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MS 672 Values And Ethics In Cross-Cultural Perspective

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**VALUES AND ETHICS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**
Instructor: Michael A. Rynkiewich

*Note:* If you got this syllabus anywhere else than the Course Center or any other time than the first day of class; it is an unofficial copy and is probably not be current. This one was posted on January 22, 2004.

**Welcome:** I am glad that you are considering this course offering. How we live as Christians flows out of our engagement with Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the contemporary culture and a community of believers. This is an exciting process, filled with potential for kingdom growth and fraught with the dangers of human frailty. We will wrestle with these issues from the perspective of places all over the world where Christianity has taken root and blossomed. We have as much to learn as to teach.

**Personal Introduction:** By training, I am an anthropologist (Ph.D. 1972, University of Minnesota, "Land Tenure among Arno Marshallese"). By vocation, I am a Christian (accepted God's salvific work in Jesus at a Youth For Christ rally at Soldier's and Sailor's Memorial Hall, Pittsburgh, PA in 1957). By association, I am an ordained elder in the South Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. Most recently (1997-2002), I served as a General Board of Global Ministries missionary with the United Church in Papua New Guinea. I was married in 1967, and have two children with Linda. She died of cancer in 1986. Both children are married and live in Minnesota. I also have three children at home here in Wilmore with my current wife, Teresa. I have a passion for the good news of the kingdom of God being worked out now in cultural contexts around the world so that the day will come when those gathered around the throne will praise God and the Lamb in ways appropriate to every language, culture, family and nation (Revelation 7:9).

My concern is that the good news of the kingdom, which was John's message, Jesus' message and practice, and the last thing Jesus instructed the disciples about (Acts 1) has been lost by a nearsighted vision of the church for the church. Thus, the church confuses its culture's values with Kingdom values, each local church assuming that its ethics are kingdom ethics, then ending up with a low tolerance for people who disagree or behave differently. My concern for values and ethics comes from Scripture (from the Ten Commandments to Paul’s declaration that he has become all things to all people whereby he might win some) and from my training as an anthropologist (one of my first books was on the ethics of doing anthropological fieldwork [Michael A. Rynkiewich and James P. Spradley, 1976, *Ethics and Anthropology: Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, John Wiley and Sons]). I trust that you too are willing to struggle with how Christ becomes real within various cultural contexts.

**Office Hours:** I will be in the office, that is, checking messages in the discussion center, at least on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays each week. All public discussions for class work should take place in the discussion center. All private messages, assignments and tests should be sent to my office icon.
ExL Support Team:

For technical support contact Jared at ExL_Support@asburyseminary.edu
For questions related to the ExL program contact Kevin Osborn,
ExL_Director@asburyseminary.edu
For library reference support contact Hannah Kirsch, Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu

Windows and Icons:

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules (No interaction takes place here. This is where the teacher posts course materials only).

The Discussion Center will be used for all public, class communication. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else which would be of interest to your classmates and the professor, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The (Class Number) Office is for private correspondence between you and the professor. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates, including assignments, papers, projects, and personal correspondence. This should not be used to ask general course-related questions.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the Discussion Center from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask questions, or to explore topics. Remember: None of the conversations carried on in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, chapel services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a Powerpoint Viewer, and a Real Audio Player.

Obtaining Library Materials and Reference Assistance
   Email: [mailto:Ats_Reference@asburyseminary.edu ]
   Toll-Free Reference Help Line: 1-866-454-2733

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local libraries, if possible. However, library services are always available to students through Asbury's B. L. Fisher Library. All requests for books and journal articles should be e-mailed to the Reference Desk [mailto:ATS_Reference@asburyseminary.edu ]. The Reference workers (Hannah, Robbie, and Nina) will also assist ExL students with reference requests, using various online databases, or doing research on a specific topic.
To request material from the B.L. Fisher Library, begin by searching the library catalog (for books available in the library) or one of the restricted journal databases available on the library's website ([http://www.asburyseminary.edu/library] - choose "library catalog" or "restricted databases"). Then send an email to the reference desk citing the sources that you would like to request. If you need help searching the databases, do not hesitate to call (1-866-454-2733) or email the reference desk. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Wilmore campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

Please allow 5-10 business days for all requests to be filled. ExL students are billed for the cost of photocopies (5 cents per page); however, shipping via media rate is free. (Media rate normally takes 5 business days for shipping, but it can take two weeks to addresses in the West). Express mail services (prices vary according to weight) and scanning (10 cents per page in pdf format) are also available. Requests generally require 1-2 business days to be processed. Plan ahead and make your requests early enough to allow for shipping and processing!

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

I would hope that students will:

1. Read all the material and participate in all class discussions.

2. 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. Develop analytic skills for discerning the key issues involved in cases of ethical conflict.
4. 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. Develop skills in applying lessons learned about ethical discernment, cultural contexts, and ethical decision-making to new missiological situations.

6. Be better prepared for ministry in all situations; particularly in the areas of discipleship and formation as well as church growth and mission.

**Course Requirements**

**Texts:**

2. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1959)
3. *Ethics and World Religions: Cross-Cultural Case Studies*  
   By Regina W. Wolfe and Christine E. Gudorf (1999)
   By Johannes Wilbert (1993)
5. A reading packet to be obtained from the ESJ School of World Mission and Evangelism.  (Directions to follow)

   Chapter 1 of *Ethics* edited by Eberhard Bethge.  New York: Collier Books,  

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

Wolfe and Gudorf’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.

Expectations:

What you can expect from me:

1. I will provide all of your materials and assignments on-line by 9 am (ET) at the starting date for each module.

2. I will respond to your messages on a first come first serve basis as posted in the MB 750 Office (which only I can read) or in my e-mail, which I check most weekdays.

3. If I need to be out of town I will let you know in advance.

5. While I might not participate in all your discussions, I will read all your postings and participate at times. In particular, I will respond to frequently asked questions by posting to the whole class rather than to an individual.

6. On occasion, I will ask for feedback about how the course is going. No one need sing with the 60s hit: "I can't get no satisfaction." I am here.

7. I promise to pray for you as a class. I will pray for individual requests as you choose to make them know. We will not be face to face, but other kinds of communities are possible. For a while, we will come together to work theologically and anthropologically through some issues, and Jesus will be there.

What we expect from you:

1. You will actively participate as a member of a learning community. MB 750 is neither an independent study nor directed readings; it is a class. We will be moving through the readings, reflections, discussions and assignments together.

2. You will invest the same amount of time in this class as if you were on campus. Plan on 10-12 hours of reading, reflecting, discussing, and writing each week.
3. All electronic messages should be posted to the Discussion Center so that we can all benefit as we would if someone asked a question or made a comment inside a classroom.

4. Tests and papers should be sent to the Office for grading.

5. Send documents of several pages as "attached files," but shorter responses in e-mail messages. Most of these will be posted to the Discussion Center.

6. If you have responsibilities that take you away from our community for a few days, please let us know in advance.

7. Please do not disappear. If a crisis has arisen, then inform us right away so we can pray and make adjustments. If it is warranted, write URGENT in the subject box.

**Course Evaluation**

1. *Participation in discussion* in response to questions. These questions will be posted by the professor for each module. Students are expected to respond to the questions and begin a dialogue that will include the whole class. Each module will have instructions about the minimal expectations. These will be stated in terms of frequency (e.g., read other people's responses and respond to two of them), quantity (e.g., 75 words responding to this question) and in terms of quality (e.g., something more than "Atta, boy!" or "Go girl!"). These will count for 25% of your grade.

2. *Critical Reflection Book Reviews.* These papers are due when we begin to discuss the books by Wilbert and Achebe. Each paper should be five pages, double spaced. The paper should: A. Summarize briefly the main argument of the book (with key phrases and concepts); 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 will count for 25% of your grade.

4. *Point/Counterpoint Discussions.* These occur when we begin to analyze cases. I will specify a particular case from the Wolfe and Gudorf book for discussion. One student will take the lead in analyzing the case, writing an analysis that leads up to a decision. Then, the other students will respond to the analysis taking the point of view of one of the two commentaries on the case in the book. The original analyst will respond to each of the other students, and they will respond to the response. The discussion may continue, but initial comment and one response to responses is all that is required. In the original analysis, the leader should:
   a. Present a timeline of events that highlights events, twists and turns, and the climax.
   b. Point out the main issues involved in the case.
   c. Declare what you think the main ethical issue is.
   d. Note what culture says.
   e. Note what Scripture says.
   f. Note what conscience says.
   g. Note what the social situation says.
h. Explain how this issue can be resolved.

Students will take the lead in analyzing a case three times during the course. The presentations, and your responses to other presentations, will count for 50% of your grade.

(From the Catalogue)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INCOMPLETE WORK

The official end of each term is 4:00 p.m. on the last day of the examination schedule. This hour 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.