not come naturally.
3. Read the assigned texts closely, carefully, and actively.
4. Ask me questions whenever you have them. That is what I am here for.
5. There are two optimal ways to improve one's writing: one is to *write, rewrite, and write more*. The second is to *read good writing*; reading articles in the NY Times or Wall Street Journal will expose you to decent writing.

Criteria for Grading

(A): "Excellent." Has clearly discernible central idea (or thesis) which relates directly to the assignment; clear organizational plan; major points logically developed and supported with concrete, specific evidence, detail or example; interesting or original; selection of effective, appropriate words and phrases; varied sentences; effective transition devices; consistent, appropriate tone; generally free from mechanical errors; ideas expressed freshly or vividly. In this category exams and papers meet all style and content requirements in a near flawless manner and exceed standard expectations for the assignment. The assignment makes excellent use of critical analysis of biblical texts, contemporary narratives, and the relationship between the two.

(B): "Good." Contains most of the qualities of an "A"; definite competence but lacks distinction; examples and details pertinent but not particularly vivid or sharply observed; word choice generally accurate but not clear or appropriate; few, if any errors in grammar and mechanics. In this category exams and papers meet all style and content requirements in a solid fashion but with minor or occasional flaws, and meet standard expectations for the assignment. The assignment makes good use of critical analysis of Biblical texts, contemporary narratives, and the relationship between the two.

(C): "Average." Meets the basic criteria in a minimal way; ordinary words used accurately and idiomatically; syntax neither choppy nor tangled; some grammatical errors; several mechanical errors; no errors of sufficient degree to obscure the sense of author's plan or central idea. In this category exams and papers do not meet all style and content requirements but minimally meet standard expectations for the assignment. The assignment has average critical analysis of Biblical texts, contemporary narratives, and the relationship between the two.

(D): “Poor.” Has several of the following: no central idea, no clear organizational plan; points developed in repetitious, incoherent, or illogical way; not on assignment; essay too brief to convey central idea; numerous mechanical errors; several serious grammatical errors; everyday words used inaccurately; syntax rudimentary or tangled. In this category exams and papers do not meet style and content requirements (with either serious error or incompleteness of information) and is below standard expectation for the assignment. The assignment has little or superficial use of critical analysis of Biblical texts, contemporary narratives, and the relationship between the two.

(F): “Unacceptable.” either assignment is not completed/submitted or is not in the ballpark for style and content.

Notes on Class Etiquette

In an effort to reduce potential distractions, I do not allow the use of tech devices (computers, tablets, phones, texting, etc.) during class. Every use of such devices during class will result in a one grade reduction (e.g. from “A” to “B”) in your participation grade.

Please bring a NRSV Bible to class each day.

Notes on Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism consists of including material from any source (other than your own brain), whether the source is an article, book, chapter, encyclopedia, review, another student’s paper, etc. (whether online or in print) – without giving clear credit to the specific source. Including any such material into one of your papers or exams (either in a verbatim quotation or in the borrowing of ideas, words, or concepts) constitutes plagiarism.

Plagiarism on any assignment or paper will result in an automatic failing grade in this course, and a report of your plagiarism to Academic Services.

Course Outline
(subject to revision)

WEEK ONE

Introduction

This section introduces how we will critically explore biblical texts and contemporary experiences related to social justice.

Introduction: The Bible and Christian Ethics

Multiple Foundations and Models of Biblical Ethics: Studying the Bible Critically

- Read: Richard Hays, “The Task of New Testament Ethics” (1-11)
- Read: Hays, “Diverse Voices in the New Testament Canon” (187-92)

What is Social Justice?

Critical Tools and Issues Related to Social Justice and Biblical Studies

Communal Shalom and Radical Inclusion: (Alternative) Biblical Models for Justice

- Jeremiah 29:1-7; Mark 1-8; 11:11-18
- Hays, “Three Focal Images” (193-205)
- *Email to me the Student Information Sheet (see below)

(I) Gender and Sexuality

This section focuses on the critical reading of biblical texts whose focus is gender and sexuality. We will place such texts into critical dialogue with Mel White’s autobiography. What are the diverse perspectives on gender and sexuality in the Bible? How do we understand such diverse perspectives and the respective motives for these conflicting points of view? How do we create a critical dialogue between such perspectives and contemporary experiences and narratives of gender and sexuality? How are gender and sexuality related to justice and injustice?

Gender and Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible

- Genesis 1-3
- White, 1-4
- Phyllis Trible article, “Eve and Adam”

WEEK TWO

Gender and Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible II

- Leviticus 18
- Song of Songs
- White, 5-8

Gender and Sexuality in the Gospels

- Matthew 1
- Rindge article, “Molestation, Matthew 18, and *Magnolia*”
(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-s-rindge-phd/molestation-matthew-18-an_b_561748.html)
- White, 9-12

Gender: Women in the Bible and the Early Church

- Exodus 20:17; 21:1-27; Numbers 5:11-31; Deuteronomy 21:10-13; 22:13-21; Colossians 3:18-4:1; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; 1 Peter 2:18-3:12; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40; 1 Timothy 2:8-15
- Luke 1:46-55; 2:36-38; 7:37-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 18:1-8; 23:44-24:12; Acts 18:24-28; 1 Timothy 3:8-13; Romans 16:7
- White, 13-14

WEEK THREE

Homosexuality

- Genesis 19; Ezekiel 16:49; Jude; Leviticus 18; 20; Romans 1-2; 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Timothy 1:1-11;
- **White review due**

(II) Wealth and Poverty

In this section we place Somaly Mam’s memoir (about her experience with sex trafficking in Cambodia) into critical dialogue with biblical texts whose focus is wealth and poverty. What are the diverse perspectives on wealth and poverty in the Bible? How do we understand such diverse perspectives, and the respective motives for these conflicting points of view? How do we create a critical dialogue between such perspectives and contemporary experiences of persons living in wealth and poverty? How do biblical texts illuminate Somaly Mam’s narrative, and how does her story help us reinterpret biblical texts on wealth and poverty? In what ways is poverty an issue of (in)justice? How is “wealth” an issue of (in)justice?

Wealth and Poverty in the Pentateuch

- Exodus 22:21-27; 23:6-12; Lev 19; 25; Deut 10:17-20; 14:28-29; 15:1-18
- Mam, 1-4

Wealth and Poverty in the Prophets

- Isaiah 3; 58; Jeremiah 5:23-31; 7:1-11; 22:1-5, 13-17; 34:12-22; Amos 4:1-3; 5:11-12;

Wealth and Poverty in the Writings

- Ecclesiastes (the whole book)
- Mam, 5-8

Wealth and Poverty in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew

- Mark 10:17-31; Matthew 25:31-46

WEEK FOUR

Wealth and Poverty in the Gospel of Luke

- Luke 1:45-55; 3:7-14; 4:16-30; 6:20-26; 10:25-37; 12:13-34; 14:12-33; 15:11-32; 16; 18:18-30; 19:1-10
- Mam, 9-12

Wealth and Poverty in the NT / Wealth and Poverty in the Roman Church

- Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37; 5:1-11; James; 1 John; Romans
- Francis of Assisi (excerpts)

Liberation Theology

- Exodus 1-15
- Mam, 13-15
- Rerum Novarum* (excerpts)

Wealth and Poverty in Today's World / Poverty, AIDS, and Sex Slavery

- View Bono's address at the National Prayer Breakfast (online)
- Rindge article, "Mark's Gospel, Social Outcasts, and Modern Slavery"
- Gaudium et Spes* (excerpts)

Review of Somaly Mam Due

(III) War, Peace, and Violence

This section places Shane Claiborne’s memoir into dialogue with a critical reading of biblical texts whose focus is war, peace, and violence. What are the diverse perspectives on war, peace, and violence in the Bible? How do we understand such diverse perspectives and the respective motives for these conflicting points of view? How do we create a critical dialogue between such perspectives and contemporary experiences of persons whose lives are touched by war and violence? How are war and violence issues of injustice? Is it possible for war or violence to be a catalyst or instrument for justice? How is peace an instrument of justice? Is it possible for peace to be a catalyst for injustice?

War, Peace, and Violence in the Hebrew Bible

- Genesis 4:1-16; 9:5-6; Deut 20; Jeremiah 22:15-17; 1 Chronicles 22:6-10
- Claiborne, Intro, Author’s Note, Chaps 1-3

War, Peace, and Violence in the New Testament

- Matthew 5-7
- Hays, “Violence in Defense of Justice”

WEEK FIVE

Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Aldo Capitini

- Claiborne, 4-7

Martin Luther King and Non-Violent Resistance

- King, “Letter from the Birmingham Jail”
- View Martin Luther King’s speech “On the Vietnam War”

State Warfare and Peacemakers in the 20th Century

- Claiborne, 8-11
- Rindge, “Constructing Ethics with Jesus, Jack Bauer, and Dexter”

(IV) Patriotism, Nationalism, and the State

This section focuses on the critical reading of biblical texts whose focus is the relationship between the individual or community and the Nation. What are the diverse perspectives on this relationship in the Bible? How do we understand such diverse perspectives and the respective motives for these conflicting points of view? How do we create a critical dialogue between such perspectives and contemporary experiences of persons who model radically disparate relationships with government? How does one determine if nationalism is a force for justice or injustice?

Theological and Religious Options of Obedience, Loyalty, and Accommodation

- Genesis 37-50; Romans 13; Titus 3:1-8a
- Claiborne, 12-13

Theological and Religious Options of Disobedience, Resistance, and Revolt

- Exodus 1-2; Daniel 1-3, 6 Acts 4:13-21; Revelation 14:8-12; 16:17-21; 17-19:1-8; Ephesians 6:10-13

Review of Claiborne Due

WEEK SIX

Constantine and the Marriage of Church and State

- Night*, first third

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Vatican, and the Holocaust

- Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (excerpts)

American Civil Religion

- Night*, second third

Night Paper is Due

Final Exam

“Course schedule, topics, evaluation and assignments may be changed at the instructor’s discretion. Students are responsible for knowing information provided in class whether or not they are in attendance when the information is given.”

About Your Professor

Matthew S. Rindge (Ph.D., Emory University) joined the Religious Studies faculty at Gonzaga in 2008. He previously taught at Emory University, Candler School of Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary, Azusa Pacific University, and in many Asian and Latin American countries. At Gonzaga he teaches “Life and Teachings of Jesus,” “Bible and Film,” and “Bible and Ethics.”

His research interests include Jesus' Parables, Luke/Acts, Mark, Intertextuality, Wisdom Literature, and the various intersections of Bible and Contemporary Culture. He speaks regularly at churches and universities on these and other related topics. He is the author of *Illustrating Wisdom: Luke 12:13-34 and the Interplay of Death and Possessions* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), and has written scholarly articles on Jewish Identity, Lament and Divine Abandonment in Mark, Death and Money in Ecclesiastes, Teaching Bible and Film, and Mark's Gospel and Modern Slavery in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Teaching Theology and Religion*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, and *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*. He has also written articles for public outlets such as The Huffington Post, *Sojourners*, and *Prism*. He is currently co-writing *The History of Biblical Interpretation to 1835: A Reader* (Westminster John Knox Press).

While at Emory, Dr. Rindge directed Project SHINE which recruited and trained university students to help immigrants and refugees in Atlanta, GA learn English. At Gonzaga he serves on SART (Sexual Assault Response Team).

In the Society of Biblical Literature, Dr. Rindge serves on the Steering Committees for the Bible and American Popular Culture section, and the Bible and Film Consultation. In addition to Emory, his previous education includes Fuller Theological Seminary (M.Div.), University of Notre Dame (M.A.), and University of California at Santa Barbara (B.A.). In 2011, Dr. Rindge received the Paul J. Achtemeier Award in New Testament Scholarship for his paper on Divine Abandonment in Mark's Gospel.

Student Information Sheets
The Bible and Contemporary Christian Ethics
RELI 310

Name: _____
(Please Print)

Major: _____

Previous Bible or Religion courses: _____

Present Standing: ____ Sr. ____ Jr. ____ So. ____ Fr. ____ Grad.

What do you most hope to learn in this course?

What are the top three contemporary ethical issues of most personal interest to you:

Favorite Film: _____

Favorite Book/Novel: _____

By typing my name below I agree that I have read through the entire syllabus, and understand it, including the section on academic dishonesty and plagiarism:

Name: _____

