
COURSE SYLLABUS

[1. Format](#); [2. Description](#); [3. Objectives](#); [4. Assessment](#); [5. Diversity](#); [6. Texts](#); [7. Protocols](#);
[8. Plagiarism](#); [9. Rubrics](#); [10. Outline & Readings](#); [11. Program Learning Objectives](#)

COURSE: INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLIC BIOETHICS (ThM 575)

SEMESTER: Spring, 2025

INSTRUCTOR: Rev. Luke Dysinger, OSB, MD, DPhil. Email: ldysinger@stjohnsem.edu

Course websites: : <http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu> [alt: <http://ldysinger.com>]

YEAR: Theology 3

CREDITS: 2

TIMES:

1. COURSE FORMAT:

This course will combine lecture and class discussion. In order to maximize the effectiveness of lectures in our culturally diverse student population, representing a wide range of different linguistic experience and ability, all audio-visual materials presented in lectures will also be available through the course website or in the seminary library.

2. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine the history of Catholic ethical teaching on medicine and health care, with particular attention to common ethical dilemmas concerning the beginning and the end of life. The development of the Catholic moral tradition of health care and bioethics will be examined both from an historical perspective and through careful study of official Catholic teaching documents, including the following: *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI); *Evangelium Vitae* (Pope John Paul II); *Jura et Bona* (DDF); *Donum Vitae* (CDF); *Dignitas Personae* (DDF); *Samaritanus Bonus* (DDF); and *Ethical and Religious Directives* (USCCB).

3. COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES and BENCHMARK

- 3.1. In written essays and oral presentations on case studies, students will cite, explain, and pastorally apply biblical and Catholic magisterial texts relevant to the following subjects:
 - (1) Human Fertility and Infertility, (natural family planning, contraceptive technology, assisted reproduction, abortion); (2) Genetic and Embryological Dilemmas at the Beginning of Life (pre-natal diagnosis, embryological and fetal malformation, intra-uterine medical and surgical interventions); (3) Research and Experimentation on Human Subjects (informed consent, cloning, stem-cell research, tissue and organ donation); (4) The Perennial Specter of Eugenics; (5) Terminal Illness and Disability (euthanasia, nutrition and hydration, withdrawing life support, palliative and hospice care).
 - 3.2. Benchmark for course learning objective: At least 80% of students will receive a grade of “B” or higher in written case studies testing their ability to provide appropriate, comprehensible advice on ethical issues concerning the subjects listed in §3.1.
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4. ASSESSMENT (Course Learning Objective Measures)

- 4.1. In written essays and oral presentations students will cite, explain, and pastorally apply biblical and Catholic magisterial texts relevant to pastoral case studies illustrating the themes in §3.1. Active participation in class discussions is essential, and will figure into the final evaluation.
- 4.2. A final examinations will consist of three case-studies. Students will have one week to return their answers, which must contain appropriate references to biblical and Catholic magisterial texts.

- 4.3. Students may choose between taking a midterm examination or submitting a research project due on or before Friday, April 18, 2025,
- 4.3.a. The midterm examination will consist of three case-studies. Students will have one week to return their answers, which should be typed, contain appropriate references and be submitted electronically by email.
- 4.3.b. The seminary student body represents a diverse spectrum of multicultural traditions, with a concomitantly wide range of preference for either verbal or written presentations. In recognition of this, students will be offered the opportunity of choosing either an oral presentation or a research paper. The research project will consist of either a paper or a presentation on a subject covered in class. Acceptable formats include:
- 4.3.b.1. A written research paper of between eight and twelve pages, including appropriate references; or
- 4.3.b.2. An oral presentation lasting twenty to twenty-five minutes using Powerpoint or student-designed webpages, Since the presentation will **not** be given during class, either a digital video recording of the presentation must be submitted, or an audio recording of the presentation must be embedded in the Powerpoint.
- 4.4. In research and on exams students must clearly distinguish between their own words and sources they cite. Failure to credit sources that are cited constitutes plagiarism and may result in a grade of “F”. See also “Plagiarism Policy,” §8 below and the “St. John’s Seminary Academic and Doctrinal Integrity Policy,” downloadable from the course site on Canvas.
- 4.5. Submission of the final examination and either the midterm examination or research project is required for successful completion of the course. The final course grade will be computed as follows (for details see “Rubrics for Assessment,” §9 below):

Class participation	20%
Final Examination	40%
Research paper or midterm examination	40%

5. DIVERSITY and INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

- 5.1. (*General*) In order to profit from the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student body, students are encouraged to bring to classroom discussion sources that illustrate the development of their own cultural traditions, including, for example: the unique contributions of Hispanic and Asian Catholicism; as well as the theological, canonical, liturgical, and spiritual emphases that distinguish Western Catholicism from Eastern traditions such as the Maronite, Chaldean, Melchite, Malabar, and Ruthenian churches.
- 5.2. (*Pedagogy*) The seminary student body represents a diverse spectrum of multicultural traditions, with a concomitantly wide range of preference for either verbal or written presentations. In recognition of this, students will be offered the opportunity of choosing either an oral presentation or a research paper. In order to maximize the effectiveness of lectures in our culturally diverse student population, representing a wide range of different linguistic experience and ability, all audio-visual materials presented in lectures will also be available through the course website or in the seminary library.

6. TEXTS

6.1. REQUIRED TEXTS [All required readings may be accessed through Canvas]

Austriaco, Nicanor, *Biomedicine and Beatitude, An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Cath. Univ. of Am.Pr., 2011), ISBN 978-08132-1881-6.

Ford, Norman M., *The Prenatal Person*, (Blackwell Publishers, 2002), ISBN: 0631234926.

Jones, David Albert, *The Soul of the Embryo, An Inquiry into the Status of the Human Embryo in the Christian Tradition*, (Continuum, London, 2004), ISBN: 0826462960

May, William, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*, 2nd ed., (Our Sunday Visitor, 2008) ISBN: 1592763308

The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

6.2. REQUIRED DOCUMENTS [All required readings may be accessed through Canvas]

6.2.1. CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHING DOCUMENTS

Pope Pius XII: *Address to the First International Conference on Histopathology of the Nervous System* (1952); *Address to Anesthesiologists* (1957).

Pope John Paul II: *Salvifici Doloris*, (*On The Christian Meaning Of Human Suffering*, 1984); *Evangelium Vitae*, (*The Gospel of Life*, 1995); *On Life-Sustaining Treatment and the Vegetative State*, (March, 2004); *On Palliative Care*, (Nov., 2004)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Nutrition and Hydration; Moral and Pastoral Reflections* (1992); *Ethical and Religious Directives*, rev. ed. (2010). *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2007, rev. 2012); *Twenty Questions for Faithful Citizens* (2012).

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Declaration On Procured Abortion*, (1974); *Persona Humana*, (*Declaration on Sexual Ethics*, 1975); *Jura et Bona*, (*Declaration on Euthanasia*, 1980); *Donum Vitae* (*On Respect for Human Life in its Origin*, 1987); *Uterine Isolation” and Related Matters*, (1993); *Responses to Certain Questions Concerning Artificial Nutrition and Hydration* (2007); *Dignitas Personae* (*On Certain Bioethical Questions*, 2008); *On the Banalization of Sexuality* (2010). *Samaritanus Bonus* (2020); *On the Care of Persons in the Critical and Terminal Phases of Life*.

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences: *Why the Concept of Brain Death is Valid as a Definition of Death* (2008).

6.2.2. ADDITIONAL REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Atkinson, Gary, M., “Theological History of Catholic Teaching on Prolonging Life”, in *Moral Responsibility in Prolonging Life Decisions*, ch. 7, ed. McCarthy & Moraczewski, (Pope John Center, St. Louis, 1981, distr. Fran. Herald Pr. Chicago).

De Marco, Donald, *The Roman Catholic Church and Abortion: An Historical Perspective*.

Sofair, André N., *et.al.* “Eugenic Sterilization and a Qualified Nazi Analogy: The United States and Germany, 1930-1945,” *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 15 Feb. 2000. Vol. 132 no. 4, pp. 312-319.

6.2.3. RECOMMENDED TEXTS and RESOURCES

Ashley, Benedict, *et.al.*, *Health Care Ethics: A Catholic Theological Analysis*, 5th ed. (Georgetown Univ. Press, 2006), ISBN: 9781589011168.

Coleman, Gerald, *Human Sexuality, an All-Embracing Gift*, (Alba House, 1992), ISBN: 081890643X,

Engelhardt, H. Tristram, *The Foundations of Bioethics, Second Edition*, (Oxford University Press, 1996) ISBN: 0195057368.

- Finnis, John, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision and Truth*, (Catholic University of America Press, 1991).
- Ford, Norman M., *When Did I Begin? Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy and Science*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), ISBN: 0521424283.
- Gomez, José H. (Archbishop of Los Angeles), *A Will to Live: Clear Answers on End of Life Issues*, (Basilica Press, 2006), ISBN: 193031406X
- Grisez, Germain *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, (1, *Christian Moral Principles*; 2, *Living a Christian Life*; 3, *Difficult Moral Questions*). Electronic version available on Paulist Media: *Welcome to the Catholic Church*.
- Kliever, L. D. ed., *Dax's Case, Essays in Medical Ethics and Medical Meaning*, (Southern Methodist Univ. Pr., 1989) ISBN: 0870742787
- Smith, Janet, & Kaczor, Christopher, *Life Issues, Medical Choices, Questions and Answers for Catholics* (Servant Books, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007) ISBN: 9780867168082.

7. SPECIAL PROTOCOLS

- 7.1 The midterm exam, research project, and final exam must be submitted by email: ldysinger@stjohnsem.edu
- 7.2. Late work will be accepted for a grade only if the professor grants an extension of the deadline: requests for extensions must be submitted in writing with a clear explanation of the reason for the request. Out of fairness to those who submit their work on time, late work for which an extension has been granted will normally be graded down by one-half letter grade for each day it is late.

8. PLAGIARISM POLICY

In research and on exams students must clearly distinguish between their own words and sources they cite. Failure to credit sources that are cited constitutes plagiarism and may result in a grade of "F". For details consult the "St. John's Seminary Academic and Doctrinal Integrity Policy," downloadable from the course site on Canvas.

9. RUBRICS for ASSESSMENT (Evaluation)

RUBRIC FOR OVERALL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

	Not Acceptable Student Performance	Acceptable Student Performance	Hoped -for Learning Outcomes
Cultural Awareness	Ignores or is unaware of cultural differences in approaches to issues concerning bioethics.	Does not take note of issues of cultural significance in case studies.	Responds appropriately to culturally-conditioned questions concerning bioethics.
Application of Catechism and relevant Magisterial Texts	Does not cite or is unaware of catechetical or magisterial norms.	Misses some magisterial/catechetical applications.	Is able to apply magisterial and catechetical teaching concerning bioethics.
Theology and History of Church teaching	Does not take note of the historical development of Church teaching	Has a general sense of history and theology of Catholic bioethics.	Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of history and theology of Catholic teaching on bioethics.

RUBRIC FOR MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAMINATION CASE STUDIES

A. Case Studies	Students present facts of the case but do not distinguish between the most important issues and/or pay unnecessary attention to less-relevant details.	Students present relevant facts and distinguish between significant issues but miss important aspects.	Students present the relevant facts of the case clearly and demonstrate a deep understanding of the underlying issues.
	1 2 3	4 5 6 7	8 9 10
B. Relevant Scripture and Magisterial Teaching	Students do not cite relevant scripture passages, or magisterial texts in their discussion of the case.	Students demonstrate only limited use of scripture and relevant magisterial teaching.	Students cite and appropriately discuss relevant biblical texts and magisterial texts.
	1 2 3	4 5 6 7	8 9 10
C. Pastoral Response	Students do not adapt their responses to the unique circumstances of individuals involved in the case.	Students display empathy but neglect significant issues of the case.	Students are empathetic and appropriately adapt their responses to the significant issues in the case.
	1 2 3	4 5 6 7	8 9 10

10. COURSE OUTLINE *and* READINGS

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS:

WEEK 1:

1. INTRODUCTION to the COURSE:

Readings: Course Syllabus and Course Website.

2. PRINCIPLES of CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY in BIOETHICS:

2.00. Relationship Between Moral Theology and Pastoral Theology: The Principle of Gradualness.

2.01. Consequentialist and Deontological Morality; Our Final End (*telos*); 2.02. Natural Law; 2.03. Double Effect; 2.04. Virtue Theory.

2.05. Formation of Conscience (*Form. Consc. Faith. Cit.* §17-18) ; 2.06. Prudence (*FCFC* §19-20) ; 2.07. Intrinsic Evil (*FCFC* §22-23) ; 2.08. Avoid Both Moral Equivalence and Misuse of Distinctions (*FCFC* §27-29) ; 2.09. Limiting Harm /Choosing Lesser Evil. (*FCFC* §31-33) ;

2.10 A Brief Glimpse at the Place of Bioethics in Current Catholic Social Teaching and Controversy (USCCB, *Twenty Questions...*)

Readings: Course Webpages; Austriaco, *Bioethics and Beatitude*, ch.1 pp. 7-42. May, *Catholic Bioethics* ch. 2, pp. 49-66. Ford, *The Prenatal Person: Ethics From Conception To Birth*, ch.s 1, “Morality for Persons” (pp. 1-26), and 3, “Ethical Principles for Healthcare” (pp. 41-52). USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. USCCB, *Twenty Questions for Faithful Citizens*.

WEEK 2:

3. THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC BIOETHICS

- 3.1. ANCIENT MEDICINE: 3.1.1. Hippocratic Texts; 3.1.2. Ancient Medical Practice; 3.1.3. Aristotle's Embryology; 3.1.4. Roman Infanticide and Abortion; 3.1.5. Jewish Respect for Life

Readings: Course Website; Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo*, ch. 1-4 (pp.1-56).

- 3.2. EARLY CHRISTIANITY: 3.2.1. Christ the Divine Physician; 3.2.2. Christian Devotion to Life; 3.2.3. Canonical Penalties and Theologians on Abortion and Contraception; 3.2.4. Augustine on Ensoulment and Suicide;

Readings: Course Website; Jones, ch. 5, pp. 57-74.

WEEK 3:

- 3.3. MEDIEVAL MEDICAL CARE: 3.3.1. Compassion for the Sick; 3.3.2. Medieval Medical Practice; 3.3.3. Penitentials and Aquinas on Life and Animation; 3.3.4. Debates on Abortion

Readings: Course Website; Jones, ch. 8, pp. 109-125.

- 3.4. RENAISSANCE BIOETHICS: 3.4.1. Anatomy and Surgery; 3.4.2. Moralists on Pain and Abortion; 3.4.3. Magisterium on Abortion

Readings: Course Website; Atkinson, "Theological History".

WEEK 4:

- 3.5. THE 17th and 18th CENTURIES: 3.5.1. Microscopy; 3.5.2. Pharmacology; 3.5.3. Medical Dogmatism and Lay Scepticism; 3.5.4. Alphonsus Ligouri

Readings: Course Website.

- 3.6. THE 19th CENTURY: 3.6.1. Anesthesia; 3.6.2. Antisepsis and Infectious Disease; 3.6.3. Nursing; 3.6.4. Public Health and Hygiene; 3.6.5. Medical Prestige and Paternalism; 3.6.6. Pius IX and Abortion

Readings: Course Website; Jones, ch. 3, pp. 72-74.

WEEK 5:

- 3.7. THE 20th CENTURY: 3.7.1. Eugenics and Pius XI (*introd.*); 3.7.2 Antimicrobials; IV Therapy; 3.7.3. Nürnberg, Informed Consent, and Pius XII (*introd.*); 3.7.4. Respirators and CPR

Readings: Course Website.

- 3.8. MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS on BIOETHICS (*introd.*):

Readings: Course Website; May, ch. 1, pp. 21-46.

WEEK 6:

4. EUGENICS:

Readings: Sofair, "Eugenic Sterilization"; May ch. 6, pp. 237-258.

WEEK 7:

5. INFORMED CONSENT and PROXY CONSENT:

Readings: May, ch. 6. pp. 213-228; Pope Pius XII, *Address to Histopath. Conference; The Nürnberg Code*

WEEK 8:

6. ABORTION:

Readings: Course Website; *Declaration On Procured Abortion*; May, ch. 5, pp. 165-212.

"Uterine Isolation" and Related Matters.

WEEK 9:
7. MARRIAGE, THEOLOGY of the BODY and HUMANAÆ VITAE: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; <i>Humanae Vitae</i> ; May, ch. 3, pp. 67-72.
WEEK 10:
8. FERTILITY and NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; May, ch. 3, pp. 73-87.
9. ASSISTED REPRODUCTION: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; May, ch. 3, pp. 88-94.
WEEK 11:
10. IN-VITRO FERTILIZATION and PLIGHT of EMBRYOS: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; <i>Donum Vitae</i> ; <i>Evangelium Vitae</i> ; May, ch. 3, pp. 95-113.
11. STEM-CELL RESEARCH: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; May ch. 6, pp. 229-236; <i>Donum Vitae</i> .
WEEK 12-13:
12. EUTHANASIA: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; May ch. 7, pp. 259-284; <i>Declaration on Euthanasia</i> .
13. CARE for the UNCONSCIOUS: COMA, THE PERSIST. VEG. STATE, and BRAIN DEATH: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; May ch. 7-8, pp. 285-352; <i>Concept of Brain Death is Valid</i> .
WEEK 14:
14. NUTRITION and HYDRATION: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; Pope John Paul II on <i>The Persistent Vegetative State; Nutrition and Hydration-Moral and Pastoral Reflections</i> . [review from prev. week: May, ch. 7, pp. 285-301].
15. PALLIATIVE CARE: <i>Readings:</i> Pope John Paul I, I on <i>Palliative Care</i> . Additional Documents of the Magisterium on Palliative Care [<i>Catechism</i> § 2279, 1994; John Paul II, <i>Evangelium Vitae</i> , 1985; Addresses of Benedict XVI 2006 & 2007; USCCB <i>Physician-Assisted Suicide - Threat to Improved Palliative Care</i> 2011] (on course website); Broeckaert, Bert, “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide” in Walsh, <i>Palliative Medicine</i> , 1st ed., ch 21 (2008 Saunders/Elsevier); Austriaco, <i>Biomedicine and Beatitude</i> , ch.5 “Bioethics at the End of Life” (pp. 135-169, esp. pp. 167-169, “Highlighting the Role of Virtue in Bioethics” [Encouraging hope at the end of life:]. <i>Samaritanus Bonus</i> (2020); <i>On the Care of Persons in the Critical and Terminal Phases of Life</i> .
WEEK 15:
16. ORGAN DONATION and BRAIN DEATH: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website; <i>Evangelium Vitae</i> ; Pope Benedict XVI, <i>Address to Pontif. Acad. for Life</i> , 2008.
17. CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS, ADVANCE DIRECTIVES, and the PROVISION of HEALTH CARE: <i>Readings:</i> Course Website.

11. PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Course Learning Objective §3.1, above, (“In written essays and oral presentations on case studies, students will cite, explain, and pastorally apply relevant biblical and Catholic magisterial texts . . .”) corresponds to the following Program Objectives for the Master of Divinity Degree (SJS 2020-22 Catalog, p. 50):

1. [formation in the Roman Catholic tradition]
 - [1.1.] The student interprets Scripture from within the living tradition of the Church.
 - [1.2.] The student applies Scripture in concrete pastoral contexts.
 - [1.3.] The student demonstrates a complete, unified vision of the truths contained in the doctrinal, moral, and liturgical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.
2. [effective communicator, teacher, . . . of the Word of God]
 - [2.4.] The student teaches clearly and faithfully the message of Jesus Christ and his Church.
4. [pastoral skills]
 - [4.1.] The student demonstrates competent theological inquiry, reflection, and application in pastoral ministry.
 - [4.2.] The student provides competent spiritual and pastoral guidance.