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# MB 750 Values and Ethics in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Michael A. Rynkiewich

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Instructor: Michael A. Rynkiewich

Room: H. C. Morrison Administration Building, AD 305

Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00-5:15 pm

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course takes a missiological approach to the nature and function of systems of values and ethics in various societies. The adjective, “missiological” implies that our approach will be at once anthropological and theological, and that we will follow the process of ethical decision-making in a methodical way. The goal is to come to an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of values and ethical systems on the one hand, and the interaction of the gospel with these systems on the other. Christ confirms and Christ challenges. The Spirit comforts and the Spirit transforms. It is easy for a missionary to destroy a culture; however, it is not so easy to participate with Christ and the people in the processes of confirming, challenging, comforting, transforming and fulfilling a culture.

The course will focus on various concepts such as culture and conscience, shame and guilt, individual and community, cultural relativism and moral absolutes, cross-cultural universals of human behavior, conversion, values and ethics. The format will include lecture, critical reading, case analysis, and class discussion.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To *read* all the material, attend all the classes, and *participate* in all class discussions.
2. To be *able to dialogue* about the issues in the essays and cases concerning values and ethics and the problems involved in Christian decision-making in the various contexts in the world.
3. To *develop analytic skills* for discerning the key issues involved in cases of ethical conflict.
4. To *develop interpretative skills* in relating Biblical narratives to cultural contexts to get at the meaning of events and behaviours for indigenous Christians and missionaries.
5. To *develop skills in applying* lessons learned about ethical discernment, cultural contexts, and ethical decision-making to new missiological situations.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### Texts:

1. *Strange Virtues* by Bernard Adeney (1995)
2. *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict (1934)
3. *Freedom and Culture* by Dorothy Lee (1959)
4. *Sick Societies* by Robert Edgerton (1992)
5. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1959)
6. *Case Studies in Missions* by Paul & Frances Hiebert (1987)

*Benedict's* book is a classic and was written at a time when the “cultural relativism” project was taking shape in anthropology and in American ethos. We will read it not for its specific content about cultures, but for its arguments about the nature of culture and cultural relativism.

Lee's book explores a theme that underlies all Western social science and is a recurrent topic of discussion in American culture: the relationship between the individual and culture. We will read it to get a sense of how culture shapes the individual, and how the individual relates to culture.

Edgerton's book is an unusual anthropological work. Instead of projecting an image of culture as different and inherently good, Edgerton breaks the connection. Cultures are indeed different, but are all cultures good? Or, is everything in various cultures good? Edgerton thinks not.

Achebe's novel is also a "classic," and you most likely have already read it. Read it again with an eye to deconstructing the worldviews of the protagonists. What does a values system look like and what happens when part of it starts to unravel?

Adeney's book is the main text for this course. It lays out for us the missiological issues involved in considering different systems of ethics. We will give this book a close reading.

Hiebert and Hiebert's book is the main source of case material for this course. Values and ethics take shape in situations of ethical conflict where a decision must be made. Thus, it is cases and not abstract propositions that will sharpen our analytic, interpretative and application skills.

### **Assignments:**

1. *Critical Reflection Papers.* These papers are due when we begin to discuss the books by Benedict, Lee, Edgerton and Achebe. Each paper should be two to three pages long, single-spaced. The paper should: A. Summarize briefly the main argument of the book; B. Explain the new insights that you have gained from reading this book; C. Apply some of these insights to your life and ministry, particularly in cross-cultural situations; D. List some areas of concern or questions you would like to have discussed in our class.

These papers are due on the following schedule:

Sept 10	<i>Patterns of Culture</i> by Ruth Benedict
Sept 19	<i>Freedom and Culture</i> by Dorothy Lee
Oct 1	<i>Sick Societies</i> by Robert Edgerton
Oct 15	<i>Things Fall Apart</i> by Chinua Achebe

2. *Controlled Comparison Papers.* These papers are due when we begin to analyze cases. When we read cases, we may read as many as ten cases during a week. While I want you to be able to discuss any of these cases, I want you to focus on two of them for further reflection. Choose two of the cases that have at least one element in common, and then proceed to analyse the cases in the framework of a comparison. Specifically: A. In a few sentences, identify the key ethical issue at stake in the cases; B. Note what is similar and what is different about the two cases; C. Show how the contexts (cultures) of the two cases affect the ethical decision-making process that is appropriate to each case; D. Propose different resolutions for the two cases; E. Try to identify and use a Biblical narrative whose context is similar (no proof-texting here), and be sure to support the approach you are taking. These papers should be two to three pages long, single-spaced.

These papers are due on the following schedule (there are seven weeks of cases, so you may skip one week of your choice):

Oct 29	Idols and Ancestors
Oct 31	Women and Men

Nov 5	Tradition and Sociality
Nov 7	Finances and Bribery
Nov 12	Conversion and Theology
Nov 14	Conformity and Conflict
Nov 19	Personal and Social Ethics

3. *Research Paper.* You will be given an opportunity to do problem-based research in this course. The methodology can employ field-based techniques or library/archival research. You should select a topic that engages a missiological issue with a cross-cultural value or ethical difference. Your paper should clearly identify the issue or problem to be researched, note the values/ethics in conflict with a biblical approach to the problem, and propose a solution to the problem. This is not a broad review of the field, but a paper focused on one particular case. The paper should be 10 to 15 pages long, single-spaced. I will be happy to look at drafts and make critical comments anytime before the due date. The following are some sample topics:

1. Christ and the Ancestors: Honoring the ancestors and confessing Jesus as Lord.
2. Preaching salvation from guilt in a shame-oriented society.
3. Focusing on individual conversion in a communal society.
4. Selecting church leaders in a society where age and wisdom are honored more than youthfulness and intelligence.
5. Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Conscience: Resolving conflicts amid cultural diversity.
6. Biblical patterns for marriage in a traditional society.

The research topic must be chosen and approved by the professor by October 24th. Turn in a topic, thesis statement, and tentative outline of your paper for approval. The final paper is due no later than December 3rd. Some may be presented to the class.

#### COURSE EVALUATION

20%	Critical Reflection Papers (4 x 5% each)
30%	Controlled Comparison Papers (6 x 5% each)
25%	Research Paper
25%	Final Exam

ADDENDA TO THE SYLLABUS FOR MB 750.

1. A student may choose to emphasize the Research Paper and drop the Final Exam. In that case, the paper will be worth 50% of the grade. The paper should be expanded to include a section that shows an understanding of the basic concepts and literature introduced in this course. The paper should be from 20 to 30 pages long. The teacher will support work that also contributes to the student's Ph.D. or D. Miss. dissertation proposal or work.
2. Students in a Masters program may choose to drop either the Paper or the Exam. In either case, the student should be sure to show that he or she controls the concepts and the literature introduced in class. The Paper or Exam need not be substantially longer, but it must be of graduate school quality. This is not just a college or university level course.
3. All students should consult and follow the style of the journal *Missiology*, edited and published out of the ESJ School of World Mission.

## COURSE GRADING

The unit of credit is a semester hour, which is defined as one hour of classroom work per week for one semester, or its equivalent. The 4.00 point system is used to compute grade point standing. The grading system is:

A	4.00	Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives.
B	3.00	Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives.
C	2.00	Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives.
D	1.00	Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives.
F	0	Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives.

## INCOMPLETE WORK

The official end of each term is 4:00 p.m. on the last day of the examination schedule. This yhour is the deadline for handing in all course work. Each instructor may set an earlier deadline for submission of any or all course work. The student must petition the faculty person involved and the student's advisor for permission to receive an "I" at the end of the semester.

A grade of "I" denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of a course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as "F."

Incomplete grades shall be removed one calendar month prior to the close of the following semester unless an earlier date is designated by the Office of the Chief Academic Officer on the individual petition. If the work is not completed by the time designated, the "I" shall be changed to an "F" unless a passing grade can be given based on work already completed or unless special permission is granted by the Chief Academic Officer.

Professors are required to give either a grade or an “I,” if approved, to each student registered for credit in a course. Students with Incompletes in two or more classes will not be allowed to enroll in a new semester or term without permission from their Dean.

#### OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will be Wednesday 1:30-3:30 p.m. It is best to make an appointment in advance, but you may check during hours to see if others have not taken a time slot. Other times may be available by appointment. My office is in the ESJ School on the third floor of the McPheeters Center, Room 308.  
Telephone: 858-2218