

## **TH-1203: Introduction to Christian Ethics**

Spring 2025  
Asynchronous  
From 2/10/25—to 5/9/25

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**“There is seldom a straight path from a single norm to an easy decision.”**

(Stivers, Gudorf, & Martin-Schramm, 2012)

**“The Christian stance is an approach to moral problems that begins from a set of beliefs that are generally shared among Christians, including beliefs about God and about how God’s presence in Jesus of Nazareth reshapes human lives and indicates the direction of human history.”**

(Lovin, 2011)

### ***Course Description:***

Introduction to Christian Ethics is a foundational course that invites students to reflect broadly on how people think about moral questions from a Christian perspective. The question before us is not *What do I believe?* It is *What Should I do?* Robin Lovin, one of our course authors, invites us to reflect on how our stance or orientation to the world as Christians, provides a way of thinking about our place in history, in the world, and in our particular social location. The Christian stance informs our duties and obligations, our goals and the good we want to achieve in the world, and the way that we act to achieve virtuous character. But let’s hear from Lovin:

**“How does the Christian stance come into conversation with other ways of thinking through moral issues?”** Robin Lovin describes the Christian stance as “an approach to moral problems that begins from a set of beliefs that are generally shared among Christians, including beliefs about God and about how God’s presence in Jesus of Nazareth reshapes human lives and indicates the direction of human history.” This approach comes into conversation with other ethical systems. All ethical systems orient persons to the three primary ways of arriving at a moral decision: (1) you can use reason to set *goals* and determine what actions are most likely to achieve these goals; (2) you can think about what your *duty* is and reflect on what you must do to fulfil your duty; and (3) you can determine what kind of person you should be and how to acquire the personal characteristics or *virtues* that empower you to be that kind of person. Christianity contributes distinct

understandings of goals, duties, and virtues that are at times in harmony with philosophical ethical systems and are often at odds with them.

With an understanding of the Christian stance, we move on to consider conflict as the context for Christian reflection. As course author Ellen Ott Marshall writes, “We live in conflict.” Conflict is both ubiquitous and unavoidable. Far from a pessimistic assessment, however, Marshall understands conflict as a catalyst for change. At its root, Marshall tells us, conflict means simply that “elements are in opposition with one another” and “strike together.” Far from being a consequence of the fall, conflict is a consequence of being interrelated and changing in an ecosystem. But let’s hear from Marshall:

***How do we live a good life in the midst of conflict?*** Conflict is a natural and necessary part of God’s creation, a creation that is relational and diverse, and a creation in which we are free to make choices. God has declared this creation good. Marshall writes “Rather than perceiving conflict as something to be managed and contained, conflict transformation intends to work constructively with conflict as a catalyst for change. Rather than focusing on a problem to be solved, this approach also tries to engage conflict in a way that begins something new and good.” While nonviolent conflict transformation can begin something new and good, Marshall reminds us how difficult it is to separate conflict from the forms of emotional, psychological, and spiritual violence that are an inevitable part of striking together. For this reason, we should privilege the perspective of victims of violence.

***A Case Method Approach.*** Last, this course is designed to give students practice at making ethical choices. Our third text, by Laura A. Stivers and James B. Martin-Schramm, is a case method approach to Christian Ethics. The case method approach retells real ethical dilemmas in order to give students experience working through complexity to well-reasoned choices. Stivers and Martin-Schramm write: “Such a method is well suited to the study of Christian ethics, for it drives the student to take the insights of traditions and theory, apply them to an actual situation, and then reconsider the adequacy of theory to practice and back to theory are all the elements that go into an ethical decision.

### ***Course Objectives:***

By the conclusion of the course, students will show proficiency in the following elements of ethical reasoning:

- Ethical self-awareness
- Understanding different ethical perspectives and concepts
- Ethical issue recognition
- Application of ethical perspectives and concepts
- Evaluation of different ethical perspectives and concepts

## ***Student learning outcomes (SLOs)***

### MDIV

- **SLO 3:** Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs.
- **SLO 4:** Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice.

### MAR

- **SLO 4:** Students will be able to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.

### MAMFT

- **SLO 5:** Graduating students will be able to use a theologically informed and clinically appropriate framework to integrate religious and spiritual factors into the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy
- **MFT Developmental Competency Component 4:** Awareness, knowledge, and skill to responsibly serve diverse communities.

## ***Course Requirements:***

You have three types of assignments. First, you have a short reflection on the reading for the week. There is no set length, but one or two short paragraphs is sufficient. If you submit two sentences, however, I will return it to you and ask you to amplify your response to the reading. These assignments are due on Sunday evenings by 6PM. Second, you have a Module assignment that you complete with your small group at the end of each module. This course has two modules. Your small group may make 1 submission on behalf of the group. If you take the course for a grade, then you will receive the same grade on the module assignment as other small group members. As a part of the assignment, I will ask you how your small group members contributed to your understanding. Third, in the last week of the course I ask you to submit a short video that invites you to reflect on one of the cases that was significant for you. Here then are the assignments:

### I. **Weekly “A WOW and A WONDER” Personal Reflections** (due Sundays @ 6PM)

Respond to the reading for the week by answering two questions:

1. What **WOWED** you about this reading? (A new concept, way of thinking, connection to your own life, etc.) Be specific about why this Wowed you.

2. What do you **WONDER** about this reading? Did something confuse you, annoy you, repel you? Let me know what about this reading you want to explore further.

Your response should show that you have processed the reading and are able to articulate at a graduate level the concepts that resonate with you and that you want to explore more fully.

## II. **Small Group Module Assignments**

At the end of each module, you will work with your small group to complete a module assignment. Please be in conversation with each other sooner rather than later about how best to communicate and do your work. You may submit a group paper, or a group PowerPoint, or a group video. What is important for this assignment is that you engage the material *together*. Engagement, however, does not mean agreement. If your small group disagrees about what to do, then please identify the disagreement(s), the reason(s) for the disagreement, and what the disagreement(s) reveal to you about Christian Ethics.

- **Module 1 Assignment: Making a Teleological Argument** (due March 30)

For this assignment, you will work with your small group to answer the four questions in Lovin's text at the end of *Goals: A Test Case*, which you will find at the end of Chapter 5. The issue concerns the right to self-defense of rival nations. At stake is whether the strategy of a pre-emptive defense is morally justifiable as a good of self-defense.

- **Module 2 Assignment: Making an Argument About U.S. Immigration** (due May 4)

For this assignment, you will work with your small group to respond to the case in the Stivers and Martin-Schramm text, *Case: Detain and Deport*. You will find this case in Part III of the text on poverty. The case is as follows: "A local sheriff must decide whether to cooperate with a request from a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent to detain an undocumented high schooler for forty-eight hours past his release date from jail." In your group response, please attend to the following:

- Your stance
- A Deontological argument, a Teleological argument, and a Virtue ethics argument
- What a strategy of nonviolent conflict transformation might look like

- Contributions of your small group members

### III. **A Short Video**

By way of conclusion to the course, I want you to submit a short video, no longer than 10 minutes, in which you discuss one of the cases that was most challenging or significant to you this semester. Did the case reveal anything about your moral decision-making process or your stance? How did the case challenge you? (Due: 5/11 @ 6PM)

#### ***Grading:***

**Ordinarily, Introduction to Christian Ethics is taken pass/fail.** However, students may request, in the first week of the course, to receive a letter grade. In either case, all of the assignments must be completed and submitted in order to receive credit for the course.

If you take the course for a letter grade, here is how the assignments are weighted:

- 10 “A WOW AND A WONDER” reflections count for 30% of the final grade or 3-points each
- 2 Small Group Module Assignments count for 50% of the final grade, or 25-points each
- 1 video counts for 20% of the final grade

#### ***Required Texts*** (in order of use):

Robin W. Lovin. ***An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues.*** Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011.

Ellen Ott Marshall. ***Introduction to Christian Ethics: Conflict, Faith, and Human Life.*** Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.

Laura A. Stivers and James B. Martin-Schramm. ***Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach.*** 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2nd edition, 2014.

#### ***Class schedule:***

**Week 1 (2/10 - 2/16):      Three Select Approaches to the Study of Christian Ethics**

- Read the Preface to the Lovin text
- Read Chapter 1 of the Ellen Ott Marshall text, up to “To Study Christian Ethics is to Study Conflict” (about 9 pages of reading)

- Read the Introduction to the Stivers and Martin-Schramm text
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 2/16

**Week 2 (2/17 - 2/23):      **The Christian Stance****

- Read Lovin, Chapter 1, on Stance (the last 1 ½ pages of the chapter)
- Read Lovin, Chapter 3: "Variations on the Christian Stance"
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 2/23
- Reflect briefly with your small group about your stance and how it was shaped by your culture and social location (decide how best to communicate with each other)

**MODULE 1 *Goals, Duties, and Virtues***

**Week 3 (2/24 - 3/2):      **Goals****

- Read Lovin, Chapters 4 & 5 on Good and Goals
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 3/2
- \*Hint: Your Module 1 project, due 3/30, will be the test case at the end of Chapter 5\*

**Week 4 (3/3 - 3/9):      **Duties: Natural Law and Human Law****

- Read Lovin, Chapter 6 on Duties
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 3/9

**Week 5 (3/10 - 3/16):      **Duties: Principles and Commandments****

- Read Lovin, Chapter 7 on Duties
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 3/16

**Week 6 (3/17 - 3/23):      **RESEARCH AND STUDY WEEK****

**Week 7 (3/24 - 3/30):      **Virtues****

- Read Lovin, Chapters 8 & 9 on Virtues
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 3/30
- **MODULE 1 SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENT DUE 3/30**

**MODULE 2 *Conflict and Cases***

**Week 8 (3/31 - 4/6):      **Affirmation and Accountability Through the Imago Dei****

- Read Marshall, Chapter 3
- Submit "A WOW AND A WONDER" reflection on 4/6

- Read Stivers and Martin-Schramm, Case: Created in the Image of God, in Part VII, and Case: Death, Duty, and Dignity, in Part VIII

**Week 9 (4/7 – 4/13):      **The Vices and Virtues of Conflict****

- Read Marshall, Chapter 4
- Submit “A WOW AND A WONDER” reflection on 4/13
- Read Stivers and Martin-Schramm, Case: An American Idol, in Part II, and Case: Oil and the Caribou People, in Part IV

**Week 10 (4/14 – 4/16):      **The Purpose and Process of Reconciliation****

- Read Marshall, Chapter 5
- Read Stivers and Martin-Schramm, Case: Cut It Out, in Part VI
- **EASTER RECESS 4/17 & 4/18**

**Week 11 (4/21 – 4/27):      **Need and Fear in Relationship****

- Read Marshall, Chapter 6
- Submit “A WOW AND A WONDER” reflection on 4/27
- Read Stivers and Martin-Schramm, Case: Keeping the Doors Open, in Part VI, and Case: Homelessness: The How and Why of Caring, in Part III

**Week 12 (4/28 – 5/4):      **Christian Ethics through Conflict****

- Read Marshall, Chapter 7
- Submit “A WOW AND A WONDER” reflection on 5/4
- **MODULE 2 SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENT DUE 5/4**

**Week 13 (5/5 – 5/9):      **Course Conclusion****

- Submit a short video, no more than 10 minutes, on a case you read this semester that has been the most challenging or significant for you, and why? Did the case reveal anything about your moral decision-making process or your stance? **DUE NO LATER THAN 5/11 AT 6PM.**

## **LPTS Policy Statements**

### **Use of Inclusive Language**

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and

translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site with information for current students.

### **Academic Honesty**

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Also covered by the Seminary's prohibition of academic dishonesty are incidents of self-plagiarism or "double-dipping": reusing an assignment written for another course (whether at LPTS or elsewhere) or incorporating a substantial portion of work submitted for another course in an assignment submission. Unless a student communicates in advance to their professor and obtains the express permission of the instructors of the two courses to re-utilize and re-submit an assignment or portions of an assignment, re-submitted work will be treated as an incident of (self-)plagiarism. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

### **Special Accommodations**

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

### **Citation Policy**

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.



Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. See also the library's citation help page:

<https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>

**Attendance Policy**

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.