

REL 612: CHRIST & BEING HUMAN

Fall 2020, Tuesday, 3:30-5:20 PM

Latourette (in-person) / (online)

Instructor: Drew Collins

Office Hours

Wednesdays, 15:30-17:30

Format

This course is offered as a hybrid class and will meet in Latourette as well as over Zoom. See the "Zoom" tab on the course Canvas page for the link.

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—might inform Christian visions of human life and practices (individual, communal, and cosmic) that promote human flourishing in today's world. Students will consider the possible relationship between conceptions of the good life, drawn from exegetical and theological interpretation of the narrated life and teaching of Jesus, and the students' own visions of the good life and other current perspectives, supported by an analysis of varied aspects of human life in contemporary societies. 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? What does a flourishing life look like if Jesus Christ is taken to be the key?* The principal objectives are three: students will be equipped to wrestle with the *formal* question of the relation between Christ and human life drawing on the gospels (with particular focus on Luke) as source texts for articulating this relation; students gain insight into the way their visions of Jesus and of the good life are shaped by their cultural contexts; students come away better able to articulate their own vision of flourishing in dialog with the figure of Jesus and the relation between his life and theirs, as each student understands it.

Objectives

The principal objectives are three:

- (1) students will be equipped to wrestle with the *formal* question of the relation between Christ and human life drawing on the gospels (with particular focus on Luke) as source texts for articulating this relation;
- (2) students gain insight into the way their visions of Jesus and of the good life are shaped by their cultural contexts;

- (3) students come away better able to articulate their own vision of flourishing in dialog with the figure of Jesus and the relation between his life and theirs, as each student understands it.

Course Assignments

All written assignments should be submitted in Word or pdf format via Canvas assignments. Late papers will receive a grade reduction of one step (e.g., from H- to HP+) for each day or part of a day that they are late.

Cohorts

The "cohort" component of the class (is intended to support community creation and collaboration across this divide. In addition, cohorts will rotate attending class sessions remotely, in light of the 12 person limit to gatherings in Latourette.

Students will be assigned to cohorts that will meet at least once a week throughout the semester. Each cohort will be responsible to select the following (**and post it on the class Google Doc, accessed via "Collaborations" section of Canvas weekly by 11:59PM on Fridays prior to class**):

- Recommend one passage from the gospel readings for that week for group discussion to focus on
- Recommend one focus passage from *each* of that week's secondary readings for group discussion to focus on
- Provide *at least* 2 discussion questions inspired by the above selections

In addition to these weekly group responses, each cohort will **lead** class discussion **three** times over the course of the semester. These will be assigned randomly to each group. Prior to your cohort's week of leading class discussion, you must submit a 'lesson plan' to the instructor **by 11:59PM on the Sunday prior to class** outlining focus passages and discussion questions agreed upon by the group. Following the remaining cohorts' posting of their recommendations, the cohort (or a representative agreed upon by the group) that is leading class each week will also meet with the instructor for 30 minutes on **Monday** before class to discuss the lesson plan and any potential revisions in light of the other cohorts' responses and/or the instructor's suggestions.

Failure to meet any of these requirements will result in a reduction in the participation grade for *all members* of the cohort.

A. Paper #1, 5-7 pages, Due 10/2, (20% of final grade)

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

Describe the vision of the good life endorsed by YDS. 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? What would one imagine would be the life of an "ideal" YDS alumnus or alumna? 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?

B. Paper #2, 5-7 pages, Due 10/23 (20% of final grade)

Topic: Theological Interpretation of an Aspect of Flourishing

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 "exegetical" paper; the goal is to describe the truth claims the passage makes about the good life and relate those claims to your own life.

C. Paper #3, 10-12 pages, Due 12/4 (40% of final grade) Topic:

What is your vision of the good life?

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.

D. Participation (20% of final grade)

Students are expected to attend, and be on time for, all seminar meetings and actively participate in discussion. Unexcused absences and more than two late-arrivals will result in a reduction of the final course grade.

Expected participation includes both speaking *and* listening generously:

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says.
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said.
- Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions.
- Make a comment that summarizes our conversation so far and/or suggests new direction and questions to be explored in the future.
- Make a comment indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful.
- Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said.
- Find a way to express appreciation for the insight you have gained from the discussion.

Required Texts

- Books available in the YDS Bookstore:
 - Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*
 - Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*
 - Matthew Croasmun, Miroslav Volf, *For the Life of the World*
- Additional weekly readings available on each week's page on Canvas.

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

Sept 1 Course Introduction

(Remote: Cohort 1)

Readings: Luke 9:18-27; Romans 6:1-14

Hans Frei, "A Meditation for the Week of Good Friday and Easter"

Willie J. Jennings, "Introduction," *The Christian Imagination*, 1-11

Sept 8 Why Visions of True Life Matter (Or: The Pearl of Great Price) (Remote:

Cohort 2)

Readings: Matthew 13:44-53; Luke 4:1-12, 5:1-11, 17:20-33; Romans 14:1-23

Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 1-29

Matthew Croasmun & Miroslav Volf, *For the Life of the World*, 11-34,

David Foster Wallace, "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again," 256-268

Howard Thurman, "Jesus - an Interpretation" & "Epilogue," *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 1-25, 100-102

Sept 15 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord'?"

(Remote: Cohort 3)

Readings: Matthew 7:24-28; Luke 6:17-49, 10:25-37, 14:25-33, 18:18-26;
 John 9:24-41, 10:1-18, 11:25-27, 12:20-26; Philippians 2:5-11

John Webster, "Christology, Imitability and Ethics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39:3, 309-326

Dorothy Day, "Why," "Wheat and Cockle," and "Your Three Objections," *From Union Square to Rome*, 1-17, 143-173

Matthew Croasmun & Miroslav Volf, *For the Life of the World*, 45-147 James Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, vii-viii, 4-8.

Christ and the Phenomena of Human Existence

Sept 22 Home as a Cradle of Our Humanity

(Remote: Cohort 1)

Readings: Luke 2:39-52, 4:16-30, 9:28-36, 9:51-62, 14:12-14, 15:11-32, 16:1-9, 18:28-30;
1 Peter 2:4-8; 1 John 4:7-21, Revelation 21

Ryan McAnnally-Linz & Miroslav Volf, "Cadbury Lectures"

[Monique Valeris & Lucia Tonelli, "How To Marie Kondo Your Home in 2019,"
ElleDecor.com](#)

Dorothy Day, *On Hospitality*, 20-26

Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 31-41

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, LXVII

Sept 29 Birth & Expectation

(Remote: Cohort 2)

Readings: Luke 1:1-3:38, 12:49-53, 13:31-35, 14:25-27, 18:15-17; John 3:1-16, 16:16-24;
1 Peter 2:1-2

Jürgen Moltmann, "The Promise of the Child," *In the End—the Beginning*, 1-18

Aldous Huxley, *A Brave New World*, chs. 1-2

[Radiolab, "G: Unnatural Selection" \[click for audio or transcript\]](#)

Frances Young, *Face to Face*, 8-68

Julian of Norwich, "The Kind, Loving Mother," *Revelations of Divine Love*, Ch.
LX

Oct 2 1st Paper Due

Oct 6 Call & Responsibility

(Remote: Cohort 3)

Readings: Luke 1:5-80, 2:1-35; 3:1-22, 4:1-30, 9:1-6, 9:21-27, 10:1-20, 10:38-42, 12:49-
53, 13:6-9, 14:25-33, 19:1-27, 21:1-4; 1 Peter 1-2:10, 3:8-12

Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 43-80

Dorothy Day, "May 10th," *On Pilgrimage*

Søren Kierkegaard, "The Listener's Role in a Devotional Address," and "What
Then Must I Do? Live as an 'Individual'," & "Occupation and Vocation; Means
and End" *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*

Miroslav Volf, "Work, Spirit, and New Creation," *Work in the Spirit*, 88-122

Oct 13 Freedom & Bondage

(Remote: Cohort 1)

Readings: Luke 4:31-44, 6:1-5, 7:1-10, 8:22-39, 9:43b-50, 11:14-23, 11:27-28, 11:37-54, 16:10-13, 17:1-10, 20:20-26, 21:7-18, 22:14-46; John 8:31-38; Romans 7:14-25

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 26-78

Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 10-17

James Cone, "The Gospel of Jesus, Black People, and Black Power," *Black Theology & Black Power*, 31-43

Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 81-121

Oct 20 Forgiveness & Justice

(Remote: Cohort 2)

Readings: Luke 6:27-38, 7:36-50, 11:1-4, 12:8-12, 15:11-32; 17:1-5; 18:1-14, 22:63-23:49

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79-99

Jonah Engel Bromwich, "Everyone Is Cancelled," *The New York Times*, June 28th 2018 (Watch embedded video by Kimberly Foster)

Imaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell*, xix-xx, 3-12, 37-44, 73-94, 129-135

James Cone, "The Gospel of Jesus, Black People, and Black Power," & "Reconciliation," *Black Theology & Black Power*, 43-61, 143-152

Miroslav Volf, "How Should We Forgive?" *Free of Charge*, 157-191

Oct 23 2nd Paper Due

Oct 27 Boredom & Entertainment

(Remote: Cohort 3)

Readings: Luke 6:20-25; 7:24-33, 10:21-37, 11:29-36, 12:35-48, 12:54-56, 17:20-24, 21:25-36; 24:13-35; Matthew 22:1-14; Mark 6:21-28; Ecclesiastes 2:1-3:15; Ephesians 5:1-20; Philippians 4:4-9; Revelation 2:1-5

David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, 33-37, 54, 78-79, 87, 105-109, 317-321
The Pale King, 78-85, 437-438

Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," *Waiting for God*, 105-116

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, XII-XIII

Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 11-48

Nov 3 Sickness & Healing

(Remote: Cohort 1)

Readings: Job 2:1-13; Luke 4:16-30, 5:12-32, 7:11-23, 8:26-56, 9:1-6, 10:1-12, 13:10-17, 17:11-19; James 5:1-19

Martin Luther, "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague"

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chs 1-3, 64-68

Aldous Huxley, *A Brave New World*, chs. 16-17

Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus*, 1-3, 19-55

Nov 10 Mourning & Death

(Remote: Cohort 2)

Readings: Luke 2:25-38, 6:20-25, 7:11-17, 8:40-56, 9:21-27; 17:20-37, 22:1-23:56; Matthew 9:14-15, 24:3-31; John 14:1-31, 16:4-33; Romans 12:14-15; 1 Peter 4:13-19; James 4:9; Revelation 1:4-8, 12-18, 2:8-11, 9:1-6, 21:1-8

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 267-90 and "Expectations"

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, ch. 4.

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chs. 8-13, 15

Mark O'Connell, "600 Miles in a Coffin-Shaped Bus, Campaigning Against Death Itself," *NY Times*, February 9, 2017

Nov 17 Joy & Fear

(Remote: Cohort 3)

Readings: Luke 1:11-79, 8:22-56, 10:17-24, 12:4-34, 15:1-32, 19:35-44, 21:25-28, 24:1-53; Matthew 10

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 114-21

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

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

Frank Furedi, *How Fear Works: Culture of Fear in the Twenty-First Century*, "Introduction" & "Conclusion: Towards a Less Fearful Future"

Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, chs. 20, 24, 25, 64.

Christian Wiman, "The Cancer Chair"

Dec 4 Final Paper Due