

# STMM504: Christian Ethics (Spring 2012)

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Thursday 1:30 – 4:20 Hunt 100

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“There is difference and there is power. Who owns the power determines the meaning of difference.” June Jordan (poet)

*“And this is the meaning of ethics: to express the ways in which love embodies itself and life is maintained and saved..”* Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*

*“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil....not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”* Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*Walk Forward Questioning.* Anonymous

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

What are communities of faith called by the whispering of the Spirit to do and be in this particular society at the dawn of the 21st century? What does it mean to live a “moral life” in a world of exquisite beauty that also is brutalized by colonialism, racism, a soul-shattering gap between rich and poor, gender inequity, and “ecocide”? What is my vision for a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world? Who or what forms that vision? Who or what mal-forms it? With whose eyes do we see society as it is and as it could be? As it ought be? Who are our conversation partners in asking questions like these and in digging for responses? Participants in this course will explore these questions with diverse contemporary voices, and with figures and communities of the past.

This course will introduce the practice and theory of moral formation, discernment, and conduct in Christian communities through the inter-disciplinary lens of Christian Ethics. Christian Ethics will be viewed as the art-science enabling Christian communities to draw critically upon their traditions, and to read the “signs of the times” in order to shape ways of living consistent with faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced in the Spirit. Participants will dialogue across the ages with faith forbearers, and with diverse contemporary voices. Particular attention will given to views from “the underside,” to the relationship of

Christian scripture and traditions to contemporary moral deliberation, and to the ambiguity and complexity underlying moral dispute. Three components of Christian ethics will be considered, and located in a practical conceptual framework. Those components include: the historical legacy of Christian morality; tools for moral formation, discernment, and action; and specific contemporary moral issues in their historical contexts. The informing undercurrent of this course is hope and moral-spiritual empowerment in the face of profound moral challenges facing contemporary U.S. society.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall intent is that participants will experience themselves as critical, constructive, collaborative theological ethicists rooted in Christian traditions, and will lay groundwork for on-going ethical work that weds morality, spirituality, and theology in the everyday practices of Christian life and ministry.

To that end, the intended outcomes for those who participate fully in this course and complete it are:

- To gain tools for bringing religion (including scripture) to bear appropriately on issues of public life in a secular society, and tools for critiquing inappropriate use of religion in the public sphere.
- To develop critical consciousness regarding culturally produced assumptions that parade as natural, normal, inevitable, or divinely ordained.
- To develop working familiarity with the discipline of Christian Ethics: its methods, tools, “languages,” vocabulary, key concepts, vibrancy, contested areas, and multi-faceted diversity.
- To explore and articulate one’s working method for ethical discernment.
- To appreciate the diversity of Christian moral traditions, how they are formed and altered, and the interplay between moral traditions and their cultural, political, economic, and ecological contexts.
- To nurture hope and a sense of agency for bringing faith to bear on crucial and vexing moral issues of our day.
- To become attuned to what “voices are missing from the table” of theological and ethical discourse.
- To enhance the capacity to have moral convictions, while respecting deeply the differing convictions of other people.
- To ask good probing question about all of the above.
- To have a good time as a community of theologically informed and critically conscious Christian ethicists working together.

A second set of intended outcomes pertain to intellectual formation.

- To develop skill in various modes of thinking (systematic and creative; analytical and synthetic; sympathetic and critical), and to experience the value of so doing for the life of faith.
- To develop the intellectual virtues of concentration, curiosity, perseverance, generosity, and mutually supportive collaboration with others.
- To nurture tenacity in the face of intellectual roadblocks (not to give up when the going is difficult).
- To experience the joy, freedom, and power to be found in disciplined intellectual inquiry into faith life and ministry using the tools of Christian ethics.

- To enhance contextual imagination (the capacity to perceive others= perspectives and situations, and through that perception to develop critical insight into one=s own).
- To deepen the ability to live with paradox and ambiguity while also maintaining conviction and seeking clarity.

## TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS

1. Active reading of texts, and varied forms of interaction with their authors. (Please consider yourselves dialogue partners with each other and with the authors read. Put your knowledge and experience in conversation with the knowledge of other people: other students, contemporaries whose perspectives will be read, faith forebearers, and the professor.)
2. Structured classroom question asking and discussion.
3. Interactive lectures.
4. Two medium length papers.
5. Additional written assignments including “Moral Agency Autobiographical Notes,” Cultural Cocoon Exercise, frequent critical reading notes.
6. Seminar groups
7. Peer consultation
8. Film and discussion of it.
9. “Testimony to Hope and Moral Agency.”
10. Interrupting Injustice Project

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Read *and reflect on* all readings in their entirety before the designated class session; be prepared to question and discuss them in class.
2. Contribute to the development of a trusting and exciting learning community in the context of this course:
  - Bring your relevant experience, knowledge, perspectives, and questions “to the table of discourse” in the course.
  - Participate respectfully--verbally and non-verbally--in seminar group discussions and in full class discussion.
  - Listen “actively” to others.
  - Be aware of and reasonably attentive to the learning needs and aims of your colleagues in the class. (This will be clarified in class.)
3. Turn in written assignments on the designated dates at beginning of class session.
4. Do all reasonably possible to read the assigned texts as early as possible in the week so that during the week you may reflect on how these readings intersect with your life, and may test out--in interaction with someone else--a claim made in the readings.
5. Bring to class for discussion purposes your “Critical Thinking Notes.” They are brief written notes reflecting your on-going engagement with the readings for the week and the readings and classroom work of the previous weeks. The notes are *not* meant to be formal and will *not* be turned in or evaluated, unless students are not doing them. Should that occur, I will begin to record their completion. Do them in whatever note-taking form works best for your learning purposes, and to enable your participation in classroom discussion. The notes should respond to

whatever study questions are assigned in the previous class. If no study questions are assigned, please respond to the following:

- What is the main question asked or the main thesis argued in each reading?
- How do these readings intersect with my experience (historical or current) or the life of a community of which I am a part? (The readings might intersect with another class, home life, church life, national or international affairs, ministry, community life, workplace, or elsewhere.)
- What have I learned from discussing or testing out a concept, theory, or claim developed in these readings?
- What one or two key questions for class discussion that I formulate from reading these texts as a self-conscious Christian ethicist?

6. Attend all class sessions, arriving on time. Missing a class will lower one's participation grade. (Necessary absences or lateness will, of course, be accommodated. If you *must* miss a session, I recommend two complementary steps: ask a colleague in the class to tape the session for you, and ask two colleagues to take especially readable notes for you to copy, noting in particular any revisions made in the syllabus.)

7. Contribute to one class project. It will require very little outside work and will not be graded. It will be explained in class. It is called, "Testimony to Hope and Moral Agency."

Note: A suggestion, but not a requirement: Shortly before each class session, review your reading notes (in book margins and notes taken), the written work you are turning in, and your journal entry.

## CRITERIA AND METHODS OF EVALUATION

The course grade will consist of:

- Interrupting Injustice Paper (20%)
- Moral Deliberation Paper (25%)
- Small group project (10%)
- Participation (20%)  
This includes attendance and verbal and non-verbal contribution to a learning community as described above.

- Preparation (25%)  
This includes completion of all required reading, major assignments, and small preparatory assignments on time.

Papers will be assessed for the following:

- doing what was assigned.
- content: depth of understanding and thought; extent of drawing upon relevant reading and lectures from the class; clarity of thought and organization of expression; skill in descriptive, critical, and constructive thinking where appropriate to the assignment (we will learn and work with these distinctions in class); coherence.
- effort.
- quality of writing: writing conventions (grammar, punctuation, spelling, correct endnotes or footnotes, etc.); voice; word choice; sentence and paragraph structure; organization and clarity.
- late assignments will be reduced in grade.

Please note: On the two papers, respect yourself, your work, and my time enough to turn in your best writing. Make every paragraph, sentence, and word have a purpose. Write multiple drafts, review and edit them. Proofread final draft three times: once for solid paragraphs, once for complete sentences, once for grammar/ spelling/ punctuation.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

PLEASE review the Academic Honesty Code in the Student Handbook. Every Student is expected to comply fully with it. *I implore you to bear in mind that even UNINTENDED plagiarism is plagiarism. Be fully aware of what constitutes plagiarism. Review the handout on plagiarism that I pass out in class. If you have any questions, PLEASE ASK ME; other students may have the same question. Unintended plagiarism is a great loss to the student. I must either fail you for the assignment, fail you for the course, or vastly reduce the assignment's grade if I encounter plagiarism.*

## DISABILITY NOTICE

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (including an “invisible disability” such as a learning disability, a chronic health problem, or a mental health condition) that interferes with your participation as a student in this class, you are encouraged to arrange support services and/or accommodations through Disabilities Service Staff (Loyola 100. 296-5740)

## TEXTS (REQUIRED)

\* West, Tracy. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*.

Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006.

\* Gudorf, Christine; Laura Stivers; James Martin-Schramm. *Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Orbis, 2012.

\* Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. *Public Church: for the Life of the World*. Fortress Press, 2005.

\* De La Torre, Miguel A. *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

\* Course Reader (for purchase at Student Pavillion.)

\* Additional readings posted on Angel.

### **Suggestions for Expanded Reading**

If you would appreciate expanded (additional) reading, please request it. I am happy to provide!

## COURSE SCHEDULE: READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS

PLEASE NOTE:

- **Students are to have watched the film “Climate Refugees” BEFORE reading the readings for Week Three.**
- Readings for each class session are listed in the order that I recommend reading them for ease of comprehension. Your reading will be much easier if you do the readings in the order indicated.
- **To repeat a previous and crucial point:** These readings and assignments may be revised in response to the needs of this class. I will announce any changes clearly ahead

of time. You are responsible for being aware of the changes. That is, should you be late for a class, it is assumed that you take responsibility for knowing any changes made in the syllabus during the minutes that you missed.)

### **Week One (March 29)**

*Who Are We? Where and When Are We? And What Is Christian Ethics for “Us?”*

Assignment due:

“Moral Agency Autobiographical Notes.” Please see Appendix A for the assignment description. This assignment should take about two hours.

### **Week Two (April 12)**

*Moral Discernment and the Art of Critical Mystical Vision*

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: “A Christian Ethical Framework” (Posted on Angel).

Maguire: Ethics: How to Do It (Course Reader)

Gudorf, et al: “Introduction.”

Rasmussen: “The Ethic We Need I.” (Posted on Angel. Please bring a hardcopy or a laptop with electronic copy.) This is a draft chapter of a forthcoming book. We are reading it with the author’s permission. It is not to be sent to other people. If cited in written work, it is to be properly footnoted.

Gudorf, et.al.: Peruse the rest of the book to choose your 3 top choices for the case study for your moral deliberation paper.

Assignments Due:

List of top three choices in order, for moral deliberation paper.

### **Week Three (April 5)**

*Moral Oblivion and the Seeing Through the Blinders of Privilege*

*Before reading these readings, you should have watched the film “Climate Refugees”*

Readings:

Kennedy (*Course Reader*)

Birch and Rasmussen: *The Bible and Ethics*, pp. 85 – 95 (*Course Reader*).

*United Nations Human Development Report 1998*, “Overview:” pp. 1-14 and “skim” pp. 15-26. (It is online at <http://hdr.undp.org/reports>. Select “1998.” Select “Global Report.”)

PLEADE NOTE: The point of this reading is to view information that was available 15 years ago.

Moe-Lobeda: “Unmasking Evil That Parades As Good: Critical Vision” (Posted on Angel)

Assignment due:

The cultural cocoon exercise in Kennedy in written form. First respond to the following: What does Kennedy mean by the term “cultural cocoon?”

### **Week Four (April 19)**

*The Bible and Other Sources in Ethics: What Sorts of Authority? How? Why?*

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics*: Introduction, chaps. 1 and 8 (Courses Reader)

Anderson. pp. 216-227 (Coursepack).

Long. Edward LeRoy. To Liberate and Redeem: Introduction (handout).

West: Preface, Introduction, chap 1.

Assignments due: Not to be turned in but to be used in class discussion.

- Critical Reading Notes: 1) How do you or your faith community commonly use scripture as an authority in moral considerations, 2) How would you critique that “method,” and 3) How might revise it given what you have learned in this class and in particular the readings for this week.

### **Week Five (April 26)**

*The Universal and the Particular in light of Structural Injustice / Structural Sin*

Reading:

West: Chap 2

Additional reading to be assigned

### **Week Six (May 3)**

*Renouncing Structural Sin*

Reading:

West: chap. 4

Begin your reading for Week Seven. It is lengthy.

Assignment Due:

First Paper: Interrupting Injustice Project

### **Week Seven (May 10)**

*The Over-all Christian Moral Norm: Justice-Making, Earth-honoring Neighbor-love*

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: *Public Church*: pp. 23 – 39.

Moe-Lobeda: *Ethics for the Uncreators*: chaps. 6 and 7. (Posted on Angel. Please bring a hardcopy or a laptop with electronic copy.) This is a draft chapter of a forthcoming book. We are reading it with the author’s permission. It is not to be sent to other people. If cited in written work, it is to be properly footnoted.

Assignments Due:

Phase One of the final paper (optional; see paper assignment)

Be prepared to discuss: Drawing upon these readings and the readings and discussion of previous weeks, what is my emerging method of doing ethical deliberation? (Consider, for example: the norms, basic convictions, moral vision, and sources that inform your method.)

### **Week Eight (May 17)**

*Ethics from the Margins*

Reading: De La Torre: Preface, chaps. 1, 2, and 3.

Assignment Due: Critical Thinking Questions:

1. In what senses has your “cultural cocoon” shaped your knowledge and understanding of structural injustice and your responses to it?
2. What factors do you now recognize, in private life or the broader public, have shaped your sense of moral agency in the face of social structural injustice or structural sin?
3. What do you learn about your own moral formation from reading Tracy West?
4. In what senses would you revise your previous entries as a result of reading West?

**Week Nine (May 24)**

*Public Church: Gathered, Fed and Watered, Sent*

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: Entire book except pp. 23 – 39.

Assignment Due:

Working draft/notes re final paper (for use in class, not to turn in)

**Week Ten (May 31)**

*Hope and Moral Agency: Practicing the Art of Christian Ethics*

*End of course celebration*

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: *Ethics for the Uncreators*: chap. 5

Review Readings TBA (Different readings to be assigned to different students)

Assignments due:

- Final Paper.
- Be prepared to discuss the most important learning or challenge that you have encountered in doing your final paper, and one thing that you have learned in this course and do not want to forget..

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## Moral Agency Autobiographical Notes

Please bring your written response to the questions below.

This should **not** be a matter of stress to you. Nor should you spend more than a couple of hours on it.

Length: Whatever length reflects about two hours worth of work for you.

The assignment will be handed in, but it will **not** be graded. Your timely completion of this will be reflected as one aspect of your “preparation grade.”

You may write in paragraphs or in the form of very well organized notes.

The assignment should be typed, rather than hand-written.

The purpose is to think about these questions, not to get any right answers. There are no right answers.

1. What factors and events have influenced your sense of who you are as a moral being and what your moral role is as a member of a society? Be sure to include factors and events that have **diminished or obscured** your awareness of who you are as a moral being and what your moral role is as a member of a society, as well as factors and events that have **developed** that sense.

2. What factors and events in **private life** have influenced your sense of **moral power** to do what you think you ought to do:

A) in your private life?

B) in your role as a member of a society? (Be this I mean your role as a citizen in your city, nation, and world. This includes your role as a participant in the U.S. economy, political system, cultural mileaus, etc.)

3. What factors and events in **the broader public life** (by “public life,” in this case, I mean political and economic factors, media, cultural factors, events or trends in the world, nation, locality) have influenced your sense of **moral power** to do what you think you ought to do:

A) in your private life?

B) in your role as a member of a society live?

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## Guidelines for Responsible Collaborative Learning in this Learning Community

1. One never sees clearly until one sees the world outside of one's inherited perspectives. This implies a commitment to enabling the perspectives of historically under-represented people and peoples to be heard. The course is designed to honor that commitment.
2. Knowledge is not what is produced and transmitted by experts, but has to do with how we know, learn, and engage our world. Learning happens more deeply when it is, at least in part: collaborative/relational, participatory/active, integrative, experiential, and embodied. Therefore, in this class we will strive to: 1) be collaborative in our inquiry; 2) actively interpret material; 3) make interdisciplinary connections even within the discipline of Christian ethics; 4) draw upon and honor the rich life experience brought by each student, and 5) attend to what is learned through the senses and the heart, as well as through the intellect.
3. Different students learn differently . We will engage in diverse modes of learning.
4. The ecological crises of our day and the imperative of forging sustainable Earth-human relations call for a shift from anthropocentric philosophical, theological, and scientific frameworks to eco-centric ones. This shift entails fascinating and difficult moves in language, conceptual frameworks, theory, and method. We will struggle toward those shifts, recalling, as we interact with the course material, that human being is part of a larger web of life.
5. Follow your intellectual passions. If you do you'll find yourself surrounded by a lovely community of friends--living and passed. If you become highly interested in particular moral situation, historical community, concept, figure, or dilemma, and wish to do further reading and work on it, see me.
6. Aim at questions and at provisional answers not at answers cast in concrete.

! Thank you for the privilege of walking and working with you !