

3243: Ethics in Economic Life

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Professor Scott C. Williamson

swilliamson@lpts.edu

Office: Schlegel #306

Office Direct: 502. 894.2284

Cell and Text: 502. 468-5377

Course Description:

This course studies theological and ethical approaches to the economy with an emphasis on the common good. Students will read scholars in Christian theology and ethics in order to evaluate the relationship between Christian social teachings and Neoliberal economic theory.

Neoliberalism is committed to the following theoretical principles: (1) an unregulated market; (2) cutting public expenditures for social services; (3) deregulation; (4) privatization; and (5) individual responsibility. On the other hand, Christian social teachings include: (1) an economy that serves people by protecting their basic human rights to productive work and decent and fair wages; (2) social institutions that promote family and community, and that protect the poor and vulnerable; (3) human rights and responsibilities; (4) life and the dignity of the human person; and (5) the common good. Students will assess the coherence of their religious beliefs, moral values and standards, and participation in the U.S. market economy.

Master of Divinity Student learning outcomes (SLOs)

- **SLO 3:** Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to their context, 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.

Course objectives:

- 1) Articulate an understanding of the money culture in American life and identify its ethical implications for Christian ministry (**SLO 3**).
- 2) Assess the efficacy of Christian social teachings for economic life (**SLO 4**).
- 3) Demonstrate critical awareness of the role of culture in economic life and the values and assumptions that undergird a consumer society (**SLO 4**).
- 4) Demonstrate knowledge of the interlocking nature of religion, political economy, and ethics (**SLO 3**).
- 5) Demonstrate an ability to initiate and sustain peer dialogue with critical issues central to understanding the complexity of economic life and resisting economic injustice.
- 6) Demonstrate an ability to identify one's religious, spiritual, and/or denominational heritage (**SLO3**) and the Christian movement as resources for a strategy of resistance against economic oppression (**SLO 4**).

Course Requirements

- I. **Preparation and Participation** (20%) evaluated by the following criteria:
 - Preparation for class: write no more than a 100-word paragraph that engages the reading material by asking and answering a question that was raised for you by your reading. Paragraphs are not graded, but each is worth 2 points, and should be submitted on Canvas no later than 12 pm on the due date. Late paragraphs will not be accepted. A total of 10 paragraphs are required on the following Mondays: 9/19, 9/26, 10/3, 10/10, 10/24, 10/31, 11/7, 11/14, 11/21, & 11/28
 - Participation: generous listening and informed contribution to class discussions are vital elements of your participation.

- II. **Draft: Faith and money autobiography** (20%, 4-5 pages, double-spaced, due: 9/28)
The ability to describe the significant determinants of your own religious and socio-cultural heritage is an important skill for self-awareness. This autobiographical reflection on faith and money provides an opportunity to ask what money means to you, what it means in your community or social context, and what significance it holds for your vocation (SLO 3).

- III. **Draft: American money culture paper** (20%, 4-5 pages, double-spaced, due: 10/26)
The ability to articulate what is really happening in the national culture, and to evaluate what should and should not be happening are important tasks in theological ethics. This paper requires students to use the discipline of theological ethics to investigate the U.S. money culture, evaluate its core values and principles, and prescribe options for economic justice (SLO 3).

- IV. **Draft: Religious and theological heritage paper** (20%, 4-5 pages, double-spaced, due: 11/16)
The ability to identify the moral standards and values of your religious heritage, including denomination, that evaluate economic life is an important part of locating yourself within the Christian movement. What is significant or distinctive about your religious and/or denominational reflection on economic life? (SLO 4).

- V. **Final integration/reflection paper and credo** (20%, 4-5 pages, double-spaced, due 12/7)
The ability to describe how your thinking has changed or deepened this semester is an important academic skill. Reflect on any changes during the semester in how you relate theology to economy. Integrate your reflection with a distillation of your best thought from the draft papers and from class discussions. Pull these materials together into a paper that contains a credo, or “I believe. . .” statement about the relationship between God’s economy and the market economy (SLOs 3 & 4).

Required Texts (in order of use):

Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer, *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Mariner Books reprint edition, 2016.

Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*. Yale University Press, 2019.

Pamela Brubaker, Rebeca Todd Peters, and Laura Stivers, *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Selected Bibliography (available in the library):

Albrecht, Gloria. The Character of our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. (ISBN: 0-687-00283-4)

Atherton, John, ed. Christian Social Ethics: A Reader. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994. (ISBN: 0-8298-0999-6)

Birch, Bruce C. and Rasmussen, Larry L. The Predicament of the Prosperous. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978. (ISBN: 0-664-24211-1)

Cannon, Katie Geneva, et al., eds. Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011. (ISBN-13: 978-0664235376)

Childs, James M. Ethics in Business: Faith at Work. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. (ISBN: 0-8006-2908-6)

Chomsky, Noam. Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999. (ISBN-13: 978-1-888363-82-1)

Daly, Lois K., ed. Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. (ISBN: 0-664-25327-X)

Dussel, Enrique. Ethics and Community. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988. (ISBN: 0-88344-619-9)

Griffin, David Ray et al. The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God: A Political, Economic, Religious Statement. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. (ISBN-13: 978-0-664-23009-8)

Lebacqz, Karen. Six Theories of Justice. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986. (ISBN: 0-8066-2245-8)

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1986. (ISBN: 1-55586-101-6)

Putnam, Robert D. and Campbell, David E. American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010. (ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-6673-1)

Stackhouse, Max et al., eds. Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. (ISBN: 0-687-00335-0)

Stackhouse, Max et al., eds. God and Globalization Volume 1: Religion and the Powers of the Common Life. New York: Trinity Press International, 2000. (ISBN-13:978-0-567-46246-6)

Tamari, Meir. With All Your Possessions: Jewish Ethics and Economic Life. New York: The Free Press, 1987. (ISBN: 0-02-932150-6)

Volf, Miroslav. A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2011. (ISBN-13: 978-1-58743-298-9)

Wink, Walter. The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium. New York: Doubleday, 1998. (ISBN: 0-385-48752-5)

Wogaman, J. Philip. Christian Perspectives on Politics. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. (ISBN: 0-664-22201-3)

Hyperlink Resources:

“How does the Economy Work? A Quick Guide to the Basics of Economics (FutureLearn, June 10, 2021)

<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog/how-does-the-economy-work>

The Pruitt-Igoe Myth YouTube Trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CAfACI7LBY>

Le Hunte, Bem & Golembiewski, Jan. (2014). Stories Have the Power to Save us: A Neurological Framework for the Imperative to Tell Stories. *Arts and Social Sciences Journal*. 05. 10.4172/2151-6200.1000073.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307807019_Stories_Have_the_Power_to_Save_us_A_Neurological_Framework_for_the_Imperative_to_Tell_Stories

“What is Economic Justice?” The United Church of Christ

<https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/economic-justice/what-is-economic-justice/>

Harvey Cox, “The Market as God,” *The Atlantic* (March 1, 1999).

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/03/the-market-as-god/306397/>

“Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization,” The Lutheran World Federation (2004).

https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWF-Doc-50-Economic_Globalization-EN.pdf

“A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just, Humane Direction for Economic Globalization,” United Church of Christ (July 2003).

https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1776/A-Faithful-Response-Calling-for-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf?1418425287

“A Social Creed for the 21st Century,” National Council of Churches (2008).

http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/connectingtothecreed.pdf

“Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality,” Pew Research Center (January 9, 2020)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>

“Racial and Ethnic Gaps in the U.S. Persist on Key Demographic Indicators,” Pew Research Center (January 12, 2021)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/interactives/racial-and-ethnic-gaps-in-the-u-s-persist-on-key-demographic-indicators/>

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings (*the assignment should be read *in advance* of the discussions listed*)

PART I: STORIES OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP (What’s *Really* Going On?)

September 12 *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011)

- Use the hyperlink to read about this documentary before we watch it in class tonight
- Use the hyperlink to read the short essay “Stories Have the Power to Save Us”
- Use the hyperlink to skim “How Does the Economy Work?” (FutureLearn 2021)

September 14 *WELFARE IS DEAD*

- Read the Introduction and chapter 1 of the Edin & Shaefer text
- Use the hyperlink to read “What is Economic Justice,” by the United Church of Christ

September 19 PERILOUS WORK

- Read chapter 2 of the Edin and Shaefer text
- Use the hyperlink to read “Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality” by Pew Research Center (2020)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (1/10)

September 21 A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN

- Read chapter 3 of the Edin and Shaefer text

September 26 BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

- Read chapter 4 of the Edin and Shaefer text
- Use the hyperlink to read “Racial and Ethnic Gaps in the U.S. Persist on Key Economic Indicators” by Pew Research Center (2021)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (2/10)

September 28 A WORLD APART

- Read chapter 5 and the conclusion to the Edin and Shaefer text
- Paper #1 due: Faith and Money Autobiography

PART II: CHRISTIANITY AND CAPITALISM (What Should and Should Not Happen?)

October 3 THE NEW SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

- Read Chapter 1 of the Tanner text
- Use the hyperlink to read “The Market as God,” by Harvey Cox
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (3/10)

October 5 CHAINED TO THE PAST

- Read chapter 2 of the Tanner text

October 10 TOTAL COMMITMENT

- Read chapter 3 of the Tanner text
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (4/10)

October 12 NOTHING BUT THE PRESENT

- Read chapter 4 of the Tanner text

October 17 & 19: **RESEARCH AND STUDY BREAK**

October 24 ANOTHER WORLD?

- Read chapter 5 of the Tanner text
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (5/10)

October 26 WHICH WORLD?

- Read chapter 6 of the Tanner text
- Paper #2 due: American Money Culture

PART III: STRATEGIES FOR JUSTICE (What Can We Do To Make A Difference?)

October 31 SUPPORTING COMMUNITY FARMING

- Read chapter 1 of the Brubaker text
- Use the hyperlink to read pages 1-12 of *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, by the National Council of Churches (2008)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (6/10)

November 2 RELATING TO HOUSEHOLD LABOR

- Read chapter 2 of the Brubaker text

November 7 CONSUMING RESPONSIBLY

- Read chapter 3 of the Brubaker text
- Use the hyperlink to read pages 15-27 (“In Faith—Personal Action Areas”) of *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, by the National Council of Churches (2008)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (7/10)

November 9 EATING INTENTIONALLY

- Read chapter 4 of the Brubaker text

November 14 HOLDING CORPORATIONS ACCOUNTABLE

- Read chapter 5 of the Brubaker text
- Use the hyperlink to read pages 28-45 (“In Love—Communal Action Areas”) of *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, by the National Council of Churches (2008)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (8/10)

November 16 ENGAGING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Read chapter 6 of the Brubaker text
- Paper #3 due: Religious and Theological Heritage

November 21 REVITALIZING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Read chapter 7 of the Brubaker text
- Use the hyperlink to read pages 46-61 (“In Hope—Global Action Areas”) of *A Social Creed for the 21st Century*, by the National Council of Churches (2008)
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (9/10)

November 23 **CLASS CANCELLED FOR THANKSGIVING**November 28 CREATING THE COMMONS & PROMOTING SOLIDARITY WITH
MIGRANTS

- Read chapter 8 of the Brubaker text
- Read chapter 9 of the Brubaker text
- 100-word paragraph due by 3:00 PM (10/10)

November 30 REFORMING GLOBAL ECONOMIC POLICIES

- Read chapter 10 of the Brubaker text

December 5 ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

- Read chapter 11 of the Brubaker text

December 7

CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

- Read chapter 12 of the Brubaker text
- Paper #4 due: Final Integration/Reflection and Credo

LPTS 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/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

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. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating 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 (kmapes@lpts.edu) during the first two weeks of a semester 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 the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:
Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

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

5. 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.