Christian Ethics and War, Rel 211 A/B
Tues/Thurs. 10:20 and 12:50, Comenius 218
Instructor: Kelly Denton-Borhaug, Comenius 214
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Office Hours: Monday afternoons; TR 2-4
You’re welcome to stop by, call or email for office appt. I encourage students to make
time to speak with me regularly.

Course Description: What do Christians think about the urgent and simultaneously
perennial human problem of war? Is war-making inherently compatible or incompatible
with Christian faith? How have Christian thinkers contributed to broader societal
understandings, values and practices related to conflict and war? This course will
introduce students to the study of Christian ethics through focus on this social issue.
Students will be exposed to Christian thinking about pacifism, just war theory, warrior
codes and just peace-making. Emphasis will be on careful and deliberate reading to
deeply understand the trajectories of various authors’ thinking. Because Americans
generally are protected from seeing and experiencing the realities of war, we also will
focus on a specific case study and its human/material/experiential reality.

Course Goals:
1) Students will gain an introductory understanding of the complexity of Christian
thought in relationship to the reality of war.
2) Students will better understand the ways in which supposedly “secular” ethical
frameworks for judgment with respect to war are deeply embedded in religious
traditions, practices and ideas.
3) Students will have the opportunity to develop their own
philosophical-religious/moral frameworks in response to this social reality.
4) Students will improve their critical thinking, reading and writing skills.

Required Course Books for Purchase:
Gary M. Simpson, War, Peace, and God: Rethinking the Just-War Tradition
Glen Stassen, Ed., Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War
Sadako Teiko Okuda, A Dimly Burning Wick: Memoir from the Ruins of Hiroshima

Books on Reserve in Reeves Library
Shannon E. French, Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present
Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of
Domination
David L. Clough and Brian Stiltner, Faith and Force

Note: Additional resources will also be on reserve in the library or may be accessible
through Blackboard.

Required Films:
Body of War, Docurama Films, 2008
White Light, Black Rain, HBO Films, 2007

Required Extra-class Experiences
Jan. 20, Tuesday, Prosser Auditorium, 7:00 pm
“Torture and Democracy: What Now?” Fourth Moravian College Peace and Justice Scholar in Residence, Darius Rejali

Course Requirements

- Prepared class participation (with readings thoughtfully prepared prior to each class period). Please be in class on time and ready to go. Bring whatever text we are reading with you to class! Read with a pen in hand, underlining key passages and writing your own shorthand in the margin with questions, notations, etc. Unexcused absences will mean a serious detraction in your grade. Your participation also includes your active, engaged presence in class. This includes:
  --participating in discussion, asking questions, taking lead and letting others provide the direction;
  --listening actively and showing understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others’ ideas;
  --volunteering willingly in small group work and carrying your own share of the small group responsibilities, helping the group to stay on track.
If you feel uncertain about speaking up in classroom settings, come and see me in the first week or two of our semester – I can help! The only excused absences are for serious illness, family emergency or religious observance and must be cleared with me in advance of the class you miss. Please make plans now to attend the various experiences I’ve planned for our semester together; speak with your employer and/or coaches if you need to be excused from other responsibilities in order to attend. 15% of grade.

- Periodic response papers, as indicated in the syllabus. Your papers will not require any additional research outside course materials, but demonstrate your own thoughtful and critical grappling with this material. Please plan on coming into my office at least once to talk about one of your papers with me (and/or anything else you wish to discuss). Your response papers will be worth 55% of your grade. Unless you have made prior arrangements with me (and have an acceptable excuse related to those for excused class absence), NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.

- Final 10 page paper, covering our last unit of study in light of everything you have learned about Christian ethics and war. This paper will give you the opportunity to draw on the authors we have read, the films we have seen and everything you have learned in order for you to develop your own ethical response to the question: how shall human beings respond to the perennial problem of human conflict and war? 30% of grade.
Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.

Important Note: Various course resources will be posted on Blackboard. Students are advised to become familiar with this Moravian online course resource. Let me know if you need assistance.

Additional Note: This syllabus will be posted on Blackboard, and updated with any changes we find we need to make as we progress through the semester.

Unit One: Getting acquainted with the Landscape of War-culture, Christianity and Ethics

Week 1 Getting Started
Jan. 20  Introduction to our course
    Evening: Prof. Rejali’s lecture, 7:00 pm
Jan 22  In class: Lecture on U.S. War-culture
    Read for class: Denton-Borhaug, “War-culture and Sacrifice” (available in Blackboard Course Documents; bring your copy to class)

Week 2
Jan. 27  In class: Body of War
    Read: the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Matthew 5:1-7:28; Luke 6:17-7:1) – then re-read these sermons again – what do they tell you about Jesus of Nazareth and his early followers’ response to the perennial problem of human conflict and violence

Week 3
Feb. 3  In class: finish watching Body of War
    Feb. 5  Read: Walter Wink, “Jesus’ Third Way: Nonviolent Engagement” Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (available on reserve at Reeve’s Library) Due: First Reflection Paper

Unit Two: Delving More Deeply into Just-War Ethics

Week 4
Feb. 10  Read: Gary M. Simpson, War, Peace and God, pp 9-37
Feb. 12  Read: Simpson, pp 39-72

Week 5
Feb. 17  Read: Simpson, pp 73-101
    Also read: Chris Hedges, “Introduction” and “The Moment of Combat,” What Every Person Should Know about War (both these resources on reserve in Reeve’s Library)
Week 6
Feb. 24  Due: Second Reflection Paper

Unit Three: Just Peacemaking

Week 7  (No class: Spring Break)

Week 8
Mar. 10  Read: Stassen, Chapters 1 and 2
Mar. 12  Read: Stassen, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 9
Mar. 17  Read: Stassen, Chapters 5 and 6
Mar. 19  Read: Stassen, Chapters 7 and 8

Week 10
Mar. 24  Read: Stassen, Chapters 9 and 10
Mar. 26  Third Reflection Paper

Unit Four: A Case Study: Hiroshima
Week 11
Mar. 31 Lifton and Mitchell, Hiroshima in America, Introduction –p 64
Apr. 2  Lifton and Mitchell, 65 -- 114

Week 12
Apr. 7  Lifton and Mitchell, 207—262
In class: White Light, Black Rain
Apr. 9  Lifton and Mitchell, 264 – 297
In class: White Light, Black Rain

Week 13
Apr. 14 Sadako Teiko Okuda, A Dimly Burning Wick, Forward – 51.
Apr. 16  Okuda, 53 -- 100

Week 14
Apr. 21 Okuda, 101 -- 137
Apr. 23 Okuda, 139 -- 189

Week 15
Apr. 28  Lifton and Mitchell, 301 -- 360

Apr. 30  Final Paper outline/discussion
  Hard copy of final paper due in professor’s door box on May 4, 10 am. No late papers will be accepted without previous approval of the professor.