

**TR 107 Christian Ethics**  
**United Theological Seminary**  
**Fall 2010**

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Office hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30 and by appointment

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the field of Christian Ethics. It will cover methodology and theory, including sources, ethical methods, rules and principles, moral agency, the relationship of theology and ethics, and the use of analysis drawn from other disciplines. The latter part of the course will examine the meanings of justice and liberation in the context of contemporary economics and politics.

**Learning Objectives**

- To understand major approaches to ethics and be able to identify them and use them constructively in discussing an ethical issue.
- To understand the relationship between theology and Christian Ethics.
- To understand how our social location and interpretation of the situation affects our ethical thinking.
- To understand the uses of scripture in Christian Ethics.
- To be able to apply course materials to a specific ethical issue.

**Class Procedure**

The class time will be divided into three parts:

1. A discussion and/or an interactive lecture. Participation will be expected. Weekly papers will help students to prepare for active discussion.
2. Small group meetings.
3. Plenary session that may involve the presentation of a case, reports from small groups, or other activities. Or it may involve discussion of issues or topics from the readings not discussed in the first plenary session. The session will conclude with a brief introduction to the next week's readings.

**Written Work**

1. A personal and confidential paper describing your social location and the ideas, experiences, and presuppositions you bring to the course. Guidelines will be distributed at the first class. This paper may be contributed by e-mail.
2. Weekly 1½ -2 page papers responding thoughtfully to the readings, with a list of important questions raised by the readings.
3. A 3-4 page paper reflecting on Farley's Compassionate Respect in a way that integrates previous materials. Specific guidelines for the paper will be given.
4. A final paper in which you will show your understanding of course materials by applying them in a coherent manner to an ethical issue of your choice. A statement of the issue you propose to address is due on November 2. Your paper should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- What makes this a significant *ethical* issue as opposed to a technical, policy, or practical issue?
- What are the facts and/or context of the issue? You may need to do research.
- What is your standpoint with regard to this issue? How does your standpoint affect both your selection of the issue and your discussion of the facts?
- What are the various sides of the issue and what arguments can be made for them? You may need to do research.
- Analyze the issue as an issue in Christian ethics using the ethical tools that we have studied. Which do you find most useful?
- Take a position and argue it in a coherent way. What sources will you use? What methods?
- What are the major objections that could be raised concerning your position? How would you respond to them?
- What should you or the communities of which you are part do about this issue?

This is not an outline for your paper. These questions are to guide you concerning the scope of the paper. Please do not simply march through these questions as if each were separate, as they are all interconnected.

### **Grading**

Every assignment is due at the beginning of class for which it is assigned. Late papers will be penalized one grade for each day late unless there is some very compelling reason why the assignment is late, i.e. a death in the family, serious illness, etc.

The final paper must be turned in at the beginning of the final class meeting, December 14. By Seminary policy, no late papers can be accepted unless a petition for an extension has been agreed to by the instructor by the end of the final class session and the student must complete a formal petition to be submitted in lieu of a grade. If you cannot negotiate the extension by the end of the last class because of critical health issues, you must notify the instructor as soon as possible and negotiate an extension. Please refer to the Student Handbook for details. I will grant an extension only because of a serious health problem, a family crisis, etc. Because I am Adjunct Faculty, I will not be employed by the Seminary after January 4 when grades are due. Thus I will be very reluctant to grant an extension beyond January 4 and will do so only for the most compelling of reasons.

Attendance and participation are critical. If you cannot be in class, please let the instructor know in advance if possible. I do take attendance. If you must be absent, your assignment is still due by the beginning of class unless other arrangements have been made. In this case, the assignment may be submitted as an e-mail attachment. Missing more than one class will require a make-up paper, content to be discussed with the instructor. Missing more than two classes will require a conference with the instructor concerning how you can successfully complete the course and will result in a grade reduction except in extraordinary situations.

Grading will be based on the following:

Final paper:	50%.
Weekly papers:	30%
Paper on Farley	10%
Participation:	10%

## **Course Policies**

1. All work, written and oral, must conform to seminary-wide policies on academic integrity, inclusive language, and sexual harassment, as articulated in the student handbook.
2. Students are expected to arrive on time and to stay until the class is dismissed.
3. Discussions in small groups are confidential. Statements made by students in small group sessions are to remain within the group.
4. Papers are to be typewritten and double-spaced. They are to be submitted in hard copy, not electronically—except as noted above.
5. The final paper must use appropriate citations. Citations must be sufficient to permit the reader to readily find the source and must be in a consistent format. It is especially important to properly cite sources accessed through the internet. It is recommended that you follow a standard guide, such as University of Chicago or Turabian. For other papers, brief in text references to course materials are adequate, i.e. (West, 46). Other sources, however, must be fully cited.

## **Texts**

William C. Spohn, *What are they saying about scripture and ethics?*

Robin Lovin, *Christian Ethics*

Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*

Margaret A. Farley, *Compassionate Respect*

Jose´ Miguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*

John B. Cobb, Jr. *Sustaining the Common Good*

## **Recommended:**

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*

## **Additional Readings (on Reserve):**

Wayne G. Bolton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds. (BKV) *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*.

Katie Geneva Cannon, "Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick," in *Katie's Canon*, 122-128.

James M. Gustafson, "Christian Ethics," in Theo A. Boer and Paul E. Capetz, eds. *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life*, 155-159.

James M. Gustafson, "The Relationship of Empirical Science to Moral Thought" in BKV, Ch. 28, 164-171.

James B. Nelson, "Doing Body Theology" in *Body Theology*, 41-54

Karen Lebacqz, "Implications for a Theory of Justice" in BKV, ch. 45, 254-259.

Aristotle, Excerpts from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, BKV ch. 18, 106-109.

Joseph Fletcher, "The New Look in Christian Ethics" in *Moral Responsibility*, 11-28.

John Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism" in *A Theory of Justice*, 22-27.

Judith Scoville, "Fitting Ethics to the Land," in Journal of Religious Ethics 30.2, 207-230.

**Class Schedule:**

#	Date	Topics	Readings and Assignments
1	Sept 14	Introduction	None Work on moral autobiography, due Sept. 16
2	Sept 21	What is ethics? What is Christian ethics?	<u>Readings:</u> Gustafson, "Christian Ethics" West, "Introduction" Lovin, Ch. 1 Cannon, "Hitting a Straight Lick . . ."
3	Sept 28	Sources for Christian Ethics	<u>Readings:</u> <i>Scripture:</i> Spohn, "Introduction" <i>Social experience:</i> West, Ch. 1 <i>Body experience:</i> Nelson <i>Sciences:</i> Gustafson, BKV Ch. 28. <i>Natural law:</i> Spohn, Ch 2, <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 1
4	Oct 5	Deontology: rules, duty, intrinsic values	<u>Readings:</u> Lovin Ch. 3 Lebacqz, "Theory of Justice" BKV ch. 25 Spohn, Ch. 1 West, Ch. 3 <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 2
5	Oct 12	Teleology or Consequentialism	<u>Readings:</u> Lovin Ch. 2 Spohn, Ch. 3 Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics" BKV ch. 18 Fletcher, "New Look in Christian Ethics" Rawls, "Classical Utilitarianism" <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 3
6	Oct 19	Moral Agency	<u>Readings:</u> Spohn Ch. 4 Lovin, Ch. 4 West, Ch. 2 <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 4

	Oct 26	<b>Reading Week</b>	
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7	Nov 2	Ethics of Response	Spohn ch. 5 Niebuhr, Intro and Ch. 1 Scoville, "Fitting Ethics to the Land" <u>Assignments:</u> Reflection paper 5 Final paper topic due.
8	Nov 9	Rules and Principles	<u>Reading:</u> Farley--all <u>Assignment:</u> Integrative paper, 3-4 pages. Specific assignment TBA.
9	Nov 16	Liberation, Politics, and Ethics	<u>Reading:</u> Miguez-Bonino, chs 1-5 <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 6
10	Nov 23	Liberation Ethics and Politics	<u>Reading:</u> Miguez Bonino, chs 6-8 Lovin, ch. 6 <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 7
11	Nov 30	Economics, Globalization, and Ethics	<u>Reading:</u> Cobb, chs 1-3 <u>Assignment:</u> Reflection paper 8
12	Dec 7	Ethics, Economics, and Globalization	<u>Readings:</u> Cobb, ch 4-5 Bread for the World booklet on the 2007 Farm Bill <u>Assignment:</u> Share and discuss final papers in small groups
13	Dec 14	Wrap-up	Final papers due at the beginning of class. Course evaluation.

