

Introduction to Christian Ethics

Louisville Seminary

Spring 2020

Professor Scott C. Williamson

Office: Schlegel 306

Direct: (502) 894-2284

swilliamson@lpts.edu

Course Description:

“How do we live a good life in the midst of 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. This course invites students to learn key concepts and theories in the discipline of Christian ethics so that they might build faithful Christian lives and a just society.

“How do we love our neighbor?” Miquel A. De La Torre’s question draws us into the necessity of praxis—what we *do*—because, 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 both Christian ethics and De La Torre’s project to do Christian ethics from the margins. 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.” This course introduces students to the study of liberationist Christian ethics so that they might participate in a Christian response to injustice that dismantles oppressive structures and builds justice-based relationships constitutive of neighbor-love.

How do we make ethical decisions and form Christian character in the context of conflict and institutionalized injustice? Utilizing a case method approach, students will take on contemporary ethical issues. 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.

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:

- 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

Course Requirements for MDIV Students:

- **Preparation and Participation:** This course follows a problem-posing, dialogical method that invites students to think for themselves, learn by discovery, and engage the professor and other students. To this end, the course will utilize role plays, small group discussion, mini-lectures, and film to encourage the development of a critical consciousness and proficiency in ethical reasoning. Regular attendance, timely reading, and participation in class discussions are crucial to student learning. (10%)
- **Paper #1:** *What does it mean for Christians to live a good life in the midst of conflict?* Ellen Ott Marshall writes, "The central question of ethics—how to live a good life—is not just something to debate or reflect upon in the abstract. It involves embodied knowledge, conversation with others, serious engagement with multiple sources of knowledge, shared actions and mutual dialogue, participation in the life of a faith community, and involvement in the institutions of society. All of this takes place in contexts of conflict and involves conflict." In this essay, students will write a provisional answer to the question, attending to sources for moral reflection, norms, and method, and following the elements of the ethical reasoning rubric in this syllabus and on CAMS. In your essay you should address resources in Christian texts, traditions, and practices for transforming conflict while pursuing neighbor-

love and justice. This paper should be approximately 10-pages in length, double-spaced. Due March 5. (30%)

- Paper #2: *What does it mean for Christians to love their neighbors who live in marginalized spaces?* De la Torre writes, “ethics done on the margins is and must remain a contextual ethics that seek to see the liberating work of God through the eyes of those made poor, those victimized, and those made to suffer because they belong to the “wrong” gender, race, orientation, or economic class.” In this essay students will write a provisional answer to the question, attending to the sources, norms, and method of a liberationist ethics, and following the process of the hermeneutical circle, and in accordance with the elements of the ethical reasoning rubric. This paper should be approximately 10-pages in length, double-spaced. Due April 14. (30%)
- Paper #3: *Making Ethical Decisions*. Select a case from *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach*, and write an essay that follows the process of making ethical decisions outlined in the text, in dialogue with the ethical reasoning rubric. Students should attend to the relationship of faith, analysis, ethical assessment, and provide guidance for faithful action. Papers should be approximately 10-pages in length, double-spaced. Due May 14. (30%)

Course Requirements for MA(R) and MAMFT Students:

In addition to the requirements above for preparation and participation:

- MA(R) Students are permitted to work on a research project in conjunction with the Research Methods course in lieu of writing the three papers outlined above. Additionally, MA(R) students are required to write a case study for the class based on their research and facilitate a class session on that case study.
- MAMFT students are permitted to submit, with the approval of the instructor, a total of thirty pages of writing on ethical issues in the practice of therapy and/or ethics case studies, in lieu of the three papers outlined above.

Accommodation for Non-Christian Students:

- Non-Christian students are permitted to write the three papers outlined above from the context of the religious, spiritual, or humanist tradition(s) that they hold.

Required Texts: (in order of use)

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

De La Torre, Miguel A. ***Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins.*** Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2017.

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

Class schedule:

February 6: Introduction to the course and to the practical question that we will address throughout the semester, **“What does it mean to live a good life?”**

Part I: Christian Ethics and Conflict Transformation

February 11: Christian Ethics in Conflict
Reading: Marshall, chapter 1

February 13: Moral Foundations
Reading: Marshall, chapter 2

February 18: Deontology
Reading: Marshall, chapter 3

February 20: Virtue Ethics
Reading: Marshall, chapter 4

February 25: Teleology
Reading: Marshall, chapter 5

February 27: An Ethics of Care
Reading, Marshall, chapter 6

March 3: Christian Ethics through Conflict
Reading: Marshall, chapter 7

Part II: Liberationist Christian Praxis

March 5: Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 1
First paper due

- March 10: The (De)Liberaton of Ethics
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 2
- March 12: The Liberation of Ethics
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 3
- March 17 & 19: ***Research and Study Week***
- March 24: Introducing Global Relationships and National Relationships
Reading: De La Torre, chapters 4 & 8
- March 26: Global Poverty and National Poverty
Reading: De La Torre, chapters 5 & 9
- March 31: Life and Death
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 11
- April 2: War on Women
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 15
- April 7: Environment
Reading: De La Torre, chapter 7 & Epilogue

Part III: A Case Method Approach

- April 9: ***Holy Week Recess***
- April 14: Christian Ethics and the Case Method
Reading: Stivers, Introduction
Second Paper Due
- April 16: Case: What God Has Joined
Reading: Stivers, pages 31-46
- April 21: Case: A Life for a Life?
Reading: Stivers, pages 51-64
- April 23: Case: Homelessness: The How and Why of Caring
Reading: Stivers, pages 93-108
- April 28: Case: Whose Water?
Reading: Stivers, pages 149-163

- April 30: Case: Keeping the Doors Open
Reading: Stivers, pages 225-241
- May 5: Case: Mixed Blessing?
Reading: Stivers, pages 265-285
- May 7: Case: A Matter of Life or Death
Reading: Stivers, pages 291-307
- May 14: **Third Paper Due by 3:00 PM**

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

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.