

THE RISE AND FALL OF “CATHOLIC SOCIAL ETHICS”

**Theology 551/451
Spring Semester, 2001
Tuesday, Thursday 3:30-4:45**

MICHAEL J. BAXTER, C.S.C.

Office: 122 Decio (1-7666)
Home: 402 Moreau Seminary (1-4608)
Email: baxter.6@nd.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the discourse of Catholic social ethics, with an emphasis on its emergence in the nineteenth century, its general development from the late-nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, and its particular formation in the United States since the Second Vatican Council. It will focus both on official church teachings (e.g., papal encyclicals, conciliar documents, and pastoral letters of the Catholic bishops in the United States), and on the theologians whose writings have been a source of these teachings, particularly Augustine and Aquinas and such modern figures as Lamennais, Maritain, Murray, and their more recent successors. This course will address a host of methodological issues, including the influence of Christian beliefs and practices upon the church's understanding of society, the place of scripture in ethical reflection, the place of liturgy in ethical reflection, the relation of the church to the modern state and market, the relation of charity and justice, and the theological status of the distinctions between sacred and secular, spiritual and temporal, and kingdom and history as they pertain to the discourse of Catholic social ethics. It will also address specific issues in the general areas of war and peace and economic justice.

The general approach of this course is historical, with the twin goals of, first, understanding how and why the discourse of Catholic social ethics has come to assume its present forms and structures over the past two centuries, and then, second, subjecting this discourse to theological analysis and critique. As suggested by the title, this course will attempt to tell the story of the rise and (possible? probable?) fall of Catholic social ethics, a story whose central theological claim is that a Christian understanding of “society” and “the social” is grounded in the Church understood as the body of Christ in the world; and that the peaceableness and generosity entailed in this life stands as an alternative and point of resistance to the violent and acquisitive character of the modern state and market. This story claims, further, that it is the task of Catholic theologians in the twenty-first century to disclose how this violence and acquisitiveness is masked and reinforced by the modern discourse of “Catholic social ethics.”

TEXTS:

Henry Paolucci, *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*
 Paul Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*
 David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*
 Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes, *Fullness of Faith*
 Michael Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God*
 Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*
 The Coursepak

REQUIREMENTS:

Take-Home Test	Due on Friday, February 9, 5:00 pm (40 points)
Paper	Due on Friday, March 9, 5:00 pm (30 points)
Paper	Due on Friday, April 6, 5:00 pm (40 points)
Paper	Due on Tuesday, April 17, 5:00 pm (30 points)
Take-home Final	Due at exam time (40 points)
Participation	Readings, written assignments, class participation (20 points)

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is required. Only excused absences will be allowed, and then, only if the professor is notified ahead of time. Students who must be absent from a class will nevertheless be required to write a two-page summary and reflection on that day's readings, which is to be handed in the next class meeting.

HONOR CODE:

Students are, of course, expected to abide to the standards of the Notre Dame Honor Code. As regards written work, please be sure to indicate the source for work that is not your own. For protocols in style and formatting, you must use either Kate L. Thurabian, *A Manual for Writers*, Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

OFFICE HOURS:

122 Decio: Monday and Wednesday, 3:00 - 4:15; and by appointment.