

ET 1A03 ETHICS AND CHARACTER

McMaster Divinity College
Franklin Pyles, Ph.D

Winter 2012 (Term 2)

Location: McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON
 Day and Times: Mondays 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Contact: pylesf@mcmaster.ca

Description

The course will examine character and calling and their relation to ethics; how to think clearly about ethics; and how to sort through various ethical situations that arise in the church, such as:

- Relationships to the governance structure
- Inter-staff relationships
- Congregational relationships including confidentiality, authority/submission, and handling of church assets and counseling/relationships to the opposite sex
- Assisting others in ethical decisions including bio-ethical issues (guest lecturer)

all with a view of actually living in ministry lives that please and bring glory to Christ and which leave both the pastor and the church whole.

Course Objectives

How you practice ministry grows from your sense of identity with Jesus Christ and your awareness of his divine call on your life. The course will seek to accomplish the following objectives.

KNOWING

To teach the student to know a framework for making ethical decisions.

BEING

To lead the student into being a person of Christian character which is more than effort, but which is a life where Christ's life is lived out.

DOING

To enable a student to actually practice righteousness in his/her private and ministry life.

Schedule

BEING

- 1 Introduction to Ethics and Character Formation
- 2 Guest Lecture – Dr. James Rusthoven
- 3 Character and Calling

KNOWING

- 4 Ethical Foundations: Philosophical
- 5 Guest Lecture – Shannon Baines and Hughson Ong
- 6 Ethical Foundations: Sermon on the Mount/Church in Community

DOING

- 7 Church in Community
- 8 Church in Community
- 9 Guest Lecture – Paul Bates
- 10 Trust
- 11 Power relationships in the Church/Formation of Code of Ethics
- 12 Final Exam

Required Texts

Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Joe E. Trull & James E. Carter. *Ministerial Ethics*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

KNOWING

PAPERS: Note: Papers should be submitted electronically to pylesf@mcmaster.ca. Put your LAST name first in the subject line and after it put Paper 1, or 2 etc. Like this:

Smith Paper 1

Having done that, please don't neglect to put your whole name on the paper itself. Use sources, but tell me what the sources are in standard McMaster University footnoting protocol. Much of your grade will be on how deeply you analyze the topic and give your answers.

Paper #1. Due: February 13, 2012. Length: Approximately 2000 Words. Weight: 20%

Describe a situation that you have directly experienced which created for you the need for a personal ethical decision. It is important to describe the situation with accuracy so that an accurate analysis may be made. Describe the full complexity of the situation and give an ethical analysis. That is, what was it about the situation that created tension because there seemed to be conflicting ethical demands? What biblical/philosophical framework(s) were brought into play? What was the outcome? What errors do you now note in the original analysis? What would you now do differently if you had to do it again?

OR

Using the life of either Martin Luther King Jr. or Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a case study, discuss the following topic: *The Minister and Civil Disobedience*.

Paper #2. Due March 5, 2012. Length: Approximately 1000 Words. Weight: 20 %.

Choose **one** of the following dilemmas and write an ethical analysis of the various points and how you personally would resolve it.

1. A person confesses a crime, which has not been solved, and which involved violence against another person (not a child). The discussion leads you to believe that the crime may be repeated in the future. Should you report this to the police? Or, not?

2. Your denomination has clear guidelines prohibiting you from officiating at the re-marriage of a divorced person. However, you know the background of the couple in front of you seeking to be married, one of whom comes from a divorce which divorce was, in your opinion, not only justified but perhaps the only option. Should you marry them?

OR

Due March 5, 2012. Length: Approximately 4 –5000 words. Weight: 40%.

You may substitute both the above for a 4000 – 5000 word paper.

EITHER

1. Analyze and compare the foundational philosophical ethical systems of Bentham/Mill (Utilitarianism) with Immanuel Kant (the Imperative) with the overall Christian ethic of law and grace. Have a thesis and prove it.

OR

2. If your denomination has a statement of ministerial ethics, do a complete analysis of it. Reveal its underlying presuppositions (both biblical and philosophical and any unique items from the denominations history) and how these are presented. How well are various ethical areas stated? Has anything of significance been left out? Etc, etc. Write a solid conclusion.

OR

**Due at one of the course times, a 1 hour presentation of a case study to the class. Weight: 40%
Note: this option may be limited to five people.**

The text by Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee contains a number of chapters dedicated to a particular ethical issue. Choose a situation from real life that involves or affects a church community. This may be a situation you are personally acquainted with, or one which you research. In class make the following presentation:

- How is the church community currently handling the situation? Specifically, what ethical perspective are they using to frame their response? How is the congregation being affected? The surrounding community? And are there any others who are being affected and if so how?
Find out this information from reading such as newspapers, interviews, and by examining available documents, such as board minutes.
- How, would Stassen and Gushee's Sermon on the Mount ethical approach change the above status quo, that is, both the ethical interpretation of the situation, the situation itself (an assumption here that an interpretation of a situation affects the reality of the situation) and the response to the situation?
- An opportunity for class interaction which should constitute one third of the class time.

BEING

Due April 7, 2012. Length: Approximately 2000 words. Weight: 25%.

Pick two books from the Bibliography, and, with the two books required (total of four) set forth a plan for change in your personal life drawn from new things you have learned from these books. You will be graded on the depth and insight of your presentation.

DOING

Overall class participation: 10%

Your final exam will also constitute the “doing section,” but will be written. **Weight: 25%**

Textbook Purchase

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College’s book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 218, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one’s academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Style

All assignments are to be typed in double-spaced format, with footnotes and bibliographic references conforming to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses* (<http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuide.pdf>). Failure to observe appropriate format and style will result in grade reductions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Colon, Christine A. and Bonnie E. Field. *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009.

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Struthers, William M. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorothy C. Bass editors. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Mills BV 3 .P6945 2002.

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