Meeting Time: Monday, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM Fall 2020

Meeting Place: DC2

*Note: the professor reserves the right to modify this syllabus as needed at any time.*

**Contact Information**

*Professor*

Bruce Baugus

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*Teaching Assistant*

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**RTS Catalog Course Description**

Students are introduced to terminology, major views, and problems in the study of ethics and to a biblical basis for morality. Basic concerns and current issues in social ethics are covered.

**Expanded Course Description**

Moral theology has a structure similar to systematic theology, beginning with a discussion of theological prolegomena (in this case on the existence, nature, and sources for knowing the moral order and method of displaying that knowledge), followed by a discussion of the content of the moral order organized under the ten heads of the summary of the moral law provided in the Decalogue. In the prolegomena, special attention will be paid significant issues in Reformed moral theology such as the ground of moral order (natural law or divine command), the relationship of the moral law to the moral order, the priority and use of Scripture in moral theology, uses (and abuses) of the moral law, its relation to the gospel and role within the covenant of grace, and the rules for rightly interpreting and applying the Decalogue. In the lectures on the content of moral theology we will work our way through each commandment, noting any significant exegetical issues, and identifying the scope and contrary forces of each. The bulk of our discussion, however, will be devoted to the application of the moral law to contemporary personal and social ethical issues Christians face today.

**Readings**

*Textbooks*

Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (ISBN 978-0875527963)

Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, (ISBN 978-1598561685 or any complete copy; also available online)

*Standards*

Westminster Larger Catechism (ISBN 978-0979377006; must bring to class each day)

*On Topics*

Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3d ed., (ISBN 978-0802867704)

PCA Position Papers & Studies available at <http://pcahistory.org/pca/>

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (ISBN 978-0451482211)[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Perspective on the Moral Law**

The moral law is spiritual and describes not only what humans, as bearers of the divine image, were created to do but the kind of people we were created to be. As such, the work of this law was written on our hearts and belongs to the terms of the original covenant between God and all people in Adam. When Adam broke that covenant and plunged himself and his posterity under its curse of death, God, being unfathomably gracious, established another covenant with his people in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all the requirements of the moral law on our behalf. Now, everyone who believes on him has been raised to spiritual life, set free from the power of sin, and empowered by the indwelling Spirit to will and do what pleases God.

By studying the Decalogue, which summarizes the whole moral law, we are studying Jesus Christ’s form of life: perfect in love, Jesus is the living exposition of the moral law. If we want to know what the law commands then we should look to Jesus who expounds it not only in his teaching (e.g. Sermon on the Mount, and many other places) but lives it out in the flesh; if we want to understand Jesus Christ or what love is, then we must study the moral law. As we do, we are also studying the Christ-like form of life we have been set free to gladly and gratefully live out now and in the sinless age to come.

The moral law remains the standard of righteousness for all people. If we love God, we will keep his commandments—this is what disciples of Christ do. There is great joy and rich blessing in doing so and as we do so we become living displays of the reality of God’s saving grace and the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Attendance & Participation Policy**

Your primary assignment is to be present, prepared, and ready to participate fully in class each week. This requires showing up on time and remaining for the duration of class, ready to contribute meaningfully by having read all assigned materials beforehand.

Any student who misses class or is grievously or repeatedly tardy (without prior permission or a compelling emergency) may find their course grade reduced on the following schedule:

1. By one full letter grade (e.g. A to B) for each unexcused absence
2. By one increment (e.g. A to A-) for each unexcused tardy or absence from class of more than 20 minutes
3. By one increment (e.g. A to A-) for every unexcused tardy of less than 20 minutes, for repeat offenders

Students found studying for other classes or using electronic devices for any reason not directly related to the current topic of discussion will be counted as being tardy or absent from class for more than 20 minutes.

Permission to be absent from class will ordinarily be granted only for medical reasons or family crises. Elective choices such as attending a conference, work (including RTS and church internship duties), enrolling in another course in conflict with this one, and so on, are unacceptable excuses. (The professor will try to accommodate special events on campus and presbytery meetings, as needed.)

Note: this “law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Tim 1:9).

**Technology Use Policy**

Since students who type notes during lectures consistently perform worse on exams and other assessments of lecture and discussion comprehension, laptops and tablets are prohibited in class except by special permission from the professor.[[2]](#footnote-2) (Permission is ordinarily restricted to matters of learning disabilities or those who handwrite their notes directly into a tablet application). Phones must be on silent and kept out of sight (and mind). If you must receive or place a call, even during a class break, please leave the classroom to do so.

**Assessments**

*Term Paper:* you must write and submit a ten to twelve (10–12) page term paper on a specific ethical problem of contemporary pastoral significance. You are free to pick any ethical problem you are likely to encounter in the context of your anticipated ministry. Use standard font and style (follow latest edition of Turabian’s *Manual*); a bibliography of at least five high-quality sources is required. See schedule for due date.

Papers should follow the principles of interpretation and application presented and modeled in class. Your work must be original and should reflect the quality of writing and exegetical and theological acumen expected of a third or fourth year seminary student. Papers receiving “A”s will ordinarily do the following:

1. Clearly define the ethical question and state a clear, arguable position (<1 page)
2. Show awareness of the current debate and relevant historical discussions on this question, noting the strongest objections or opposing views (3-4 pages)
3. Argue for and defend your position from Scripture (4-6 pages)
4. Conclude by showing how the argument has answered the original question (<1 page)

*Book Review:* submit a five-page review or response to Ta-Nehisis Coates’s *Between the Word and Me*. Your review should engage the moral import of the Coates’s reports, views, and arguments on race relations in America. Write from the perspective of a Presbyterian pastor (or counselor) who is ministering to a young adult African-American reader of Coates’s work—someone much like his son to whom the book is addressed—who is struggling with making sense of Reformed evangelical faith in light of the realities to which Coates speaks.

 International students planning to return to and minister in your home country may propose a substitute book of similar import for your home culture. The proposed book should offer an penetrating moral critique of your home culture from a non-Christian perspective or a moral challenge to Christianity from a recognized figure within your home culture.

*Exams:* you will be given two exams (a midterm and a final) that will cover course content including class lectures, class discussions, and assigned readings—the final is comprehensive. These will be timed-limited open note and open book exams administered through Canvas and taken at your convenience within specified windows of opportunity. The exams may include a combination of objective (T/F, multiple choice, etc.), short answer (a sentence or two), and short essay (1–3 concise paragraphs) type questions. While you may use notes and books, you must NOT work together with classmates while taking the exams or discuss the content of the exams with classmates till the professor has notified you that ALL exams have been submitted. See schedule for dates.

Note well: I often use student questions to introduce and expand on important concepts and their applications. Class discussions ordinarily cover testable material.

**Course Grade**

Term Paper 35%

Book Review 15%

Midterm (Intro &1st table) 25%

Final (2nd table) 25%

Total 100%



**Course Objectives Related to MDiv Student Learning Outcomes**

Course: ST5500 Pastoral and Social Ethics

Professor: Bruce P. Baugus

Campus: Jackson

Date: Fall 2020

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| **MDiv Student Learning Outcomes** | **Rubric** | **Mini-Justification** |
| **Articulation**  **(oral & written)** | Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. | Strong | First 1/3 of course is on ethical sources, norms, and methods; latter 2/3 of course on Reformed understanding of content of Moral Order |
| **Scripture** | Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.) | Strong | Ethics is taught from Scripture and exegetical perspective |
| **Reformed Theology** | Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.  | Moderate  | Students expected to know Westminster Standards teachings on topic and develop an ethical method grounded in Reformed principles |
| **Sanctification** | Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification | Strong | Love for God and neighbor summarizes Moral law which is the content of this course |
| **Worldview** | Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues | Strong | Moral theology is the practical discipline of applying the moral law to contemporary life. |
| **Winsomely Reformed** | Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.) | Minimal | The professor strives to model and encourage this ethos in the course as we consider other traditions and points of view. |
| **Pastoral Ministry** | Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both churched and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians. | Moderate | Moral theology is an inescapable aspect of the work of pastoral ministry. |

1. International Students are permitted to propose a substitute work and should read the Assignments: Book Review section of this syllabus before purchasing. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, for example, Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer, “The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science* 25.6 (June 2014): 1159-1168. See also the excellent guide produced by Harvard University’s Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching (HILT): Machael C. Friedman, “Notes and Note-Taking: Review of Research and Insights for Students and Instructors,” available online at <http://hilt.harvard.edu/files/hilt/files/notetaking_0.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)