

**School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University
900 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122**

STMM 504: Christian Ethics
Hunt 100
Spring 2007
Mon. 9:00 - 11:50

Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda
Office Hrs: (Mon-Fri by appt.)
(206) 296-5762
moe-lobc@seattleu.edu

Your vocation is where the world's deep hunger and your deep joy meet.
F. Beuchner

"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

"The problem with much contemporary discourse is that affirmation masquerades as argument."
Stephen Brookfield

"Walk forward questioning"
Zapatista slogan

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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 be 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.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

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 weaves morality, spirituality, and theology in the everyday practices of Christian life and ministry. To that end, the intended outcomes for participants in the course are:

- To develop working familiarity with the discipline of Christian Ethics: its methods, tools,

languages, vocabulary and concepts, vibrancy, contested areas, and multi-faceted diversity.

- To gain skill and confidence in various aspects of moral inquiry.
- 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 explore and articulate one's own working theo-ethical method.
- 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 questions 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. Moral autobiography journal
2. Intellectual formation journal.
3. Testimony to hope and moral agency.
4. Peer consultation groups.
5. Written assignments: one short paper, one medium length longer final paper, A Critical Reading Notes.
6. 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.)
7. Structured classroom question asking and discussion.
8. Interactive lectures (please feel free to ask questions during these).
9. Film and discussion of it.

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 and knowledge to the table of discourse in the course.
 - Participate respectfully--verbally and non-verbally--in seminar group discussions and in full class discussion.
 - Occasionally, at close of class session, contribute to the professor written comments on when I was most engaged, and when most disengaged in the class this day, or on what I found particularly empowering or disempowering in the class this day.

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 ACritical Reading 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. 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. (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, ATestimony 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

Criteria for assessment include completion of all required reading and written assignments on time, verbal and non-verbal contribution to a learning community in class sessions (offering knowledge, experience, perspectives; listening attentively; respecting others= opinions), receptivity to learning, and excellence in understanding and integrating material. Written work will be evaluated for the following:

- doing what was assigned
- content: depth of understanding, thought, and interaction with the material
- quality of writing:
 - writing conventions (grammar, punctuation, adherence to Chicago Manual of Style/Turabian, etc.); voice; word choice; sentence and paragraph structure; organization/logic/flow/clarity.
- effort.

TEXTS (REQUIRED)

Moe-Lobeda. *Public Church: for the Life of the World*. Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2005.
 De La Torre, Miguel A. *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.
 Anderson, Terence R. *Walking the Way: Christian Ethics as a Guide*. Regent College Publishing, 2005.
 Birch, Bruce and Larry Rasmussen. *The Bible and Ethics*. rev. ed. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989.

Coursepack (for purchase at Student Pavillion by April 2.)
 Additional readings downloaded and printed from the web.)

Suggestions for Expanded Reading

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

COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

Please note: Readings for each week are listed in the order that I recommend reading them for ease of comprehension.

Part One: Setting the Stage

Week One (March 26)

Introduction to Each Other and to the Course.

What is Christian Ethics? Mapping the Terrain of Moral Formation, Deliberation, and Practice.

Week Two (April 2)

Morality in Context: Christian Moral Being and Doing in Sites of Structured Injustice

Readings:

United Nations Human Development Report 1998, “Overview:” pp. 1-14 and “skim” pp. 15-26.

(Download and print from the web: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports>. Select “1998.” Select “Global Report.”) A hard copy is required.

Anderson, Terence. *Walking the Way*: pp. 189-191.

De La Torre: Preface, Chaps. 4 and 5

Assignment Due:

Be prepared to discuss connections between these readings and the first week’s discussion of Christian Ethics.

Part Two: Moral Dialogue Across Cultures, Time, Space, and Species: Stepping on Holy Ground

Week Three (April 9)

Faith Community and Moral Formation: Conversation with the First Christians

Readings:

Birch, Bruce and Rasmussen, Larry. *Bible and Ethics*: Chaps. 2 and 7.

Meeks, Wayne. *Origins of Christian Morality*: Preface, Chaps. 1 and 2, Postscript. (Coursepack)

Assignment due:

- Initial notes in moral autobiography journal.

- Be prepared to discuss connections between these readings and those of the previous week, and to relate both to the first week’s discussion of Christian Ethics.

Week Four (April 16)

Mapping the Terrain of Christian Ethical Method and Theory

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics*: Chap.3 and 6.

De La Torre: pp. 27 through end of Chap. 2; Chap. 3

Assignments due:

- Paragraph regarding final paper; see paper assignment.

- Initial notes in intellectual formation journal.

Week Five (April 23)

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

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics*: Intro, Chap. 1, 8, and 9; review pp. 31-33 & 127-133.

Anderson. pp. 216-227.

Long, Edward LeRoy. *To Liberate and Redeem*: Introduction. (Coursepack.)

Assignments due:

Be prepared to: 1) discuss how you or your faith community commonly use scripture as an authority in moral considerations, 2) critique that “method,” and 3) suggest how you might revise it given what you have learned in this class. This is for the purpose of class discussion, it is not a

written assignment to be turned in.

Week Six (April 30)

Christian Moral Norm: Justice-Making, Self-Honoring Neighbor-love

Readings:

Biblical text to be assigned.

Anderson. *Walking the Way*: pp. 21-40 and 69-74 and 149-163.

Brady (Coursepack)

Assignments due:

Short paper due (see handouts from weeks 2 and 3)

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

Optional: "Phase One" of the final paper

Week Seven (May 7)

Moral Norms: Love as Justice

Readings:

Anderson. *Walking the Way*: pp. 40-62.

Hobgood. Chapter from *Dismantling Privilege*. (Coursepack)

Maguire, Moral Core, chapter on "Justice.: Selected pages (To be emailed)

Assignments Due:

"Phase One" of the final paper

Week Eight (May 14)

(Film: "Weapons of the Spirit")

Moral Character and Social Structure: Moral Formation and Malformation

Readings:

Birch and Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics*: Chaps. 4, 5 and review 7.

Anderson. *Walking the Way*: pp. 74-88.

De la Torre. Chap.1; Chap. 2: pp 22-27.

Week Nine (May 21)

Public Church: Moral Life as Spiritual Life as Practicing the Faith

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: pp. 1-3, bottom of 6 – 61.

Memorial Day : No class

Week Ten (June 4)

Moral Agency: Practicing the Art of Christian Ethics in Sites of Structured Injustice

End of course celebration

Readings:

Moe-Lobeda: pp. 62 – 75.

Birch and Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics*: Chap. 10.

De La Torre: pp. 263-4.

Review: Different readings to be assigned to different students.

Assignments due:

Final Paper due.

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..

Thank you for the privilege of working with you!

APPENDICES

- I. Operative Guidelines for Responsible Collaborative Learning in this Learning Community/ Class.
- II. Moe-Lobeda=s *Working ADefinition@ of Christian Ethics:*

I. Operative 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.

II. Moe-Lobeda=s *Working ADefinition@ of Christian Ethics*

Christian Ethics is the art-science enabling Christian communities to draw critically upon their traditions and read Athe 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. Said differently, Christian Ethics is the disciplined art of coming to know ever more fully the mystery that is God and the historical realities of life on Earth, and holding these two in one breath, so that we may shape ways of living consistent with and empowered by God being with, in, among, and for creation. AKnowing@ here refers not merely to Aknowledge of,@ but to Abeing in relationship with.@¹ Where vision and knowledge of God and of life=s realities are obscured or distorted, a task of Christian Ethics is *to know and see differently*, so that we might *live* differently. Where dominant forces distort historical realities by describing them falsely, ethics must Aredescribe the world.@²

¹ This distinction is made clear in the Spanish language. Two Spanish words translate the English Ato know.@ One, *Asaber*,@ refers to cognitive knowledge of something. The other, *Aconocer*,@ refers to knowing as being in relationship with.

² Walter Brueggemann, *AVoices of the Night--Against Justice,@* in Walter Brueggemann, Thomas H. Groome, and Sharon Parks, *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, and Walk Humbly* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 17.

