

SE 571—Christian Ethics and Social Issues

Patrick T. Smith, Course Instructor
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Spring Semester 2012

Friday Sessions, 6:00-10:00 PM; Saturday Sessions, 9:00-4:30 PM
(February 10-11; March 23-24; April 13-14)

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COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description

This course is a study of the interaction between Christian ethics and social issues. Attention is given to biblical, theological and philosophical perspectives on **select** contemporary social issues facing the church.

Course Textbooks

Required:

1. Carroll R., M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, Baker Academic Books, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8010-3566-1
2. Hoffmeier, James K. *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-4335-0607-9
3. Hollinger, Dennis. *Choosing the Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Books, 2002. ISBN: 0-8010-2563-X
4. Rae, Scott. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics, Third Edition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. ISBN: 0-3102-9109-7
5. Additional essays listed on the course schedule below are provided by the course instructor

Course Objectives

The student who successfully completes this course should develop and demonstrate the following skills:

1. To become familiar with the academic discipline of Christian ethics in its central concepts, methodological approaches, biblical and theological norms, and the variety of critical issues it seeks to address.
2. To develop a holistic framework for understanding the scope and content of Christian ethical decision making.

3. To understand some of the reasons for the social and ecclesiastical controversies surrounding ethical issues and learn to relate responsibly to both arenas of controversy.
4. To encourage personal moral growth, analytical thinking, and obedient discipleship as one loves the Lord with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength.
5. To gain skills and insights necessary as a Christian to serve in constructive, corrective, and redemptive ways in relation to the issues taken up in the course.

Course Requirements

1. **Class Attendance/ Participation**—Students are required to attend and participate in all class sessions for the entire meeting times. The instructor will carefully monitor the in-class participation of each student and this will factor into the student's final grade. This will include mandatory discussion groups where students will be graded on their participation and leader summaries.
2. **Assigned Readings-** Some of the reading material is covered in class. However, there are elements that will not be brought out in class but are still essential to gaining an understanding of the material and successfully completing the course. Therefore, the reading provides a rich and necessary component of the learning experience.
 - a) **Textbook Reading-** The students will be responsible for reading the assigned sections of the course textbooks stated below.
 - b) **Reading Handouts-** Students are also responsible for reading all handouts and essays passed out in class by the instructor. There will be some topics not fully discussed in the textbooks. These essays serve as a necessary supplement to the material discussed in class and in the assigned texts.

Students are to indicate if they have completed the reading assignments for the course by attaching a statement to the final projects to be turned in for the course.

3. **Book Review/Interaction Essay**—Each student is to write a combined book review of both Carroll R. and Hoffmeier's textbooks on immigration and Christian ethics. In the first part of the assignment, students are to summarize the basic thrust of each text, then highlight each book's strengths and some of the issues perceived to be missing based on their stated objectives for writing the text. This section should be no more than 3 pages.

In the second section of the paper, imagine what one would say to the other in dialogue and response to their respective positions. In other words, where would they likely agree or what would the one affirm in the other's position? Where would they disagree? Do they agree on the exegesis and interpretation of key passages? How, if at all, do they differ on the application of the biblical material on the issue? How much does their methodology (or starting points) of theological reflection on the issue affect their conclusions, if at all? What did you learn about this issue after reading the authors that you did not know prior? What did you find beneficial about the discussion for the context of ministry? What do you think your church's approach to this issue should be?

There is no need in a short assignment such as this to attempt an answer every question listed above. Just use them as an initial primer in your thinking in the second part of the assignment (this section should be no more than 3-4 pages). Be sure to highlight how one author is distinct from one another.

The entire interaction paper is to be between 6-7 typed pages (strict limit), double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. The papers will be graded on their clarity, accuracy, rigor and faithfulness in addressing the issue. **This assignment is due March 23, 2012 at the beginning of class.**

- 4. Final Exam**—Each student will be responsible for a final exam. It will be either a written exam or a multiple-choice exam to be taken on-line.

Course Grading

Discipline is an important part of all aspects of life whether spiritual, physical, or mental. The course is designed in such a way that faithfulness and diligence on your part will be rewarded. The student's grade will be determined as follows:

Required Readings/Participation	20%
Book Review and Interaction Essay	40%
Final Exam	40%

The following letter grades and their achievement equivalents are used by the instructor to reflect a student's performance in the course:

Grade	Achievement	Quality Points	
A	100-96	<i>Work of exceptional quality</i>	4.00
A-	95-93		3.70
B+	92-90		3.30
B	89-86	<i>Work of commendable quality</i>	3.00
B-	85-83		2.70
C+	82-80		2.30
C	79-76	<i>Work of acceptable but minimal quality</i>	2.00
C-	75-73		1.70
D+	72-70		1.30
D	69-66	<i>Substandard and barely passing work</i>	1.00
D-	65-63		0.70
F	62-below	<i>Failure</i>	0.00

Grading Rubric: After all the requirements of the course have been completed, the instructor will use the following rubric for the assignment of grades, based on the overall performance of the class. The grades assigned will represent the instructor's interpretation of the following standard:

- A = Outstanding mastery of the subject: excellence is evident in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; unusual ability to retain, analyze and synthesize the material; with a positive attitude making productive contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- B = Superior mastery of the subject: sincere effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; ability to master the essential aspects of the material; with a mostly consistent attitude in making contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- C = Basic mastery of the subject: inconsistent effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; engagement with the material but difficulty in grasping some of its aspects; with occasional contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- D = Inadequate mastery of the subject.
- F = Failure: course must be repeated.
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Warning on Plagiarism: Helpful guidelines on plagiarism can be found on the Indiana University website <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/plagarism.html>. This document has the official recognition of the Gordon-Conwell faculty and provides very helpful tools to guide you as you prepare for your assignments. If a student is caught plagiarizing, the student will receive the consequences of this act according to the process established by the seminary.

Intellectual Property Rights: To protect the professor's intellectual property rights with regard to classroom content, students are asked to refrain from audio and video recording of classes, as well as audio, video, and written publication (including internet posting and broadcasting) or live transmission of classroom proceedings.

Internet Usage: Students are asked to refrain from accessing the Internet at any point during class sessions, unless otherwise instructed by the professor. "Surfing the web," checking email, and other internet-based activities are distracting to other students and to the professor, and prevent the student from fully participating in the class session.

Course Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Reading/Assignments</i>
<p><u>Session #1</u> February 10-11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Introductory Issues in Doing Christian Ethics ❖ Biblical & Theological Issues ❖ Toward a Biblical Theology of Social Justice 	<p>Background Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hollinger, <i>Choosing the Good</i>, Parts 1-3, then also read Chapter 10 • Steven Roy, “Embracing Social Justice: Reflections from the Storyline of Scripture,” <i>Trinity Journal</i>, Vol. 30 NS, No. 1, 2009, pp. 3-48 • Rae chapters on Christian Ethics, Major Figures, Making Ethical Decisions
<p><u>Session #2</u> March 23-24</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Christianity and Violence ❖ Immigration ❖ Economics 	<p>Background Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rae chapters on Capital Punishment, Morality of War • M.L. King, Jr., “Letter from a B’ham City Jail” • Completed reading of the immigration books by Hoffmeier and Carroll <p>Assignment Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Immigration Book Review/Interaction Essay</i>
<p><u>Session #3</u> April 13-14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bioethics as Social Ethics ❖ Ethics, Culture and Society <p><i>Take Home Exam Questions will be passed out this session</i></p>	<p>Background Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hollinger, <i>Choosing the Good</i>, Chs. 9, 11, 12 • Rae, chapters on Abortion, Reproductive Technologies, Genetic Technologies, Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia, • Essays on the HIV/AIDS crisis and the church from the book <i>The Hope Factor</i>
<p>Final Assignments Due</p>	<p>DUE: <i>Final Exam</i>, Monday, May 7, 2012</p>	<p>Will accept by email attachment file or hard copy by “snail” mail</p>