

National Capital Semester for Seminarians

Wesley Theological Seminary

Core Reflection Seminar (ES 491) | Spring 2014

Prof. Mike McCurry | mmccurry@psw-inc.com

Prof. Kristopher Norris | kmn4jj@virginia.edu

Mondays | Site visits, various locations

Tuesdays | Classroom lecture and discussion, 8:30–10:30a in Kresge K-105

Course Description

This seminar is the core of the NCSS program in ethics, theology, and public policy. It combines readings, classroom discussion, and academic writing assignments with visits to policy experts, advocacy groups, and public officials. Its aim is to integrate theological reflection about the character and mission of the church with information about current issues in American public life.

Course Goals

1. To develop the students' ability to think theologically about public policy issues.
2. To provide background material and tools to inform judgments about public life.
3. To present a variety of theological perspectives and concrete models of the intersection of Christian theology and political life.
4. To aid students in making vocational choices.
5. To help students deepen their passion for public theology and social justice.
6. To help future pastors learn how to guide and conduct civil discussions on contentious issues in a congregational setting.

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** at site visits: this includes active participation in the conversations at all site visits. **Active participation** in seminar meetings: this includes doing all of the reading and being prepared to discuss the texts. (30% of course grade)
2. A **4-page midterm paper** due at the end of reading week (due March 18) that will offer a personal reflection on key insights in the course and key questions remaining to be addressed. (10% of course grade)
3. **Six posts of 200–250 words** on the class Blackboard site which reflect on either or both of the readings and class visits of that week, due by the Wednesday after that class. Also at least **four 100-word thoughtful responses** to a posting made by a

fellow student in the course. Professors will comment from time to time but these dialogues are designed to encourage thoughtful engagement on the issues we will encounter, and are a serious part of the learning in this course. (20% course grade)

4. At the conclusion of the seminar each student will write a **6–8 page final paper** on a topic of choice illuminated by the semester. The paper should also describe the student’s vocational goals and integrate any insights gained from their experience in the NCSS. Topics will be reviewed by professors and approved by April 14. Paper due May 6. (40% course grade)

Required Texts

Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

All other course readings are available on-line via Blackboard or web link in syllabus.

Course Schedule *(site visits on Mondays, reading assignments on Tuesdays)*

I. APPROACHES TO CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Foundations in Christianity and Politics

January 27	1:00p	Initial Gathering Public Strategies Washington
	3:00p	Dr. Shaun Casey Director of Faith-Based Initiatives U.S. State Department
January 28		Daniel 7, Matthew 5-7, Luke 20:19-26, Romans 13, Revelation 13 Augustine, <i>City of God</i> : Book V: Chs 13, 16, 21, 24, Book XIX: 6, 7, 11-17, 24 Luther, <i>On Temporal Authority</i> Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , IV.20

February 18 Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*,
Ch 3, Ch 4, Conclusion
James Mumford, “Clowns to the Left of Me, Jokers
to the Right”

II. FOREIGN POLICY AND THE USE OF FORCE

February 24	1:00p	Denis McDonough, White House Chief of Staff
February 25		Augustine, “Against Faustus” Thomas Aquinas, “War,” <i>Summa Theologica</i> II-II Q. 40 Martin Luther, “Sermon on the Mount” (excerpt) <i>Schleitheim Confession</i> (Anabaptist) US Conference of Catholic Bishops, <i>The Challenge of Peace</i>
March 3	1:00	Doug Johnston, President, International Center for Religion & Diplomacy
	3:00p	Jim Winkler, General Secretary/President National Council of Churches Former General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church
March 4		Doug Johnston, “Islamic View of the West” Barack Obama, <i>Nobel Peace Prize Speech</i> “Responsibility to Protect” Summary “Schlesinger Report” (Appendix on Detention Operations) Alan Dershowitz, “The Case for Torture Warrants” “An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture”
March 10 & 11		<i>Reading Week: No visits or class sessions</i>

III. GLOBAL POVERTY AND MIGRATION

Poverty Policy

March 17	1:00	David Beckmann, President Bread for the World
	3:00	Tim Goeglein, Senior Advisor Focus on the Family
March 18		US Conference of Catholic Bishops, <i>Economic Justice for All</i> , Introduction, Ch 1—3 Gustavo Gutierrez, “Poverty” in <i>A Theology of Liberation</i>
		Midterm Papers Due
March 24	1:00p	Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners
	3:00p	Michael Elliot, President and CEO ONE Campaign
March 25		Jim Wallis, excerpts from <i>On God’s Side</i> Bono, “Remarks at National Prayer Breakfast, 2006”

Immigration Policy

March 31	1:00	Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director NETWORK
	3:00	Michael Cromartie Ethics & Public Policy Center
April 1		Hernandez, “Mexican Immigration to the United States”

Reed, “Refugee Rights and State Sovereignty: Theological Perspectives on the Ethics of Territorial Borders”

Heyer, “Strangers in Our Midst: Day Laborers and Just Immigration Reform”

IV. FAITH AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Trends in Faith & Politics

April 7	1:00p	Michelle Boorstein, Religion Reporter The Washington Post
	3:00p	Dr. Robert P. Jones, CEO Public Religion Research Institute
	4:30	David Price, Congressman Cannon House Office Building
April 8		Fowler, et. al. “Latino and African American Religion and Politics” & “Gender, Religion, and Politics” in <i>Religion and Politics in America</i> Robert Bellah, “Fueling the Tensions” in <i>The Restructuring of American Religion</i>

Critiques of Faith & Politics

April 14	1:00	Ambassador Dennis Ross, Distinguished Fellow The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
	3:00	Doug Tanner, Founder and Senior Advisor The Faith & Politics Institute
April 15		James Hunter, “The Christian Right,” and “The Christian Left” from <i>To Change the World</i>
April 21	1:00p	Reverend Dean Snyder, Pastor

Foundry UMC

3:00p

Leslie Woods,
Representative for Poverty & Environmental Issues
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

April 22

Reinhold Niebuhr, "American Politics," from *Love and Justice*

Hauerwas & Willimon, "Christian Politics in the New World," in *Resident Aliens*

Emilie Townes, "Religious Values, Public Policy, and Women's Moral Autonomy" in *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*

Organizing Faith & Politics

April 28

1:00p

Mark Fraley, IAF Community Organizer

3:00

Amy Vruno, Lead Organizer
Washington Interfaith Network

April 29

Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*,
Ch 2

Conclusions

May 7

Exam Week: **Final Papers Due**