

## **E300: INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

McCormick Theological Seminary

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Dr. Reggie Williams

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**Introduction:** The content that students encounter in a seminary education, and in daily life, is both formative and becomes part of future decision making processes. recognized as one braided strand rather than separate parts when we consider the questions that Christians ask, “what shall we do? How shall we live?” All of the disciplines of learning in the seminary context become tools for the discernment of the good life together in church and society, which in the theological academy is the study of Christian Ethics. In daily life we make efforts to integrate all of our learning, in faithfulness to our core convictions. In this introductory Christian Ethics course we will begin an engagement with those questions through analysis of the development of Christians who are shaped, body and mind, by core beliefs and practices, in order to explore the uniqueness of Christian Ethics in response to contemporary issues.

**Office Hours:** Office hours, as posted, Mon, Wed, Thurs or by appointment.

**Class Format and Objectives:** The class will rely heavily on student interaction and conversation. Since much of the course material entails rigorous and at times difficult arguments, we will work as a class to understand, advance, and critique respective claims. Your success in the class will depend on your ability to contribute to, and learn from, these discussions. That requires that you have the day’s assigned reading completed by class time. In order to prompt conversation, I may “volunteer” you and your classmates and solicit responses to readings, mini-lectures, one another, and so on to accomplish the following three course objectives:

1. To expose students to the discipline of Christian social ethics in order to identify and inform how you currently understand a moral Christian life.
2. To familiarize students with important resources that inform Christian ethical deliberation using scripture, theology, science, philosophy, and social theory as concrete guiding sources for ethical deliberation.
3. To equip students with the ability to work within a particular tradition of Christian Ethics in response to a contemporary dilemma.

## Required Texts:

- Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*
- Patricia Beattie Jung, and L. Shannon Jung. *Moral Issues and Christian Responses*. 8th ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013
- Dorrien, Gary. *Social Ethics in the Making*. Malden, MA. Wiley-Blackwell, 2011
- Stassen, Glen Harold, and David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2016
- Online reading as assigned

## Parallel Reading: please choose one book from this list.

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. NY. NY: The New Press, 2012
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Discipleship*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003
- Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*. New Studies in Christian Ethics. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Cannon, Katie G. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Cone, James, H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Marykoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011
- De La Torre, Miguel A. *The Politics of Jesus: A Hispanic Political Theology*. Lanham, MD. Rowan and Littlefield 2015
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *What's Faith Got To Do With It: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books, 2005
- --- *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll, NY. Orbis Books, 1996.
- Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010.

- King, Martin Luther. *Stride Towards Freedom*
- Marshall, Christopher D. *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*. Studies in Peace and Scripture. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. 2001.
- Rasmussen, Larry L. *Earth Community Earth Ethics*. Ecology and Justice. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, N.C. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Sider, Ronald J. *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 1999.
- Stassen, Glen Harold. *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.
- West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. 1st ed. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*. 3rd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Marshall Turman, Eboni. *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, The Church, and the Council of Chalcedon*. New York, NY. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

### **Expectations and Evaluation:**

The content of our course is not simply “academic,” but much of it pertains to our personal and communal lives. For that reason, as we engage one another in dialogue, we may expect at least some heated conversation. The topics we will address will help to inform students who are preparing for religious leadership in church and society.

With that in mind, this class will require, at minimum, that we adhere to the following expectations. First, that we maintain respectful dialogue with one another, recognizing and valuing all input, especially when perspectives differ from our own. Second, that we attend class regularly, prepared and ready to participate. Your reading and in-class participation are both valuable to the success of the course, and the quality of our classroom community. Attendance and full participation are mandatory. **More than one absence will affect your participation grade, and missing more than three full classes will result in a failure of the course.** Finally, all written assignments submitted late without prior arrangement with the professor will lose one-half letter grade for each day they are late.

### **Course Format:**

I have designed this course as a discussion/research seminar, so you should be prepared at all times to productively contribute. As a discussion seminar, the class will rely heavily on student interaction and conversation. Much of the course material entails rigorous and at times difficult

arguments, so we will work together, as a class, to understand, to advance, and to critique respective claims.

- **Parallel Reading for your analysis paper (Precis = 15%, Final Analysis = 10%, Total 25%)**

- 1 Select a book from the list of parallel reading choices. You may choose to read alone, or together with others. Reading groups must not exceed 3 persons, and to allow a wider exposure to the reading list, no more than 3 persons will be allowed to choose one book.
- 2 Submit three précis about the book, as listed in the course schedule. Your précis should not exceed two double-spaced pages, and should demonstrate comprehension of the argument/arguments within the reading, and explanation of how the argument(s) is/are supported.
- 3 Your précis will culminate in a 3-4 page final analysis paper on your parallel reading. It is not book a report; it is a thesis-driven critical engagement with the book's core argument. Your argument should be an insightful engagement with the author's argument, and include your own interaction with the conclusions made by the author.

- **Quizzes (15%)**

Quizzes are announced on the day they are given (pop-quizzes) and will cover the reading materials that are due for the day's class session. They are 10 minutes in length, and will occur at the beginning of class. There are no trick questions. They are meant to help you process what we are working through in the reading assignments, and prepare you for involvement in the day's conversation.

- **Presentations (10%)**

Presentations will discuss what are typically considered contentious ethical dilemmas, in class together. These will be student-led conversations, during which time one, or a group of students will be responsible to lead those discussions during the last hour of class. You are free to choose which discussion topic you will lead. You may co-lead the discussion in a group, or as an individual, but the discussions will lead us through the assigned reading from *Moral Issues* for that day. The day prior to your assigned presentation, you are to submit a summary reflection on the reading for your dilemma, including the position you will take on it, for the discussion. It is important that you present counter arguments to the position that you will take. Please email your paper (no longer than 4 double-spaced pages) to the entire class (through Moodle) the day prior to our class session for review before the discussion. **Late papers will not receive full credit.**

- **Mid-term Exam (10%)**

The mid-term will occur at the end of the first section of the course, March 28th. There is no final exam, but you will be required to write a final analysis paper.

- **Final Projects (40%)**

**Option 1: term paper**

Your term paper will demonstrate your ability to articulate, and to think critically about, theological ethics. It is not a report, and it is different than your analysis paper; it is a thesis-driven critical engagement of a dilemma that must utilize the tools we have become familiar with in the course. You are free to engage the dilemma that was chosen as your presentation topic. Your term paper should be no longer than seven pages in length, double-spaced, size 12 Times New Roman font, and include footnotes and a bibliography (Turabian Format). Your bibliography must include, at minimum, 5 peer-reviewed sources.

A good thesis is placed in your first paragraph, is clearly identifiable, and allows your reader to disagree with you. For example, “I like euthanasia” is a weak thesis because it cannot be supported by evidence, nor can anyone disagree with what you like. Rather, “euthanasia is wrong because it is a capitalist exploitation of loneliness within the population of elderly citizens” is a stronger thesis because it makes a claim that names what it will support by evidence, and can be argued both for and against. The analysis paper takes the place of a final exam. Your term paper is due on Friday of finals week.

### **SPARKLING SIGNS OF A STIMULATING ARGUMENT for each paper:**

- i. It has originality; it may not be what everyone thought of arguing.
- ii. It is significant; it makes a difference for Christian living.
- iii. It is supported cogently; it does good reasoning and good analysis of what the author(s) said; and it clearly represents their argument(s). Shows how your thesis relates not only to one chapter of the book, but how it reveals something about the author's way of arguing in *various sections of the book*. Thus your thesis is not only a small quibble, but discloses a twist in the author's way of understanding Christian faithfulness and its implication for specific issues.
- iv. It has unity; the thesis is clearly stated in the first paragraph, and everything in the paper coheres to support the thesis, or define it, or qualify it.
  - v. It produces some insights, sparkles, surprises.
  - vi. It has good style; uses English well.
- vii. It has a strong conclusion that wraps the argument up and that sees a further implication, maybe even an unexpected conclusion.

### **Option 2: Justice Action Plan**

This is a group project, to be done in a group, and presented to the class as a group. You are to select and become involved in a justice-related experience, called an action plan, designed to help you gain knowledge, sensitivity, and skills in connecting your theology and science to justice advocacy, regarding a particular dilemma. Complete the action plan according to the schedule and turn in a 10-15 page paper describing the experience and a list of resources (see Action Plan Guidelines on p.7). The proposal should be no longer than 2 pages, the final action plan should be no longer than 15 pages. This assignment will culminate with an in-class presentation in which you will argue persuasively for a just Christian response to the injustice you have engaged. The paper that your group submits will determine one half of your grade on this project; the other half will be determined by your group presentation. Your justice action plan includes a presentation that **will occur during the final two class sessions**. This is the culmination of your action plan. Please be interactive, and creative as you seek to persuade your classmates about justice and

Christian discipleship in regards to the matter that your group has analyzed. You will receive a group grade for your presentation that will apply to all group members individually, and help to determine 50% of your action plan grade. You may use visual aids like PowerPoint, Prezi, video, photography or handouts, in addition to audio. This should be no longer than 35 minutes, allowing 15 minutes for classroom conversation.

**Justice-oriented Action Plans (guidelines):**

The Action Plan proposal is designed to help you identify goals relative to social justice and to develop specific objectives and activities designed to achieve those goals. The spirit of the plan is for you to learn to develop skills in raising personal and social awareness of contemporary matters of justice in order to engage them. The action plan moves from initial contact that may involve literature and/or digital media (observation), to social contact with the dilemma, which may involve personal visits, empirical observation, or interaction with people or programs directly impacted by the injustice (gaining knowledge). Students will integrate what's been learned from the first two stages into a final plan for engaging the problem.

Before you engage the three-step plan, you must outline your proposal. To meet the objectives of your action plan, a range of experiences from least to most challenging is suggested. You are encouraged to select experiences with maximum potential for personal awareness, knowledge and skills development. For example: speak to a priest would be easy; speak to the pope would be hardest. List all possibilities that you can think of, that you will try to do in order to accomplish the learning objective.

Your Action Plan does not need to follow this outline to the letter, but it must include the following pieces that you see here:

Thesis: this is the big picture or overall goal for the plan. You should include here a statement about personal, social and educational learning that you wish to acquire as it relates to the justice issue you have chosen.

1. First objective: Observation [ask your questions and do your research]
  - a. List a proposed goal (to accomplish what?)
  - b. List your proposed activities (put a few activities here that will help you accomplish your goal. Your activities are connected to your goal, which is connected to your objective, which comes from your thesis. There should be obvious symmetry)
  
2. Second Objective: Gaining Knowledge [Construct your hypothesis]
  - a. List a proposed goal
  - b. List your proposed activities

3. Third Objective: Direct Participation/Skills Development [test your hypothesis by experimentation, and analyze your data]

- a. List a proposed goal
- b. List your proposed activities
- c. Perform your work
- d. Communicate the outcome in your presentation and final essay

Example:

Thesis: Mass incarceration in the United States is a contemporary version of the historic use of race as a social organizing scheme. In this iteration of white supremacy, race continues to financially incentivize the commodification and abuse of black bodies.

### **First Objective: Observation**

**Goal: To gain personal awareness of the problem of mass incarceration**

**Activity(s):**

- Read Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*
- Attend a lecture that focuses on race and incarceration
- Watch the documentary "Gideon's Army."
- Find local arrest records for the community surrounding the seminary (or for a community that I am interested in focusing on)

### **Second Objective: Gaining Knowledge**

**Goal: To gain first-hand knowledge about the cycle of high incarceration, and the factors promoting it, in order to begin imaging a solution.**

**Activity(s):**

- Interview Michelle Alexander by phone (read her book first!)
- Find and speak with prison ministries within the community (church-based and para church)
- Interview 3 people who work within the department of corrections/law enforcement: a probation officer/a juvenile hall counselor/ neighborhood police (Do they see race contributing to criminality? How? Why?)
- Find what intervention programs are present within the community surrounding the schools.

### **Third Objective: Participation/Skills Development**

**Goal: To advocate justice and opposition to the injustice of mass incarceration.**

#### **Activity(s):**

- Participate with Trinity United Church of Christ in their neighborhood opposition to the classroom to prison pipeline.
- Participate with Trinity United Church of Christ in their Freedom School
- Participate with Saint Sabina in their stop the violence rally on Thursday evenings.
- Help arrange a collaborative program between Saint Sabina, Trinity United Church of Christ, and Apostolic Assemblies, to address the infrastructure problems, and educational problems that contribute to the classroom to prison pipeline.
- (just sayin, What should a Christian do, inspired by devotion to Christ, to advocate justice on this contemporary dilemma?)

#### **Assignment:**

- I. **Prepare a Justice-oriented Action Plan proposal and submit it to the instructor by the fourth class, February 28, 2019.**
- II. Prepare a summary of your experience (which should include your thesis, three objectives, goals and planned activities) based on the following guidelines for each of your three objectives.
- III. Identify and briefly describe the experience.
- IV. Identify and briefly discuss your personal objectives for each of the experiences (ways you hope to learn, change, or grow).
- V. Discuss your feelings and reactions to the experience. Briefly discuss how your experience was supported or not supported by concepts found in the literature.
- VI. Discuss the experiences in terms of implications for multiculturalism in higher education and student affairs.

Your justice action plans should show a clear link between the action plan experience and concepts of Christology, love and justice from within the course.

\*Adapted from Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton, Professor, Bowling Green State University

#### **Grades**

Letter grades are compiled throughout the course, according to the percentage value apportioned to each assignment. Although it is not stated in the assignment schedule, your participation in class, and in your group (measured by your preparation, and participation in class, and in your group) is considered in the grading process. The final grade is assigned at the conclusion of the course according to the following weighted scale:



A+	4.0		
A	4.0	C+	2.3
A-	3.7	C	2.0
B+	3.3	C-	1.7
B	3.0	D	0.00
B-	2.7	F	0.00

**Assignments:**

- Quizzes 15%
- Parallel Reading 25%
- Test 10%
- Presentation and participation 10%
- Final project 40%

Regular attendance and class participation are expected. Professors may consider attendance and participation when calculating grades for courses. In case of an emergency, and you are not able to make it to class, a student may call Alicia Rhine's Office (773) 947-6317 and request that information be reported to instructors.

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Class Schedule

<b>Class Meeting</b>	<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Class Topic/Lecture and Assignments DUE</b>	<b>Reading for Lectures</b>
<b>1</b>	2/7	<b>Introductions: The meaning of Christian Social Ethics Lecture by Tamura Lomax</b>	Gushee lecture
<b>2</b>	2/14	<b>The Social Gospel</b>	Sign-up for discussions completed by today Dorrien portions (pgs. 6-7, 10-20, 25-35, 83-109)
<b>3</b>	2/21	Jesus and the Kingdom of God	Stassen and Gushee (Chapters 1&2)
<b>4</b>	2/28	<b>Science and Christian Ethics The genetics of moral behavior</b>  <b>[Grace Wolf-Chase from Adler Planetarium, "The Origin and Evolution of our Interactive Cosmos"]</b>	<b>Whatever Happened to the Soul?</b>  <b>Chapters 3 &amp; 4</b>

5	3/7	Science and Christian Ethics The Neuroscience of moral behavior	Soul, Psyche, Brain: New Directions in the Study of Religion and Brain-Mind Science  Chapters 1 & 12 (on Moodle)
6	3/14	Central Norms of Christian Ethics: Love and Justice	Stassen and Gushee chapters 6&7 Dorrien Chapter 6 (Bryson Lecture)
0	3/21	Reading Week	
7	3/28	Relationships: Sexuality  1 <sup>st</sup> Précis Exam	Dorrien 411-437 <i>Moral Issues</i> chapter 6 Stassen and Gushee chapters 12-14
8	4/4	The Mental Grid and the Social Location of Thought: Racism and Immigration  2 <sup>nd</sup> Précis	Stassen and Gushee chapter 20 Dorrien 563-598 and 637-657 <i>Moral Issues</i> chapters 7&8
9	4/11	Ethics of life and death: Abortion and Euthanasia 3 <sup>rd</sup> Précis	Stassen and Gushee chapters 8, 21 (417-441) <i>Moral Issues</i> chapter 13 <i>Moral Issues</i> chapter 14
10	4/18	State Violence: Capital Punishment and Just War/Pacifism <u>Parallel reading analysis paper due.</u>	Stassen and Gushee chapters 11 <i>Moral Issues</i> (405-419) Stassen and Gushee chapter 16 <i>Moral Issues</i> (29-32, 426-432)
11	4/25	Ethics and economics Ron Cole-Turner, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Pittsburg Theological Seminary, "The Human Future: Technologies of Human Enhancement, Theological and Ethical Considerations <i>graduating seniors must have all work completed and submitted by 4/24</i>	Dorrien chapter 9 and pgs 683-688. Stassen and Gushee chapter 18 <i>Moral Issues</i> chapters 10-11
12	5/2	Care for Creation: Stewardship or Domination? Animals, crops,	Stassen and Gushee chapter 19 Moodle: <i>Ecowomanism</i>

		ecology <i>Term Paper is due 5/9</i>	<a href="http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/highspeed-slaughter-hell-at-hormel-makers-of-spam/">http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/highspeed-slaughter-hell-at-hormel-makers-of-spam/</a> <i>Moral Issues</i> chapter 9
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**As necessary for the success of this class, I may alter the contents of this syllabus, notifying you of any changes.**

### ASSIGNMENT CHART

<u>PARALLEL READING</u>	<u>PRESENTATIONS</u>	<u>FINAL PROJECTS</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> précis 2 <sup>nd</sup> précis 3 <sup>rd</sup> précis 3-4 page Analysis Paper  * Cannot be cut and pasted from précis  * Not a book report  (Book can be read individually or in a group of no more than 3 persons, but the analysis paper is individual)	Based upon chapters from <i>Moral Issues</i>  Presentation can be done in groups – this is encouraged  2-4 page Summary Reflection  * Sent to all classmates the day before your presentation by email through Moodle.  * Must touch on all of the articles within the chapter  * The summary reflection is individual, i.e., even if you do a joint presentation with another person you each must turn in your own summary reflection; they cannot be identical.	<b><i>Final Assignment</i></b> Individual paper  - No longer than 7 pages  - 5 peer reviewed sources  - Can be based upon parallel reading.  * Cannot be cut and pasted from either précis or analysis paper  - Paper must be “a thesis-driven critical engagement of a dilemma”  <b><i>OR</i></b> <b><i>Justice Action Plan</i></b> Class Presentation  Joint paper no longer than 15 pages