

REL 612: CHRIST & THE GOOD LIFE

Fall 2015, T 1:30 – 3:20

Instructors: Miroslav Volf and Matt Croasmun

Office Hours: Miroslav Volf, Th 12:30-2pm (SG 64)

Matt Croasmun, Mon 1-3pm (SG 62)

Description

This course explores the ways in which Christ—as a character in the gospel narratives, an object of Christian theological reflection, and a living presence in the life of the Church—informs Christian visions and practice of the good life. Students will engage a thematic reading of the Gospel of Luke, organized around the Gospel's core themes and touch-points with key concrete phenomena of human experience. The guiding questions are: What does it mean for Christ to be the key to human existence and flourishing and what does the good life look like if Jesus Christ is taken to be the key?

Objectives

The principal objectives are three: to equip students to wrestle with the *formal* question of how to relate Christ to a Christian articulation of the good life; to give students an opportunity to read the Gospel of Luke as a source text for such an articulation; to help students articulate their own vision of the good life in dialog with the Christian tradition.

Organization

The course will begin with three sessions on the question: In what way is Christ the key to human flourishing? Subsequent sessions will explore key concrete phenomena of human existence in the context of the account of the life and teachings of Christ found in the Gospel of Luke.

Course Requirements

Paper 1, 5-7 pages, **Due 9/29** (20% of final grade)

Topic: What is Yale's vision of the good life?

Describe the vision of the good life endorsed by Yale. What vision is endorsed *explicitly* (in official communications like mission statements, websites, official public addresses given by faculty and administrators, etc.)? What vision is endorsed *implicitly* (that is, what vision or visions are endorsed tacitly by university or school practices, culture, etc.)? How do these visions differ? What accounts for these differences? In your analysis, consider all three dimensions of the good life that we are considering in this course:

1. Life led well (the agential dimension of the good life)
2. Life going well (the circumstantial dimension)
3. Life feeling well (the affective dimension)

On what truth claims (stated explicitly or endorsed implicitly) does this vision depend? In considering the vision of the good life as articulated in the Christian tradition, what resources do you find for resisting or endorsing these implicit or explicit visions?

Paper 2, 3-5 pages, **Due 11/3** (20% of final grade)*Theological Interpretation*

Write a theological interpretation of a passage from the Gospel of Luke that describes an aspect of a vision of the good life that helps you articulate an aspect of your own vision. This is *not* an “exegesis” paper; the goal is to describe the truth claims the passage makes about the good life and relate those claims to your own life.

Paper 3, 10-12 pages, **Due 12/8** (40% of final grade)*Topic: What is your vision of the good life? (Due 12/8)*

In light of the vision of the good life articulated in this course, reflect for yourself: What is your vision of the good life? (You need not endorse a “Christian” vision of the good life, but the vision you articulate for yourself must be in conversation with the Christian tradition as we have encountered it in this course.) In your paper, discuss at least two topics that were taken up during the course and each of the formal dimensions of the good life described above.

Weekly Reading Responses (10% of final grade). Each week (beginning with Week 2), students are expected to send a brief (150-250 word) reflection on the week’s readings to the instructors by Monday at 5pm. These reflections will help frame our seminar discussions together.

Participation (10% of final grade). Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings and actively participate in discussion. Unexcused absences will result in a reduction of the final course grade.

Required Texts

Bonaventure. *Bonaventure. The Classics of Western Spirituality*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978.

Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1949.

Grading Rubric

“H” is reserved for outstanding work that shows not only competence but also mastery: intelligent organization, vivid expression, clarity of argument, freshness and originality.

“HP” work demonstrates that a student understands the material, has a grasp on the issues in an assignment, and can develop an interesting line of thought; written expression is good.

“LP” work is weak, in content as well as form, but still acceptable; it is a wake-up call, however, and a warning that the student is far below where he or she should be.

“F” indicates that the work cannot receive credit.

Plus and minus grades indicate the quality of a student’s work in relation to others in the same letter category.

Schedule of Classes

Preliminary Matters

Week 1 A Formal Account of the Good Life
 Readings: Robert Nozick, “The Experience Machine,” *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 42-45
 Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 359-366, 386-401
 Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, 106-115, 127-29

Week 2 Christ & History: The Hermeneutics of Christ & the Good Life
 Readings: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 277-311 (esp. 300-311)
 Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, *God Sent His Son*, 217-230
 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* #28-35, 39-40
 The Gospel of Luke

Christ and the Phenomena of Human Existence

Week 3 Birth, Family, and Tradition
 Readings: Luke 1:5-3:38; 4:16-30; 6:1-5; 8:19-21; 9:57-62; 11:27-28, 42; 12:49-53; 14:25-27;
 18:15-17; 20:41-44
 Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Neglecting Everything,” *Jesus, The Divine Physician*
 Jürgen Moltmann, “The Promise of the Child,” *In the End—the Beginning*, 1-18
 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7-21
 Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapter 1: “Jesus: An Interpretation”
 Adela Collins, “Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels” in *King
 and Messiah as Son of God*, 143-148
 Mary Douglas, “Institutions Cannot Have Minds of Their Own” in *How Institutions
 Think*, 1-13

Week 4 Call & Responsibility
 Readings: Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 3:21-22, 4:1-30; 5:1-11, 27-32; 6:12-16; 8:1-3, 25; 9:23-27, 45;
 10:1-16; 12:7, 32; 14:25-33; 19:11-27; 22:2
 Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Put Out Into the Deep,” *Jesus, the Divine Physician*

Søren Kierkegaard, "What Then Must I Do? Live as an 'Individual'," *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*

Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 13-80

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapter 2: "Fear"

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 403-411

Paper 1 Due

- Week 5 Freedom & Bondage
- Readings: Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-13, 31-41; 7:1-10; 8:22-39; 9:37-50; 11:14-26; 13:10-17; 17:5-10; 20:1-8, 20-26; 22:24-30
- Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, "Temptation," *Jesus, The Divine Physician*
- Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, *God Sent His Son*, 237-240
- Miroslav Volf, *End of Memory*, 186-88
- Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapters 3-4: "Deception," "Hate"
- J. D. Crossan, "Magic and a Meal," *The Historical Jesus*, 303-323
- John Mbiti, "'Our Savior' as an African Experience", in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, 397-414
- Walter Wink, *Unmasking The Powers*, 1-8, 41-68
- "Workers of the World, Faint!" *New York Times*
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- Week 6 Wealth & Poverty
- Readings: Luke 1:46-55; 3:10-14; 6:20-26; 12:13-34; 16:1-13, 19-31; 17:20-37; 18:18-30; 19:1-10; 21:1-4
- Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, "God and Mammon," *Jesus, The Divine Physician*
- Ernesto Cardenal, "The Song of Mary (Luke 1:26-55)," *The Postmodern Bible Reader*, 183-187
- Eugene McCarragher, "The Enchantments of Mammon," *Modern Theology*, 429-461
- Harvey Cox, "The Market As God," *Atlantic Monthly*
- Miroslav Volf, "Epilogue," *Flourishing*
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- Week 7 Repentance and Forgiveness
- Readings: Luke 3:3-9; 5:27-32; 6:27-38; 7:36-50; 11:1-4; 12:8-12; 13:1-5; 15; 17:1-4; 18:9-14; 23:39-43

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “The Man Who Is Close and Stands Far Off,” *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Chapter 7: “Love”

Miroslav Volf, “Conflict, Violence, and Reconciliation,” *Flourishing*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, #10, 13-15

Amy Poehler, *Yes, Please!*, 65-83

Week 8 *Vita Activa vs. Vita Contemplativa*

Readings: Luke 10:38-42

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Windows for Vacation Time,” *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 289-313

Bonaventure, *Tree of Life*

Paper 2 Due

Week 9 Food (Feasting & Fasting)

Readings: Luke 4:1-4; 5:33-39; 6:20-26, 7:31-35; 9:10-17; 14:7-24; 17:26-30; 22:14-23; 24:13-43

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Give Them Something to Eat,” *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Norman Wirzba, *Food & Faith: A Theology of Eating*, 1-34, 137-143, 224-234

Chris Kresser, *The Paleo Cure*, 3-17

John Climacus, “On Gluttony” from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

The Rule of St. Benedict, #39-41

Week 10 Suffering and Death

Readings: Luke 2:25-38; 7:11-17; 9:21-27, 43b-45; 18:31-34; 22-23

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Terminus: Life,” *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Jürgen Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 267-90

Jürgen Moltmann, “Expecting a Good Death in the Old”

Kent Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure*, 1-24

Christian Wiman, “Mortify Our Wolves,” *My Bright Abyss*, 145-162

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 3-16

Michael Pollan, "The Trip Treatment," *The New Yorker*, abridged

Week 11 Joy

Readings: Luke 1:13b-14, 39-45; 2:10-11; 6:20-26; 7:36-50; 8:13; 10:17-24; 15:5-7, 9-10, 32; 19:5-6, 37-39; 24:1-12, 36-53

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, "Complete Reversal of Values," *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Miroslav Volf, "The Crown of the Good Life: A Hypothesis" in *Joy and Human Flourishing*

Marianne Meyers Thompson, "Reflections on Joy in the Bible" in *Joy and Human Flourishing*

C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, ix-x, 1-19, 159-175, 205-230

Alysa Harris, "Joy" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCe8tD1Jme4>

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.1, 247-48

Week 12 Temporality & Desire

Readings: Luke 12:32-34; 17:20-37; 20:27-40; 21:5-36

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, "A Different Advent," *Jesus, The Divine Physician*

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 924-928

Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time*, 1-19, 146-167

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, #34

Tomáš Sedláček, "The Economic and Theological Impossibility of Joy"

Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 111-120

Paper 3 Due