

**ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
AGTS WEST – SACRAMENTO CAMPUS**

**P THE 640: The Local Church and Social Justice
(3 Credits)**

Professor: Charlie Self, Ph.D.
Email: drcharlieself@yahoo.com
Phone: 408-307-1339

Spring 2009
Jan 8 – Feb 5, 2009

Course Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines head-on the issues of social (in)justice, (in)equality and the exploitation and liberation of vulnerable social groups from a thoroughly Pentecostal perspective. A solid Biblical foundation for the church's involvement in these issues will be established, along with an examination of the failures and successes of the historic streams of the Church. Global issues such as AIDS, at-risk children, poverty, racial and sexual exploitation and the distribution of resources will be carefully surveyed. The varied responses of Christians will be examined for their fidelity to Scripture and effectiveness in application. We will explore the ideologies that often affect and infect the contemporary interpretation and application of Scripture. Some focus will be given to the "Christian Left" and "Christian Right" that both claim loyalty to Scriptures while operating from a different "canon within a canon"

What makes this course unique is the focus on the local church as the key to God's administration of justice through the Spirit as believers await the Coming of Christ and the full establishment of justice. Bishop N.T. Wright prophetically calls the Church to cooperate with the Spirit in God programs to "set the world to rights" while living in between the two Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Put simply, every believer in every local church has a role to play in bringing justice and love to their world.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, the diligent student will be able to

1. Articulate a Biblically cohesive theology of the Kingdom of God and its impact on social engagement for individual believers, the local church and larger agencies of change. The student will avoid the extremes of reducing the Christian faith to social action or spiritual isolation and retreat from "the world."
2. Evaluate strategies for social transformation and create a system for determining a particular community's transformational mission.
3. Live out the Gospel in a tangible way through the local church, either by leading/participating in a special outreach or preparing a plan for impact approved by their local spiritual leaders.

4. Understand several current issues confronting the world and their neighborhood and articulate the ideological and practical challenges involved in meeting the needs.

TEXTBOOKS

Cochran, C.E., et. al., Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 2007

Lausanne Occasional Papers – from the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism Papers # 21 and 33 – free downloads from their website

Sider, R. J., Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America. Baker Books 2nd edition. 2007

Sowell, Thomas, Economic Facts and Fallacies. Basic Books 2007

Stassen, G.H. and Gushee, D.P., Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 2003

METHODOLOGIES

We will learn through lectures, discussion, film/video and guest presenters who are working “on the ground” with the vulnerable.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Consistent attendance and active participation are essential. Insightful comments, intelligent questions and active interaction are the definition of involvement.
2. Two book reviews are due by the end of the class: One will be on Sider’s *Just Generosity* and the other on Sowell’s *Economic Facts and Fallacies*. These will be 4-5 pages and consist of three parts: 1) a summary of the author’s key ideas; 2) evaluation of these ideas in light of Scripture; and 3) the student’s own evaluation.
3. One research paper will be due within 30 days of the end of class. It will be a 10-12-page work focused on what the student’s own local church is doing or can do to make a difference in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic life of its “parish.”
4. Students will participate in at least two social justice activities in the course of the semester and submit a 1-2 page summary of their experiences.

GRADING

Attendance and participation: 10%

Book Reviews: 40%

Research Paper: 30%

Activity Reports: 20%

GRADING SYSTEM:

AGTS uses the following to determine grades:

94%-100% - A; 90%-93% - A-
87%-89% - B+; 84%-86% - B; 80%-83% - B-
C grades in same range
D grades in same range

Professor note on grades: An “A” must be earned, it is not a given. A “B” represents acceptable work for a professional. A “C” means, “OK, you know some basics, but this was not your cup of tea.”

COURSE PLAN/SCHEDULE

January 8: Biblical-theological Foundations for Social Justice (Reading: Stassen and Gushee – first half). Important note: we will examine the idea of the Beatitudes as “transforming initiatives” in depth.

January 15: The Lenses of Social Vision: Christian Historical and Contemporary Reflection (Reading: Cochran, Five Views) Special note: we will distinguish ideology from theology.

January 22: On the Frontlines: The Evangelical Left and Local Impact (Read Sider) Note: Christians have very diverse views on most socio-ethical issues.

January 29: Compassionate Conservatives and Economic Realities (Read Sowell)

February 5: The Local Church and Social Transformation

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A full list of references will be distributed in class or attached separately as an online document.