

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 283:

ETHICS AND SOCIETY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

AUTUMN QUARTER, 1998

Instructor: Dr. Dennis P. McCann

Class Meets: Tuesdays 5:45 - 9:00 PM

Office: SAC 427

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:00 - 5:30 PM (By appointment only)

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Course Description and Objectives:

This course invites students to explore the Roman Catholic tradition toward the ethical and social dimensions of Christian faith and practice. We will focus particularly on the history of Catholic social teaching, its ancient antecedents in the ethical teachings of the Bible, its Medieval presentation in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, its development as a critical response to modern Western society over the past century, and its perspectives on a number of social issues. We explore the major tensions in Catholic social teaching, and seek to understand how it both converges with and diverges from the lived experience of contemporary society.

Our specific objectives are as follows:

- (1) helping students achieve a breadth of knowledge by informing about the overall contours of Catholic social teaching and its application to contemporary social issues;
- (2) encouraging students to integrate areas of their knowledge and experience by showing them how to compare Catholic social teaching with other ideologies in light of their studies of philosophy and the social sciences;
- (3) inviting students to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of Catholic social teaching as a public philosophy capable of sustaining critical participation in the processes of social change;
- (4) inviting students to clarify their own values by demonstrating the way in which Catholic social teaching responds to our common intellectual challenge of bringing

coherence between an individual's deepest personal aspirations, both moral and religious, and the never ending quest for social order, justice and peace; and

(5) promoting communication skills by requiring students to engage in activities conducive toward interactive learning, and excellence in oral and written interpretation and argument.

#### Expectations of the Student:

(1) Class attendance and participation: Our time in the classroom will be taken up with discussion of the texts and the issues raised in them. Since one of the objectives of the course is to enhance the student's communication skills, the discussions in class will be a crucial part of the evaluation process for the course as a whole. In other words, given the objectives of the course, it will take more than passive learning, i.e., good note taking and passing grades on the exams, to do well here. I will do some informal lecturing only when it is necessary to provide perspective on the nature of Roman Catholic Christianity, and the development of Catholic social teaching. Attendance will be taken occasionally. Each student will assess his own participation by completing a self-evaluation form at the time of the midterm, and again, at the final exam. Class participation will count as 20% of the final grade. Anyone found unprepared to participate in the class discussion will be docked a full letter grade. Two or more unexcused absences will result in failure to pass the course.

(2) Midterm and Final Exam: You will be given a study guide one week before the date of these. Their format includes both true-false/multiple choice questions and essay questions. Each exam will count as 20% of the final grade.

(3) Student Task Force Presentation: Each student will be assigned to one of four teams, each of which will be responsible for a class presentation, in which one major area of ethical concern will be examined in light of Catholic social teaching. See the attached memo on "Student Task Force Presentation" for details. The teams will be organized at the beginning of the quarter, and will meet occasionally during class, to organize their presentations, which will be held in the final three weeks of the quarter. At the time of the class presentation, each team will distribute to the class a one page outline of the presentation. The common grade given for the team presentations will count as 20% of each member's final grade for the class as a whole.

(4) Term Paper: Each student will write a 5-7 page paper on some topic related to Catholic social teaching, as discussed in this course. The essay question on the midterm exam will consist in a serious term paper proposal, outlining the topic the student has chosen, why it was chosen, what resources--primarily texts discussed in the course--will be used, and a preview of the overall argument that will be presented. The proposal itself will be a minimum of 2 pages. Any topic is legitimate, so long as the student and the instructor mutually agree to it. If you have any doubt about the suitability of the topic you want to do, please discuss it with the instructor before you write up the proposal and submit it as part of the midterm. The paper will be evaluated for the quality of the

argument, and must meet certain minimum standards for competent English prose, as outlined in the DePaul University pamphlet, *Writing in Liberal Studies*. The term paper will count as 20% of the final grade. The DEADLINE for the term paper will be NOVEMBER 24, the date of the FINAL EXAM.

#### Grading Procedure:

You will be evaluated on the basis of your mastery of the content of the course and your progress in developing the communication and learning skills emphasized in this course. The assigned tasks will allow me to measure your progress as we go along. I intend to weigh them as follows: Class participation: 20%; Midterm Exam: 20%; Final Exam: 20%; Team Presentation: 20%; and Term Paper: 20%. Failure to complete any of the written assignments will result in a final grade of F.

#### Required Texts:

Denise and John Carmody, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction through History and Current Issues (C&C)*

(ISBN: 0-3-131533-1)

St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics (TA)*

(ISBN: 0-87220-031-0)

David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage (OB&TS)*

(ISBN: 0-88344-803-3)

#### Schedule of Discussions and Assignments:

WEEK ONE: SEPTEMBER 15: Christian Ethics and the Social Order

SESSION 1: Getting started: presentation of syllabus and "In-session writing assignment" (see attached form)

SESSION 2: Christian Ethics: A Map and a Method

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 1-70

WEEK TWO: SEPTEMBER 22: Biblical Perspectives

SESSION 1: The Hebrew Scriptures

SESSION 2: Early Christianity: The New Testament and Patristic Literature

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 71-89, TA 11-55

WEEK THREE: SEPTEMBER 29: The Ethic and Ethos of Christendom

SESSION 1: Christendom as a Civilization

SESSION 2: Aquinas on Natural Law

Assignment for next week: Read TA 164-169, 176-208, 249-274

WEEK FOUR: OCTOBER 6: The Ethic and Ethos of Christendom

SESSION 1: Aquinas on Economic Justice

SESSION 2: Aquinas on Church and State

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 91-125, OB&TS 12-37, plus skim Syllabus of Errors and Libertas (handout)

WEEK FIVE: OCTOBER 13: The Origins of Catholic Social Teaching

SESSION 1: The Reformation and the Enlightenment

SESSION 2: Catholic Resistance to Modernization

Assignment for next week: STUDY GUIDE FOR THE MIDTERM, PREPARE TERM PAPER PROPOSAL

WEEK SIX: OCTOBER 20: Retrospect and Prospect

SESSION 1: MIDTERM EXAM

SESSION 2: ORGANIZE TASK FORCE PRESENTATIONS

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 127-146, OB&TS 492-564

WEEK SEVEN: OCTOBER 27: Catholic Social Teaching on War and Peace

SESSION 1: Student Task Force One: War and Peace: The task force will review the tradition of Catholic social teaching for its developing views on the morality of warfare and peace-keeping.

SESSION 2: Discussion of Key Texts: The Challenge of Peace (1983), the NCCB pastoral letter on the just war tradition and its application to warfare in a nuclear age.

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 147-166, OB&TS 572-664

WEEK EIGHT: NOVEMBER 3: Catholic Social Teaching on Social and Economic Justice

SESSION 1: Student Task Force Two: Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy: From the readings available in this course, the task force will lead a session discussion assessing the perspectives of Catholic social teaching on economics, business, wealth and poverty.

SESSION 2: Discussion of Key Texts: Economic Justice for All (1986), the NCCB pastoral letter on the US economy

Assignment for next week: Read C&C 168-194, OB&TS 172-201, and NCCB Letter on Women in Church and Society (handout)

WEEK NINE: NOVEMBER 10: Catholic Social Teaching on Gender and Sexuality in the Family

SESSION 1: Student Task Force Three: Gender, Sexuality and the Family: The task force will review the tradition of Catholic social teaching for its developing views on gender, sexual identity, marriage, and sexual ethics, and evaluate them for their social significance in the culture of the United States.

SESSION 2: Discussion of Key Texts: Gaudium et Spes (1965) and NCCB Letter on Women in Church and Society (1995) (handout)

Assignment for next week: Read OB&TS 129-159, and Dignitatis Humanae (handout)

WEEK TEN: NOVEMBER 17: Catholic Social Teaching on Human Rights in Church and Society

SESSION 1: Student Task Force Four: Democracy and Human Rights: The task force will review the tradition of Catholic social teaching for its developing views on democracy and human rights and evaluate them in light of the challenges of the post Cold War world.

SESSION 2: Discussion of Key Texts: Pacem in Terris (1963), Dignitatis Humanae, and NCCB Letter on the Role of Women in Church and Society

Assignment for next week: STUDY GUIDE FOR THE FINAL EXAM

WEEK ELEVEN: NOVEMBER 24: FINAL EXAM:

**RS 283: ETHICS AND SOCIETY IN ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION**

**INITIAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

**YOUR NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Two Questions:

(1) What is your experience of Catholicism? Have you taken courses in which it is studied? What were they about? Have you ever gone to Catholic church services? What was it like? What do you know or what have you heard about Catholic attitudes on social issues? If you have no experience of Catholicism, what is your general attitude toward religion?

(2) What social issue would you like to study in this course, and why? What is your perspective on this issue before taking this course? I will use your answer to help assign you to one of the four Student Task Forces that will present an issue later in the quarter.

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### STUDENT TASK FORCE PRESENTATIONS

Each student will be assigned to one of four teams, each of which will be responsible for a session presentation, in which one major social issue currently under discussion in the United States will be examined in light of Catholic social teaching. The teams will be organized at the beginning of the quarter, and will meet occasionally during session, to organize their presentations, which will be held in the final four weeks of the quarter. At the time of the session presentation, each team will distribute to the session a one page outline of the presentation, and will present to the instructor a written report expanding on the points to be made in the presentation, of between 5 and 7 pages. The common grade given for the team presentations will count as 20% of each member's final grade for the session as a whole.

Session Presentation Topic: The presentation will consist in three parts: (1) A description of the assigned social issue to be investigated, reviewing the range of public opinion on it, and posing a general question or two to be asked of the tradition of Catholic social teaching; (2) A description of the relevant themes in Catholic social teaching that address this issue and the questions you've raised about it; and (3) An evaluation of the relevance and truth of Catholic social teaching, based on your experience and investigation of points (1) and (2). For example: Does Catholic social teaching contribute anything significant to the discussion? If so, what; if not, why not? If your conclusion is positive, suggest ways in which Catholic social teaching might be made a more effective conversation partner in public debate; if negative, suggest the major obstacles that the tradition must overcome if its teachings are to be taken seriously. Most research on Catholic social teaching can be done on the basis of the texts commonly assigned in this course. The instructor will provide additional research leads, as needed.

Session presentation format: The oral presentation made by the team should not exceed 30 minutes in length, total. You may wish to make a division of labor, possibly consisting of the following roles: a team coordinator, report writer, and one or two students responsible for each of the three major parts of the presentation. I suggest that no more than four team members make formal remarks during the presentation, and you may want

to consider, especially on the second part, staging a debate in which a variety conflicting perspectives might be represented, all in critical dialogue or public argument on the topic assigned to your team.

At the time of the session presentation, each team will distribute to the session a one page outline of the presentation, and will present to the instructor a written report expanding on the points to be made in the presentation, of between 5 and 7 pages.

The purpose of this assignment is to provide an opportunity for students to learn from one another, and not just from the readings and the professor; to encourage students to think for themselves by offering them the opportunity to develop their own interpretations of the possible relevance of Catholic social teaching to American public life. Each of these goals, I believe, is consistent with the overall aims of the Liberal Studies program at DePaul University.

In order to make it possible to fit this kind of teamwork into your busy schedules, I will set aside some session time, at least one half hour a week during weeks 2 through 6 in order to allow the teams to organize themselves and make adequate preparation for their presentations.

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### SELF-EVALUATION OF CLASS PARTICIPATION

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

### MIDTERM EVALUATION

The purpose of this form is to record your impressions of the quality of your participation in the session discussions and team activities during this quarter. It is hoped that this exercise not only will give the instructor important help in determining your session participation grade but also will help you to monitor your progress in developing effective skills for interactive learning and group work. Please answer these questions as truthfully as possible.

In the boxes place a "Y" for Yes; "N" for No; "S" for Somewhat; and/or an "NA" for Not Applicable:

Responsible preparation

W1 W2 W3 W4 W5

1. Read assigned material
2. Reviewed reading material before session
3. Completed task force assignments on time

Responsible participation W1 W2 W3 W4 W5

1. Answered questions when called on in session
2. Volunteered comments and responses
3. Encouraged sessionmates' participation
4. Raised relevant issues for discussion
5. Listened to the opinions of others
6. Learned something new from my sessionmates
7. Used the HyperNews Internet connection to communicate with the Instructor and sessionmates
8. Used the Internet to download reading materials for session
9. Used the Internet to do research on the Task Force topic
10. Used the Internet to do research for my Term Paper

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THE GRADE I DESERVE FOR SESSION PARTICIPATION IS: A B C D F

Additional comments: