TH-1203: Introduction to Christian Ethics

Spring 2022
M/W 6:00 – 7:20 PM

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Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/5028942284

"There is seldom a straight path from a single norm to an easy decision"
(Stivers, Gudorf, & Martin-Schramm, 2012)

Course Description:

Introduction to Christian Ethics is a foundational course that invites students to use the case method "to enter the process of ethical reflection and decision-making" (Stivers, 2). Students will discuss how they engage in ethical reflection in order to move from norms (guidelines for moral behavior and action) to decisions. Case methodology is a helpful way to practice thinking ethically. Case studies capture past occurrences of ethical problems and case teaching invites critical reflection on what is right, good, and just, so that students can gain experience and confidence making ethical decisions. The case method is a form of dialogical inquiry that draws students into the context of an ethical issue and encourages them to reflect on what it means to behave ethically in particular situations, in conversation with their peers. Ethical decision-making is no easy task. It is a task fraught with inconsistency, ambiguity, and irony. The course enters the process of reflection and decision-making by asking three methodological questions:

"***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.

"***How do we live a good life in the midst of ongoing conflict?*** Ellen Ott Marshall's question draws us into a timely investigation of the normative traditions inspired by the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus. Christian ethics must address the question of conflict because of the reality of difference and the variety of theological and moral beliefs. Christians interpret the Bible differently, pray differently, weigh values and obligations differently, and occupy vastly different social and political locations in contemporary society. Yet they share basic theological convictions about the reality of God and human redemption. Marshall reminds us that to do Christian ethics is to participate in conflict. Whenever Christian ethicists "advance an argument, make a recommendation, or commend one thread of the tradition or one interpretation of Scripture or one application of a conviction or one way of being church over others" (15), they are participating in conflict. "The praxis—the ongoing interplay of action and reflection, of practice and theory, of activity and argumentation—is a praxis of conflict" (15). But conflict need not be the end of a good life. Marshall writes, "the assertion that conflict can be a site of constructive change is, for me, also an expression of faith informed by grace and responsibility" (17).

"***What is the case method of instruction and how does it aid in the process of ethical reflection and decision-making?***" The course introduces students to two versions of the case method of instruction so that they might participate in a Christian response to wrongdoing and injustice that builds justice-based relationships constitutive of neighbor-love. The traditional approach to case method moves from theory to practice and back to theory. The liberationist approach to case method, in the work of Miguel A. De La Torre, for example, moves from praxis to theory and back to praxis. Students will evaluate both approaches in the process of ethical reflection and decision-making. In the words of Brazilian theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, "love is praxis, not theory (1984)." Neighbor-love working to establish justice-based relationships is at the heart of Christian ethics. Miguel De La Torre writes, "For Christian ethics to be relevant, the faith community's struggles with oppressive living conditions must be engaged, always with the goal of dismantling the mechanism responsible for creating the inhumanity faced within marginalized spaces (2014)."

The course is taught synchronously and does not have an asynchronous option. It is ordinarily taught pass/fail.

Student learning outcomes (SLOs)

MDIV SLO's
- **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.

MA(R) SLO's
- **SLO 4:** Students will be able to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues.

Course Objectives:

By the conclusion of the course, students will show proficiency in the following elements of ethical reasoning:
- Theological and Ethical self-awareness
- Understanding different ethical perspectives and systems
- Ethical issue recognition
- Application of ethical perspectives and concepts
- Evaluation of different ethical perspectives and concepts

Course Requirements:

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

- **Monday Questions**: Students will submit one or more questions that *engage the reading* prior to each of 10 Monday class sessions between February 14 and April 25, with the exception of March 14 (**10 points**).

  - ➢ All questions are due no later than 1-hour prior to the start of class. Late submissions (after 5:00 PM) will not be accepted.

- **Case Leader**: Each student will facilitate one class session by helping the class to reflect on the assigned case using the four elements of an ethical decision. These elements are found in the *Introduction* to the Stivers, Gudorf, and Martin-Schramm text, and include: (1) the relationship of faith; (2) analysis; (3) assessment; and (4) proposed action. Dates for class facilitation will be assigned randomly between February 16th and May 4th. Please refer to the Stivers, Gudorf, & Martin-Schramm text, *Appendix,* page 334, for more specific guidance about the purpose of case leadership. If you are not able to be present on the day of your presentation, you may switch dates with a fellow student, or submit a 15-minute video to Canvas Studio, for the class to view, in which you demonstrate how you work through the case using the four elements of an ethical decision. (**30 points**).

- **Midterm Brief**: This is a formative exercise in which students will write a three to five-page brief or analysis of one of the cases discussed in class. Due March 21st (**20 points**).

- ▪ **<u>Videotaped case and analysis</u>**: This is a summative exercise in which students will use Canvas Studio to design an original case and videotape a 10-15 minute brief in conversation with course readings, additional readings if necessary, and course discussions. Due May 4th (**40 points**).

Accommodation for Non-Christian Students:

Non-Christian students may write the briefs outlined above from the perspective of the religious, spiritual, indigenous, or humanist tradition(s) that they hold.

Required Texts:

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

Robin W. Lovin. *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2nd edition, 2011.

Laura A. Stivers, Christine E. Gudorf, and James B. Martin-Schramm. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 4th edition, 2012.

Class schedule:

| | **Part I:** | **Christian Ethics and the Case Method** |

February 7:   Introduction to the course and to the guiding questions that we will address throughout the semester: "How do we work through moral issues?" What is the Christian *stance*?

February 9:   <u>Introduction to the Case Method</u>
- ▪ Read Stivers Introduction, Appendix, and Case: Rigor and Responsibility (page 17)
- ▪ Read Lovin, Preface
- ▪ Read De La Torre, Miguel, Chapter 1: "Doing Christian Ethics" in *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004)
  file:///C:/Users/swilliamson/OneDrive%20-%20Louisville%20Presbyterian%20Seminary/Miguel%20De%20La%20Torre--Christian%20Ethics%20from%20the%20Margins.pdf

Part II: Goals, Duties, Virtues and Conflict

February 14:   The Origins of Ethics
- Read Lovin chapter1; submit question

February 16:   Christian Ethics in Conflict
- Read Marshall chapter 1
- Read Case: What God Has Joined (page 31)

February 21:   The Good Life and the Christian Life
- Read Lovin chapter 2; submit question
- Read Case: A Life for a Life? (page 51)

February 23:   Considering Method
- Read Marshall chapter 2
- Read Case: Vietnam's Legacies (page 67)

February 28:   Variations on the Christian Stance
- Read Lovin chapter 3; submit question
- Read Case: Homelessness: The How and Why of Caring (page 93)

March 2:   Affirmation and Accountability through the *Imago Dei*
- Read Marshall chapter 3
- Read Case: Who Cares about Haiti Anyway? (page 109)

March 7:   Goods, Goals, and God
- Read Lovin chapter 4; submit question
- Read Case: Oil and the Caribou People (page 127)

March 9:   The Vices and Virtues of Conflict
- Read Marshall chapter 4
- Read Case: Whose Water? (page 149)

March14 & 16:   ***No Class***: ***Research and Study Week***

March 21:   The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number?
- Read Lovin chapter 5; submit question
- Read *GOALS: A Test Case* (Lovin, page 113)
- **Midterm Brief due**

March 23:   The Purpose and Process of Reconciliation
- Read Marshall chapter 5
- Read Case: Sustaining Dover (page 167)

March 28:   <u>Natural Law and Human Law</u>
- Read Lovin chapter 6; submit question
- Read Case: Executive Pay: Reward or Excess (page 189)

March 30:   <u>Need and Fear in Relationship</u>
- Read Marshall chapter 6
- Read Case: How Many Children? (page 207)

April 4:   <u>Principles, Casuistry, and Commandments</u>
- Read Lovin chapter 7; submit question
- Read *DUTIES: A Test Case* (Lovin, page 181)

April 6:   <u>Christian Ethics through Conflict</u>
- Read Marshall chapter 7
- Read Case: Keeping the Doors Open (page 223)

April 11:   <u>Virtues: Natural and Theological</u>
- Read Lovin chapter 8; submit question
- Read Case: Mixed Blessing? (page 263)

April 13:   **CLASS CANCELLED FOR HOLY WEEK**

April 18:   <u>Virtue and Responsibility</u>
- Read Lovin chapter 9; submit question
- Read *VIRTUES: A Test Case* (Lovin, page 234)

April 20:   Andrew Sung Park, "Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology"
     https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-4_001.pdf

April 25:   Emilie Townes, "Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have"
Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader
Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011
     https://lib.tcu.edu/staff/bellinger/60013/Emilie_Townes.pdf
     Read the chapter and submit a question
- Read Case: A Matter of Life or Death (page 287)

Part III: Workshop for Videotaped Case and Analysis

April 27:   Small group discussion of case and analysis

May 2:   Small group discussion of case and analysis

May 4:   Plenary discussion of cases
                    ▪ **Videotaped case and analysis due**

Policy Statements

1. 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. See for further assistance, http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-forms/guides-policies-and-handbooks/inclusive-and-expansive-language.

2. 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. 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 the Seminary policy, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

3. 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.

4. 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.* 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.
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.* 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

5. Attendance Policy
Perfect or near-perfect attendance at Zoom sessions is expected, and roll will be taken. Ordinarily, you must be present for at least 75% (= 60 minutes) of the class session in order to be counted as "present." In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class prior to the session. Whether excused or unexcused, more than two absences will affect the student's grade, and more than four absences may result in a failing grade in the course. Note that to earn full credit for "attendance" you will need to be engaged in the discussions and adhere to standards of professionalism for digital meetings as outlined in the section "Etiquette for Digital Meetings," immediately below.

6. Etiquette for Digital Meetings
  ➢ *Timeliness:* Plan to sign on to the meeting at least a couple of minutes before the scheduled start-time.
  ➢ *Audio:* Please mute your microphone unless you are speaking or about to speak. If the discussion gets lively, virtually raise your hand to be recognized by the moderator before speaking or use the "chat" function.
  ➢ *Online presence:* • **Keep your camera turned on** unless you must step away for a moment. • Close the door, turn off your phone, Twitter alerts, etc. Do not multitask. • If you use a virtual background, test it first to make sure it is not distracting. • Do not eat, walk around, or move in other distracting ways. (Sipping a beverage is fine.)

7. Other Items Relating to Instruction, Learning, and Technology at LPTS
  • To access the library and its resources, visit: https://lpts.edu/library/
  • To request a library laptop loan, contact library@lpts.edu
  • For a summary of information related to accessing Outlook, Canvas, CAMS, and the Intranet, see: Accessing LPTS Resources
  • For general help with campus network access, Outlook (email), contact support@lpts.edu
  • For information on Student Assistance Funds to help with costs associated with learning technology and access ($300 maximum), contact Gina Kuzuoka at gkuzuoka@lpts.edu