

MESOM Christian Ethics for the Twenty-First Century, Fall 2022

Course Description and Overview: The course will focus on the basic questions of Christian ethics and morality and their relevance to current issues and perspectives. Eight sessions, Saturdays: 9/10, 9/24, 10/8, / 10/22, 11/5, 11/19, 12/3, 12/19: 9-12 AM, with two ten-minute breaks.

The course has four basic components:

- Moral Thinking in the New Testament as relevant especially to preaching today
- A classic Christian ethicist: The thought of Reinhold Niebuhr
- Underrepresented voices in today's discussions
- Current moral issues

Sept. 10 Week 1: Basic issues:

- What makes ethics 'Christian'? ('canon': earliest apostolic witness, NOT Bible, NT, 'lectionary')
- What makes ethics (Christian or other) 'true'? (must be universal, unconditional, 'grounded' ['metaphysics'], 'motivational' ['kerygmatic'='direct address'], and 'fitting' (contextual='practical')
- 'Living Realistically'

**NOTE: PROCURE HARD COPY OF NIEBUHR AND BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS FOR FIRST CLASS**

Hour 3: Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, chap. 1.

Sept. 24 Week 2: Jesus: The Earliest Apostolic Witness: Does it pass these tests, and if so, why?

Willi Marxsen, New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics, pp. 23-141

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 2.

Oct. 8 Week 3: Paul and the Post-Pauline literature: Does it pass these tests, and if so, why? ('demythologizing,' and 'deideologizing')

Marxsen, pp. 142-227; 249-84.

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap 3. (John Riggs)

Oct. 22 Week 4: The Synoptic Gospels: Mark, Luke, Matthew: Do these pass these tests, and if so, why? (literary criticism)

Marxsen, pp. 228-48.

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 4.

Nov. 5 Week 5: The Gospel of John: Does it pass these tests, and if so, why? (review of demythologizing and literary criticism)

Marxsen, pp. 285-312.

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 5.

Nov. 19 Week 6: Contemporary Voices:

Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology, "How Shall We Live? Christianity and Planetary Economics" (81-97).

Traci C. West, Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter (3-71)

Robert Allen Warrior, 'Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians.'

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 6. (Jen DeWeerth)

Dec. 3 Week 7: Contemporary Issues:

William Sloane Coffin, A Passion for the Possible.

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 7. (Al Sharp)

Dec. 17 Week 8: Concluding Session

Summary review

Hour 3: Niebuhr, chap. 8.

### **Overview:**

Each session of the course consists in three units of 50 minutes each, separated by two 10-minute breaks.

### **Required Assignments:**

For each session:

1. Each session: One written question designed to evoke discussion by the class, emailed to the instructor by midnight two days ahead of class
2. Each session: A one-page summary of one of the week's readings (as assigned by the Instructor), due by email by midnight of the day before the following session
3. A *sermon* of 3-5 double-spaced, typewritten pages on a text or topic to be determined by the student and the instructor. Due at noon, Dec. 16
4. Final paper: A paper of 15-20 double-spaced, typewritten pages that critically and constructively engages the argument laid out by Niebuhr. Due by midnight, Dec. 23.

### **Required Texts:**

To be procured by students in advance of the course, available through Amazon or [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

Marxsen, Niebuhr, and Coffin. **HARD COPY REQUIRED—not electronic.** McFague, West, and Warrior: either hard or electronic copy.

### **Faculty Team**

#### **Dr. Phil Devenish - Instructor**

Received his Ph. D. from SMU under Schubert Ogden in 1977. He taught at the University of Notre Dame from 1977-82 and taught and headed the M.Div. Program at The Divinity School at the University of Chicago from 1987-94. Among other courses, Phil taught Christian systematic

theology each of those twelve years. He pastored Union Congregational Church of Hancock, ME UCC from 1983-87 and First Congregational Church, UCC, Webster Groves, MO from 1994-97. He owned and ran Devenish Wines, a Maine wholesale wine distributorship, from 2000-2015. Phoebe, his wife of 52 years, was an operating room nurse. They retired in 2016 and live in Hancock.

**Rev. Alexander Vishio (Teaching Assistant)** Rev. Alex Vishio was born and raised in Baltimore, MD. Upon receiving his BA from Swarthmore College, where he majored in religious studies, he entered the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, earning his MDiv degree. After returning to Baltimore to teach high school classics, he eventually returned to the Divinity School to pursue graduate work in ethics. He served as an adjunct religion instructor at Chicago Theological Seminary. He returned to Baltimore to teach classics and minister as chaplain at the Gilman School, as well as to teach in the classics department at Loyola University. Most recently, he served as Assistant Minister for Social Justice & Witness and Acting Associate Conference Minister of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ. Alex is currently a doctoral student in systematic theology in the Graduate Department of Religious Studies at SMU, specializing in neoclassical metaphysics. He currently is a co-editor of The Notebooks of Schubert Ogden, an online project hosted by Drew University ([uknow.drew.edu/confluence/display/ogden](http://uknow.drew.edu/confluence/display/ogden)).

### **Faculty Guests with Brief Bios**

#### **Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth**

Jen DeWeerth is the Dean of Student Enrollment at Mohawk Valley Community College. She is ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and preaches regularly as a supply pastor in UCC and Lutheran congregations. She has served on the Board of Directors of the YWCA-Mohawk Valley since 2008 working with the organization to fulfill its mission of Eliminating Racism and Empowering Women in the local community. Since the 2016 election, she has been involved in grassroots political and social justice organizing in central New York. She is a co-founder of Indivisible Mohawk Valley and is active in Citizen Action of Central New York, working for racial, social, and economic justice. Jen holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Swarthmore College and a Master of Divinity degree from The University of Chicago. She lives in Clinton, NY with her husband, Steve Ellingson, and two sons.

#### **Dr. George L. Goodwin**

Larry Goodwin graduated from the University of Chicago Divinity School where he studied with Schubert Ogden. He taught theology at St. Catherine's University in St. Paul, MN, and later served as academic dean and then president of The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth MN. With his wife Anette he is enjoying retirement on the north shore of Lake Superior.

#### **Dr. John Riggs**

John W. Riggs is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ who retired from Eden Theological Seminary as Professor of Historical Theology and Church History. He received his B.A. in history from Yale; an M.A.R and M.Div. from Yale Divinity School; and his Ph.D. in Theology, majoring in sacramental theology, from The University of Notre Dame. His writings

and public lectures have included issues concerning early Christianity, the Protestant Reformation, baptism, The Lord's Supper, and worship in general. Among his books, John authored *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) and *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition: An Essay on the Mystical True Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015). John served 10 years in local church ministry, five years in rural Indiana and five in rural Missouri. He is the father of two and married to Rev. Ruth Drews, a retired ELCA pastor

### **Rev. Alexander Sharp**

On March 10, 2015, Reverend Alexander E. Sharp launched "Clergy for a New Drug Policy." The mission of the project is to mobilize clergy nationally against the War on Drugs, which has been waged for the past 46 years. The project educates and advocates for a paradigm of health rather than punishment, in response to drug issues in our society; and for an agenda that will end the War on Drugs as we know it today.

Rev. Sharp has been engaged in faith-based social justice advocacy with organizations in Illinois for over twenty years. He was the founding Executive Director of Protestants for the Common Good, which he led from May 1996 through June 2012, and Acting Executive Director of the Community Renewal Society after the organizations merged in 2012. Rev. Sharp graduated from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, with a Master of Public Affairs in 1969 and received his Master of Divinity Degree from the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1996. He was ordained in the United Church of Christ in January 2007. He served as Commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the first term of Governor Michael Dukakis from 1975-79 and in 1980 was appointed the Vice President of Business and Finance for The University of Chicago. He held this position until entering divinity school in 1994. He is a member of Hyde Park Union Church in Chicago. He is married and has two daughters, Lydia and Joanna.