

# Introduction to Christian Social Ethics

Professor: Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This introductory course is a critique of selected readings from contemporary Christian social ethical perspectives. We will employ historical and ethical analyses of case studies in order to gain some orientation to doing ethical reasoning on current perennial social issues and pursue reading in the literature of the field. The fundamental problems guiding our inquiry will be: (1) the way in which each account interprets morality as the relation between justice and good; (2) the social theoretical assumptions and views that make each of these accounts intelligible and help explain their differences, this will include special attention to the relevant intellectual and social history of each issue and its public advocates; and (3) the theological warrants for how a just society may reside in religious and secular communities of moral discourse.

**CLASS PROCEDURES:** This course will be both lecture and seminar oriented. Each week, the professor will provide the ethical theory and motif of the issue under investigation for that week. The students will be responsible for writing a case study analysis for each ethical motif and contestable ethical issue to be covered. The class discussion of each case study will be facilitated by a self-selected group of students who will offer their exploration and ethical prescription regarding the issue for that week.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** By the end of the course, students should be able to: (1) express an understanding of the importance of the ethical dimension of human life in an intellectually responsible manner; (2) demonstrate a coherent, metaethical understanding of some of the most pressing perennial concerns facing our society today; and (3) demonstrate the ways in which ethical theory and vocabulary have profound implications for life, ministry, and social change.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:** These texts form the core of the required reading:

*Christian Ethics: A Case Method Approach.* Robert L. Stivers et al, (Orbis Books, 2005).

*Moral Issues and Christian Responses* (7th edition). Patricia Beattie Jung and Shannon Jung, eds. (Wadsworth Pub Co, 2002). (MICR)

*Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics.* James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds. (Westminster Press, 1986). (WCDE)

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

➤ **An open and willing mind** is a fundamental requirement. You must be willing to entertain thoughtfully and carefully ideas and questions that may be different than your own. You must be willing to work on your own, to wrestle with ideas or questions – suspending rash judgment until you have filled in overlooked or missing components in your own framework.

➤ **Preparation of required reading** is expected to be complete before each class meeting. Students who have not adequately prepared for class are considered absent. As important as physical presence in the classroom is each student's ability to be present *mindfully*, i.e., engaged consciously and intentionally with material treated in reading assignments and the class lectures, exercises, and discussions that evolve from the reading. Reading is critical to developing a knowledge that will facilitate understanding and following lectures. The lectures and handouts will reinforce your reading but they will not repeat the readings verbatim.

➤ **Class participation** is critical since lively, substantive, and serious class discussion is the result of careful and thoughtful preparation. It goes without saying that engaged, active classroom conversation as well as attentive and respectful listening is necessary. Class participation entails: attendance, punctuality, preparedness, class etiquette, and engagement. Each student is expected to come to class having thoroughly prepared for discussion. This means either to contribute to an explanation of key arguments or be able to raise appropriate questions of the material. At the professors' discretion, brief quizzes may be given in order insure comprehension and retention of assigned material and lectures. *Students may be called upon by name and will be expected to reply to the best of their ability.* **Please note:** No more than two absences from class are allowed in this course. Any other absence will result in the lowering of your final grade by 10% (That is one full letter grade!) Absences harm your ability to keep up with course material and detract from your participation in discussions – both of which are crucial for our learning **and** your grade. Therefore, excessive absences, i.e., more than six, will not be given course credit. It is incumbent upon each student to sign the attendance sheets, this is the only record that will be used to verify class attendance. *Active participation in responsible, reflective and respectful discussion is critical for educational growth and success in this course. Your registration in class is a contract with yourself and with me to learn all you can.*

➤ **Case study analyses** will be turned in weekly. You will complete nine case study analyses over the semester. In each case study you will identify the six essential steps for doing metaethical case study analysis:

- a) Define at least five contestable ethical issues in the context of weekly discussion topic
- b) Address your understanding of the metaethical problem (What is it? How is it being done? Why is it happening?)
- c) Cite an ethical theorist or moral advocate from your reading who specializes in one of the issues that has particular concern for you and his/her fundamental statement(s) that relates to this topic.
- d) Provide biblical documentation (and denominational documentation when feasible) that serves as possible theological warrants that correlate with the problem and/or your assessment
- e) Apply the weekly ethical motif's prescription to the problem
- f) Prescribe a socioethical response based on your metaethical analysis of the moral crisis.

The analyses should be 2-3 pages in length. All papers must be typed and should be kept inside a notebook along with class notes, handouts, and classmate presentations for future reference. All case study analyses will be due at the beginning of class, those turned in later will be penalized.

➤ **Group Case Study Presentations** will be given by a self-selected group of students. Each group will be responsible for leading the discussion of the weekly case study, required readings, and issues explored. Groups are free to determine how they will present material, but presentations must engage both the argument and issues of reading assigned for the week of the presentation and a joint case study analysis with commentary must be distributed to every class member.

➤ **Midterm Examination** will be given in order to assess students' understanding of the metaethical process of case study analysis and the frameworks for doing Christian social ethics and moral reasoning. You will be required to complete one take-home midterm exam on the reading of the first half of the course. You may use notes and books, but may not work with others.

➤ **Original Case Brief** will be the final assignment for the class. Each student will be required to write a case brief (with commentary attached) that focuses on a real-life dilemma that forces a decision. Several workshops will be held in class on how to prepare for completing this task. Towards the end of the semester, students will vote on one of these case studies to be presented as the last case studied this semester.

➤ **Maintain an e-mail account and check the class website regularly.**

### **A NOTE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and adhere to the honor code regarding all assignments and examinations for this course. This is essential for the success of student learning and our work together. As a general rule of thumb, any work you submit should represent your own time, thoughts, and efforts as to avoid plagiarism.

### **DISABILITIES AND HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS**

There is a commitment to make every reasonable effort to facilitate the learning of students capable of graduate seminary level work. Any student who has a diagnosed and documented condition that may prevent full demonstration of her or his abilities (e.g. difficulty seeing or hearing, dyslexia, or other learning disabilities) should contact the professor to discuss learning needs and alternatives that have worked for the student in the past and mutually acceptable accommodations to ensure the student's full participation and evaluation in the course. Arrangements for such conditions must be discussed with the professor at the start of the semester.

Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 11. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-7486.

### **ETHICAL GROUND RULES REGARDING CLASSROOM DISCUSSION**

This course aims to create and maintain an atmosphere conducive to rigorous intellectual dialogue, analysis, critique, and a politics of professionalism and respectability. Think of these as ground rules or guidelines for our time together. They are adapted from feminist/womanist pedagogy as models and guidelines for higher education discourse:

1. We shall listen to one another – patiently, carefully – assuming that each one of us is always doing the best that she or he can. (*And because we assume this about each other, each of us shall do the best that she or he can.*)
2. We will speak thoughtfully by: speaking in the first person; not engaging in foul language; refraining from remarks showing a lack of respect for the feelings, beliefs, and thoughts of others; refusing to make comments that disparage any person or group on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, religion, social class, or sexual orientation; and remembering that the social locations of persons, whether present in the class or not, are to be respected at all times.

3. We will be faithful in using gender inclusive and anti-racist language in our writing and speaking.
4. We will address our colleagues in our classroom by name in recognition of their humanity and individuality. We will refer to our professor by her appropriate title in recognition of her training and position.
5. We will claim ownership of our own assumptions, our conclusions, and their implications for moral development and social change.
6. We will be open to each other's intellectual growth and change.
7. We cannot be blamed for the misinformation we have been taught and have absorbed from U. S. society and culture, but we shall be held responsible for repeating and acting out on misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
8. We each have a moral obligation to actively combat stereotypes so that we can begin to eradicate the biases that prevent us from envisioning and realizing the well being of us all.

**CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION:**

Attendance and Class Participation	10%
Case Study Analyses	50%
Midterm Examination	20%
Final Case Study Brief	20%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

**A note on grading**— Grading in this course will be based on your documentation of having achieved all of the course objectives, and having met all the requirements. In respect for academic discipline, the discipline appropriate for ministry and graduate study, and the efforts of timely students, deadlines are unbreachable. Late papers will be accepted if advance arrangements are negotiated, with a grade docked for each late day, not to exceed two days. Therefore, the grade(s) given in this course represent an evaluation of actual work – not good intentions, inherent ability, intelligence, personal, moral, nor spiritual qualities. Thus, the evaluation criteria for grading include:

- ability to comprehend and articulate the controlling ideas of class lectures and texts
- demonstration of independent critical analysis of ideas, theories, and issues
- logic and accuracy in grammar and structure of writing
- accuracy and precision in grammar usage and spelling
- completion of assignments on the due dates
- contribution to the class discussion of inquiry

## **GRADING STANDARDS:**

I interpret the letter grades (A through F) in the following manner:

- A very clear, insightful, perhaps, original thinking; excellent grasp of subject matter; clear evidence of personal engagement in course material and critical thinking; thorough, timely preparation of reading assignments; excellent preparation, timely completion of written work; active and thoughtful participation in class discussion, frequent contributions to classroom learning are made through responses, comments, open-mindedness, demonstrated willingness to be changed by new insights and discoveries.
- A- clear thinking; accurate and thorough grasp of subject matter; evidence of personal engagement in course work and critical thinking; thorough and timely preparation of reading assignments; very well-prepared written work; active and thoughtful participation in class discussion, often contributions are made to classroom learning; open-mindedness, demonstrated willingness to be changed by new insights and discoveries.
- B+ clear thinking; marked improvement in understanding of subject matter; evidence of personal engagement in course work and critical thinking; well-prepared written work; active and thoughtful participation in class discussion, often contributions are made to classroom learning; open-mindedness, demonstrated willingness to consider new insights, to risk change.
- B clear thinking; improvement in understanding of subject matter; some evidence of personal engagement in course work, effort at critical thinking; timely, careful preparation of reading assignments; adequately prepared written work; active participation in discussion; open-mindedness, a willingness to consider and wrestle seriously with new insights and ideas.
- B- reflective thinking; increasing understanding of subject matter; some evidence of personal engagement in course work, effort at critical thinking; preparation of reading assignments; adequately prepared written work; participation in discussion; open-mindedness
- C+ some evidence of reflective thinking; satisfactory understanding of subject matter; some evidence of personal engagement in course work; reading assignments adequately prepared; written work adequately prepared; some participation in class discussion.
- C satisfactory understanding of subject matter; reading assignments adequately prepared; written work somewhat adequately prepared; occasional participation in class discussion.
- C- some understanding of subject matter; less than adequate preparation of written work; less than adequate preparation of reading assignments; occasional class participation.
- D little understanding of subject; written work inadequately prepared; infrequent preparation of reading assignments; infrequent participation in class discussion.
- F little or no understanding of subject; poorly prepared written work and reading assignments; infrequent participation in class discussion.

<b>SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, READINGS, &amp; ASSIGNMENTS</b>
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**Week One**

Session 1     Lecture Topic: Introduction to the Course of Study

**Week Two**

Session 2     Lecture Topic: How do we do Christian social ethics?

Required Reading	
MICR	Chapter 1 “Faith and the Church’s Response to Social Issues”
WDCE	<b>Ethics; Deontology</b> ; Utilitarianism; Responsibility; Ethicist; Morality and Religion; Goodness

Session 3     Lecture Topic: The Foundations of Moral Reasoning

Required Reading	
MICR	Chapter 2 “Foundations”
WDCE	<b>Moral Theology; Natural Law</b> ; Humanistic Ethics; Wesleyan Ethics; Anglican Moral Theology; Calvinist Ethics; Lutheran Social Ethics; New England Transcendentalism; Puritanism; Quaker Ethics; Modern Protestant Ethics; Modern Roman Catholic Moral Theology

**In-Class Exercise: Trial Case Study**

**Week Three**

Session 4     Lecture Topic: Moral Agency and the Economic Order

Required Reading	
Case	David Trapp’s Rigor and Responsibility
MICR	Chapter 15 “Christianity and Consumer Lifestyles”
WDCE	Character; Conscience; <b>Family; Responsibility</b> ; Virtue; Wealth

Session 5     **Case Study Facilitation: David Trapp’s Rigor and Responsibility**  
**Due: Case Study #1**

**Week Four**

Session 6     Lecture Topic: Relational Motif and the Family

Required Reading	
Case	Mary Gardner’s Fourth Pregnancy
MICR	Chapter 4 “Family Values”; Chapter 7 “Abortion”
WDCE	<b>Abortion; Marriage; Sex Discrimination</b>

Session 7     **Case Study Facilitation: Mary Gardner’s Fourth Pregnancy**  
**Due: Case Study #2**

## Week Five

Session 8 Lecture Topic: Intentional Motif and Race Ideologies

Required Reading	
Case	Adamant Mr. Adams and Problem in Gilead
MICR	Chapter 9 “Ethnic Diversity and Prejudice”
Online	
WDCE	<b>Race Relations; Racism; Respect for Persons; Afro American Religious Ethics</b>

Session 9 **Case Study Facilitation: Adamant Mr. Adams**  
**Due: Case Study #3**

## Week Six

Session 10 Lecture Topic: Prescriptive Motif and Social Justice

Required Reading	
Case	Preference for the Poorest?
MICR	Chapter 16 “Capitalism and Christian Values”
WDCE	<b>Community; Common Good; Poverty</b>

Session 11 **Case Study Facilitation: Preference for the Poorest?**  
**Due: Case Study #4**

## Week Seven

No Class Reading Week

## Week Eight

Session 12 Lecture Topic: Deliberative Motif and the Quality of Life

Required Reading	
Case	Baby Boy Hernandez
MICR	Chapter 8 “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide”
WDCE	<b>Bioethics; Eugenics; Euthanasia; Experimentation and Human Subjects; Medical Ethics; Right to Health Care’ Care of the Sick; Prolongation of Life</b>

Session 13 **Case Study Facilitation: Baby Boy Hernandez**  
**Due: Case Study #5**

## Week Nine

Session 14 Lecture Topic: Operational Motif and the Common Good

Required Reading	
Case	Chaos in Carlton
MICR	Chapter 17 “Seeking Justice in a Globalized World”
WDCE	<b>Natural Rights; Human Rights; Neighbor; Power; Resistance</b>

Session 15 **Case Study Facilitation: Chaos in Carlton**  
**Due: Case Study #6**

## Week Ten

Session 16 Lecture Topic: Implementation Motif and Immigration

Required Reading	
Case	Chaos in Carlton
MICR	Chapter 12 “Immigration: Can We Have Open Borders?”
WDCE	<b>Racism; Human Rights; Immigration, Race Relations; Social Gospel; Capitalism; Poverty; Neighbor; Power</b>

Session 17 **Case Study Facilitation: Problem at the Border**  
**Due: Case Study #7**

## Week Eleven

Session 18 Lecture Topic: Norms Motif and Heterosexism

Session 19 **Case Study Facilitation: More Light**  
**Due: Case Study #8**

Required Reading	
Case	More Light
MICR	Chapter 11 “Heterosexism”
WDCE	<b>Homosexuality; Lesbianism; Sexual Ethics; Vocation</b>

## Week Twelve

Session 20 Writing Case Briefs for Ethical Analysis Workshop I

Session 21 Case Study Lab (peer-reviewed workshop)

## Week Thirteen

Session 22 Writing Case Briefs for Ethical Analysis Workshop II

Session 23 Case Study Lab (peer-reviewed workshop)

## Week Fourteen

Session 24 Case Study Lab (electronically submit student cases)

No Class **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

## Week Fifteen

Session 25 Student Case Presentations (Student Selected Readings to be announced)

Session 26 Reporting Out and Course Evaluation  
**Student Case Study Facilitation**  
**Due: Case Study #9**

## Case Study Abstracts

### **Case Study #1      David Trapp's Rigor and Responsibility**

*A professional couple active in church and community considers the implications of building a vacation cabin. Taken at face value this case is about Nancy and David Trapp struggling to decide whether or not to build a vacation cabin. But at a deeper and more comprehensive level the case is addressed to all no-poor Christians, and the issue is how to live as Christians in a materialistic world where ostentatious luxury and grinding poverty exist side by side.*

### **Case Study #2      Mary Gardner's Fourth Pregnancy**

*An unexpected pregnancy raises intense ethical, practical, and personal issues for a wife and husband. Mary Gardner, with her husband Tom, faces an agonizing decision: whether to terminate with medical assistance an unwanted pregnancy in its early stages. With her decision Mary enters fierce public debates over the definition of human life, the meaning of motherhood, the issue of who should control the abortion decision, and the role of sacrifice in Christian life. If this were not enough, she must also work through a crisis in her relationship with Tom.*

### **Case Study #3      Problem in Gilead**

*The appointment of a new pastor to Gilead Memorial United Methodist Church raises concerns about ministerial leadership as well as the church's response to social issues. Rev. Basil Roberts is an African American minister who recently finished his seminary training and has been appointed to his first full-time parish. When Roberts arrived, he found that Gilead Memorial Church was a small, white, affluent, congregation deeply committed to its sense of privilege and tradition. Shortly thereafter, Rev. Roberts began to pay great attention to the mounting poverty and suffering in the neighborhood surrounding the church. While the pastor found it to be bitter irony that this wealthy and elitist church was situated in this midst of so much privation and misery, Gilead's congregation wanted him to simply focus on his pastoral duties for this church and not think about social outreach and evangelism.*

### **Case Study #4      Preference for the Poorest?**

*Board members of a private organization founded to help people with low incomes secure adequate housing are faced with issues that call into question their preference for the poorest. Though the issues are numerous, a clear agenda is lacking. In light of this, a central question must be framed by the Board in terms of Christian spirituality and ethics, namely: who are the poor?*

### **Case Study #5      Baby Boy Hernandez**

*Staff members of a hospital with a highly successful and expensive neonatal unit disagree about the moral, social, and financial implications of curative and preventative medicine. There are at least two questions posed in this case. One is what kind of care Baby Boy Hernandez should receive. The other is how to make the neonatal unit financially secure. Both of these connected questions in turn provoke other questions which underlie what does it mean to be just and equitable when caring for a life in the midst of institutionalized health care.*

## **Case Study #6            Chaos in Carlton**

Tension is growing in Carlton, a major coastal city in South Africa, over the proposed plan to build a yacht harbor and upscale tourist area on the site of the bankrupt Atlantic Marine Company. Although the two groups of indigenous (black) Africans and so-called “Coloureds” who live on different parts of the property are located some distance apart, open hostility is increasing between these feuding groups. Meanwhile, both groups are worried that wealthy Afrikaners (whites) could dominate the debate concerning the use of land and distribution of resources and compromise the progress made since the end of apartheid, a legally enforced system of white supremacy. Today South Africa is a nation in transition that is moving painfully and hesitantly from decades of oppression and discrimination into an era of social justice and spiritual reconciliation for all.

## **Case Study #7            More Light**

*Lay leaders of a local congregation debate a resolution to consider gay and lesbian members eligible for election to church leadership positions in violation of the denomination’s constitution. The issue before Don and Shepherd Presbyterian involves choices on three distinct matters. Deciding how to respond to the More Light resolution will require prior decisions about biblically and theologically based moral assessments of homosexuality, about the purpose and shape of Christian ministry, and about the binding character of denominational guidelines.*

## **Case Study # 8            Problem at the Border**

Miguel, a leader in a church has to travel to Mexico to take care of his mother’s funeral and see about his seventeen year old sister. The church was helpful in sending him to Mexico and even helping him with the travel and funeral expenses. However, he needs to come back to Dallas, Texas where he has a family, a good job and is an active member of the church. The problem is that he is undocumented and the only way to cross back into the U.S. is by crossing illegally. This means that he would have to pay a professional “coyote” – a person who has connections and resources in both sides of the border that allow him to cross people illegally. The church was not aware of Miguel’s situation. Actually, the church, a predominantly white church was not aware of most issues related to immigration, except to believe that helping Miguel constituted breaking the law. This forced the leadership of the church to consider the issue of immigration, especially “illegal” immigration. The church just got a dose of what many undocumented families have to go through in our society. Sadly, many of the families in their church are undocumented. The leadership of the church cannot ignore this issue anymore.