

RS 234-01 (Fall, 2003)

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Tues, 4:00 pm – 6:25 pm, Briggs 211

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Office Hours: T/W/R 11:30 – 12:30 or by appointment

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Course Description: This is an introductory course in "Christian ethics." "Christian ethics" is the study of the good, or moral, life from the perspectives that arise out of the Christian tradition. We will first look at the sources of moral wisdom and the methods of moral deliberation that are used in the Christian tradition (how do Christians know what is "good"?), as well as the Christian concept of moral personhood (can people be "good," and, if so, how?). As we do this, we will consider both the more abstract level of moral principles as well as specific issues that challenge Christians in the world today. We will also take note of the diversity that characterizes Christian ethics and we will consider the possible causes of that diversity. As an academic study of "Christian ethics," a student does not have to be a Christian to engage the intellectual task of understanding the ethical aspects of the Christian religion. Similarly, students who profess Christianity as a faith should not assume that they already know the contents and methods of "Christian ethics."

Course Objectives: RS234 may be taken to fulfill Core Curriculum Objectives 4B or 4C or 6A. As such, its goals are (a) to extend the student's understanding of the basic elements of Christian moral life, (b) to engage students in reflection about their own values and decisions in light of these elements, (c) to make explicit the methods by which the Christian tradition reaches moral decisions, and (d) to encourage students to identify and clarify their own methods of moral decision-making, generally, and with particular regard to the specific issues studied.

Texts:

1. Readings will be handed out in class, or may be placed on the reserve shelf of the McNichols library. It is each student's responsibility to make sure you receive a copy of any material that is handed out in class.
2. Guest speakers and videos, whether viewed in class or out of class, are "texts." As such, students are expected to treat them with the same seriousness as a written text or class lectures.
3. Textbooks: (also available at www.amazon.com)
 - a) Buss, ed. 1993. *Forged Under the Sun! The Life of Maria Elena Lucas*. University of Michigan Press.
 - b) Connors and McCormick, 1998. *Character, Choices, and Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics*. Paulist Press.

Grading:

1. The average of your **homework** assignments and any **in-class quizzes** comprise 25% of the course grade. Homework is graded ("A+"), 100 points, for being of extra good quality and on-time; ("B"), 85 points, for being good enough and on-time; ("C"), 75 points, for being acceptable and on-time; and ("D"), 65 points, for being less than acceptable and on-time. Homework that is not turned in at all is averaged in as a "zero" and hurts your homework average badly.
2. The **research project** comprises 25% of your course grade. Directions are attached.
3. The **mid-term** and **final exams** each comprise 20% of the course grade.
4. **Good attendance** (arriving on time and staying throughout the class period) and **informed participation** (after having read the assignments) comprises 10% of your course grade and influence borderline grades very positively.

Numerical averages for course grade: 100-95 average = A; 94-90=A-; 89-87 average =B+; 86-83=B; 82-80=B-; etc. When converting letter grades to numbers in order to average grades, A+=100, A=95, A-=91, B+=88, B=85, B-=81, etc.