Course Description

The Catholic Church has from her beginning thought and taught on social, political and economic relations (e.g. St. Paul’s Epistle to Philemon). Over the last century or so, however, she has devoted particular attention to the problems of modern economies – inequality, class conflict, private property, the profit motive, the welfare state, consumerism, and human freedom to name just a few – and wrestled with many foundational questions of modern economic life: What is the proper relationship between the social classes? What are the merits and flaws of socialism? Of capitalism? Is love a relevant concept in political and economic analysis? What is an economy for?

This course involves a thoughtful engagement with one small portion of the larger body of thought known as ‘Catholic social teaching,’ namely that emphasizing the themes of political economy. Our primary texts will be the papal encyclicals Rerum novarum (1891), Quadragesimo anno (1931), Mater et magistra (1961), Laborem exercens (1981) and Centesimus annus (1991), as well as commentaries on the documents themselves and their social impact.

Readings

This course has two readings sources for the term:

2. Course readings.

The book should be purchased through your favorite on-line retailer – it is NOT available at Water Street Books. Course readings will be provided to you as soon as possible. It will also be helpful to have a Bible on hand, both in class and while doing the readings. Any translation is fine.

Course requirements and grades

Regular attendance and thoughtful contributions to discussion are essential – if these are absent, we are in for a loooong January. A final 10-page paper on a topic of student choice related to the course is due on January 28 in class.

Your grade in this course will be based on the following formula: class participation (30%); final paper (70%).
Course Calendar

Jan. 4 AN INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT


Jan. 5 CATHOLIC POLITICAL ECONOMY AND MAINSTREAM ECONOMICS


Jan. 6 NATURAL LAW


Jan. 7 HUMAN RIGHTS


Jan. 11 RERUM NOVARUM – TEXT

- O’Brien and Shannon, pp. 12-39

Jan. 12 RERUM NOVARUM – COMMENTARY


Jan. 13 QUADRAGESIMO ANNO – TEXT

Jan. 14 QUADRAGESIMO ANNO – COMMENTARY


Jan. 18 MATER ET MAGISTRA – TEXT

• O’Brien and Shannon, pp. 82-128.

Jan. 19 MATER ET MAGISTRA – COMMENTARY


Jan. 20 LABOREM EXERCENS – TEXT


Jan. 21 LABOREM EXERCENS – COMMENTARY


Jan. 25 LIBERATION THEOLOGY


Jan. 26 CENTESIMUS ANNUS – TEXT


Jan. 27 CENTESIMUS ANNUS – COMMENTARY


Jan. 28 STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS