

1-1-2004

MB 750 Values and Ethics in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Rynkiewich, Michael A., "MB 750 Values and Ethics in Cross-Cultural Perspective" (2004). *Syllabi*. Book 1395.
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MB 750 / MS 672 VALUES AND ETHICS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Instructor: Dr. Michael A. Rynkiewich
Room: SH 404 Time: Tuesday 2:30-5:15

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. We do not have Christ or the gospel outside of a cultural context. All Christianity is contextual; the question is: “Whose culture?” When Christ comes to a culture, in some ways, Christ confirms culture and in others, Christ challenges culture. The Spirit comforts persons and the Spirit transforms persons. It is easy for a missionary to damage a culture; however, it is not so easy to participate with the Holy Spirit and the local community 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

Reading Packet:

- a. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 1955 [1949] “The Love of God and the Decay of the World,” Chapter 1 of *Ethics* edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company. Pp. 17-54.
- b. Benedict, Ruth 1961 [1934] “The Nature of Society,” Chapter 7 in *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. Pp. 223-250.
- c. Lee, Dorothy 1987 [1959] “Codifications of Reality: Lineal and Non-lineal,” in Dorothy Lee *Freedom and Culture*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press. Pp. 105-120. Originally published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* 12 (1950).
- d. Thompson, David L. 1996 “Women, Men, Slaves and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 25.3:326-349.
- e. Dye, T. Wayne 1976 “Toward a Cross-Cultural Definition of Sin,” *Missiology* 4:4:27-41.
- f. Fortosis, Steve 1990 “A Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Morality,” *Missiology* 18:2:164-176.
- g. Priest, Robert J. 1994 “Missionary Elenctics: Conscience and Culture,” *Missiology* 22:3:291-315.
- h. Fiske, Alan Page 1990 “Relativity within Moose (“Mossi”) Culture: Four Incommensurable Models for Social Relationships,” *Ethos* 18:2:180-204.

Texts:

1. *Strange Virtues* by Bernard Adeney (1995)
2. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1959)
3. *Mystic Endowment: Religious Ethnography of the Warao Indians* by Johannes Wilbert (1993)
4. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies* edited by Regina W. Wolfe and Christine E. Gudorf (1999)

Bonhoeffer's chapter was not written by him, but was put together after his martyrdom by his students from his lectures. Bonhoeffer is radically Christocentric and Theocentric, and so his approach to ethics seems upside down compared to others.

Benedict's chapter 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 chapter 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.

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 of us the missiological issues involved in considering different systems of ethics. We will give this book a close reading.

Wilbert's ethnography is the prime example of how different and how complex another worldview can be, and how that worldview provides a particular context for the establishment of a system of values and a variety of social settings in which ethical decisions are made.

Wolfe and Gudorf's book is the main source of case materials for this class. They provide us with contemporary (female genital mutilation, AIDS), complex (diversity of values in postmodern cities), and critical (evaluations from a variety of perspectives) materials for discussion. By using critical commentary from a variety of world religions, they give us a realistic situation since most mission will be carried out in diverse ecumenical communities.

Assignments for Master's Students:

1. *Two Critical Reflection Papers.* These papers are due when we begin to discuss the books by Wilbert and Achebe. Each paper should be five, double-spaced. The paper should: A. Summarize briefly the main argument of the book; B. Explain the new insights about values and ethics 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. (five pages each)
2. *Presentation and Paper.* There are 18 cases in Wolfe and Gudorf's book. Each Master's student will choose a case and prepare to lead discussion on that case. Two other Master's students will represent a writer who responded to the case. Thus, there will be a leader and two helpers for each case.

- The leader presents the events of the case in a timeline that highlights the events, twists and turns, and climax of the case.
- Point out the main issues involved in the case.
- Select what you think the main ethical conflict is.
- What does culture say?
- What does Scripture say?
- What does conscience say?
- What does the social situation say?
- How can this be resolved?

Please give me a copy of your presentation before you present it (10 pages).

3. *Final Research Paper*. By the time we get to the end, you should have developed a complex model for the study of values and ethical reflection about particular cases. Take either the Warao or the Ibo (Igbo). You are a missionary working in their midst. Imagine an ethical case. Tell me how you would approach the case in order to get to a resolution that is faithful to Scripture, faithful to the culture, and likely to work. Be sure to use the readings, perspectives and models that we have developed in class. (20 pages)

Assignments for Doctoral Students:

1. *Two Critical Reflection Papers*. These papers are due when we begin to discuss the books by Wilbert and Achebe. Each paper should be five, double-spaced. The paper should:
 - a. Summarize briefly the main argument of the book;
 - b. Explain the new insights about values and ethics 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.

2. *Presentation and Paper*. Bring a case to class. Prepare the case to present in class. The other students likely will not have read this case, so the burden of laying out the case is greater than on the Masters students. If you are an international student, Native American or ethnic American, I would invite you to select a case from your experience or that comes from your community. Here is a list of minimal responsibilities.

- Write up a verbatim (word for word) account of the case. Distribute it in class so people can follow the case.
- Begin your presentation by reading or enacting the case.
- Put a time line in Power Point or on the board: highlight events, turning points, forks in the road.
- Review the issues involved in the case; again on Power Point or on the board.
- What are the different perspectives that people have about the case.
- Select what you think the main ethical conflict is.
- What does culture say?
- What does Scripture say?
- What does conscience say?
- What does the social situation say?
- How can this be resolved?

Give me a copy of your presentation, before you present it (15 pages).

3. *Final Research Paper*. By the time we get to the end, you should have developed a complex model for the study of values and ethical reflection about particular cases. Take either the Warao or the Ibo (Igbo). You are a missionary working in their midst. Imagine an ethical case. Tell me how

you would approach the case in order to get to a resolution that is faithful to Scripture, faithful to the culture, and likely to work. Be sure to use the readings, perspectives and models that we have developed in class. (30 pages)

COURSE EVALUATION

- 25% First Critical Reflection Paper
- 25% Second Critical Reflection Paper
- 25% Presentation and Paper
- 25% Final Research Paper

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:

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|---|------|--|
| 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

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.

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- i. Hillman, Eugene 1973 "Pluriformity in Ethics: A Modern Missionary Problem," *Missiology* 1:1:59-72.
- j. Kelly, David C. 1978 "Cross-Cultural Communication and Ethics," *Missiology* 6:3:311-322.
- k. Hiebert, Paul and Mary Case studies
- l. Edgerton, Robert B. Sick Societies.