

**ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

BTHM/PHIM 640/THEM 639

The Church and Contemporary Moral Issues

Post-Summer Semester, 2005

Intensive Format: June 27-July 1

M-F 1:00-5:00/6:00-10:00 p.m.

Instructor: Murray W. Dempster, Ph.D.

A. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to develop a constructive Christian ethic as a basis from which to address the moral problems confronting the contemporary church. Emphases will be placed on exploring the relationship between theological reflection and ethical thinking, and on identifying the church's moral mission in society.

B. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

In order to provide a methodology for ethical decision-making on representative contemporary moral issues confronting church leaders, the following objectives have been identified:

- 1) to discuss the moral mission of the church in the world;
- 2) to provide an understanding of the diversity and the unity of ethical thinking within the Bible;
- 3) to appreciate the relevance of philosophical categories to bridge the gap between biblical ethics and a contemporary Christian ethic;
- 4) to propose a procedure for case study analysis of contemporary moral issues;
- 5) to identify the practical strategies which implement a biblically grounded Christian ethic; and,
- 6) to investigate the importance of theological reflection in formulating a meaningful Christian ethic for today's church in a post-modern world.

C. COURSE FORMAT:

The objectives of the course will be achieved through a combination of lecture and class discussion of the assigned reading materials.

D. INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE HOURS:

Due to the intensive format, no regular office hours are scheduled. Discussion times may be arranged with the instructor during class breaks and other free times.

E. BOOKS TO BE PURCHASED BY EACH STUDENT:

Birch, Bruce C., and Larry L. Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*. Revised & Expanded Edition. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989.

Frankena, William K. *Ethics*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Maston, T.B. *Biblical Ethics*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988.

Mott, Stephen Charles. *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982.

F. COMPILED READINGS PROVIDED FOR THE STUDENT IN “A DEMPSTER READER”:

Dempster, Murray W. Case Study Analysis of Artificial Insemination with Donor. “Integrative Inquiry.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 18 (Spring 1990): 86-91.

_____. “The Church's Moral Witness: A Study of Glossolalia in Luke's Theology of Acts.” *Paraclete* 23 (Winter 1989): 1-7.

_____. “Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God.” *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. 22-43.

_____. “Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of Social Justice.” *PNEUMA: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9 (Fall 1987): 129-153.

Dempster, Murray W. “Social Concern in the Context of Jesus' Kingdom Mission and Message.” *Transformation: An International Evangelical Dialogue on Mission and Ethics* 16 (April/June 1999): 43-53. Reprinted as “A Theology of the Kingdom: A Pentecostal Contribution.” *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel*. Ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden. Oxford, UK and Irvine, CA, USA: Regnum Books, International, 1999. 45-75.

G. COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

SESSION 1 (Monday, June 27, 1:00-5:00 p.m.)

Theme: **Introducing the Class and the Subject Area.**

Theme: **Hermeneutical Posture: Reading the Bible from a Moral Point of View**

SESSION 2 (MONDAY, June 27, 6:00-10:00 p.m.)

Theme: **The Development of Old Testament Ethics.**

Reading: Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 1-144.
Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of Social Justice," 129-153.

SESSION 3 (Tuesday, June 28, 1:00-5:00 p.m.)

SESSION 4 (Tuesday, June 28, 6:00-10:00 p.m.)

SESSION 5 (Wednesday, June 29, 1:00-5:00 p.m.)

Themes: **The Jesus Tradition:** A Theology of the Kingdom of God and an Ethics of Response to God's Rule.

The Pauline Tradition: A Theology of the New Life "in Christ" and an Ethics of Formation of Christ's Life within Personal Character and Community Life.

The Johannine and Petrine Traditions: A Theology of Jesus' Life as the Christ and an Ethics of Imitating the Pattern of Jesus' Life.

The "Later Apostolic" Tradition: A Theology of Sound Doctrine and an Ethics of Obligation to Godly Living.

Readings: Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 145-288.
Dempster, "Social Concern in the Context of Jesus' Kingdom Mission and Message." *Transformation: An International Evangelical Dialogue on Mission and Ethics* 16 (April/June 1999): 43-53.

SESSION 6 (Wednesday, June 29, 6:00-10:00 p.m.)

Theme: **The Role of the Bible in Christian Ethics within Twentieth Century Theological Thought.**

Reading: Birch & Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, 141-188.

SESSION 7 (Thursday, June 30, 1:00-5:00 p.m.)

Theme: **The Relevance of Philosophical Categories in Providing Conceptual Clarity in Ethical Thinking.**

Readings: Birch & Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, 35-119.
Dempster, "Integrative Inquiry," 86-91.
Frankena, *Ethics*, 1-116.
Gustafson, "Context Vs. Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics," *Christian Ethics and the Community*, 101-126.
(Handout)

Theme: **On the Relationship of Love, Justice and Respect of Persons.**

Reading: Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 3-106.

SESSION 8 (Thursday, June 30, 6:00-10:00 p.m.)

Theme: **The Role of the Church as an Agent of Evangelism, Social Service and Social Change.**

Readings: Birch & Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, 17-34,
120-140.
Dempster, "The Church's Moral Witness," 1-7.
Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern and the Kingdom of God," 22-43.

SESSION 9 (Friday, July 1, 1:00-5:00 p.m.)

Theme: **A Multiplicity of Strategies for Implementing Church Mission.**

Reading: Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 109-208.

SESSION 10 (Friday, July 1, 6:00-10:00 p.m.)

Theme: **Creation, the Fall and Redemption as Key Episodes in the Biblical Narrative of God's Story: The Moral Ambiguity of Being Historical Creatures**

Reading: Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 1-16.

Theme: **Reading the Biblical Narrative of God's Story from a Moral Point of View: God's Moral Character as the Absolute Source of Christian Moral Life**

Reading: Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 17-34.

Theme: **God's Story and the Human Story: Moral Virtues of Character, Moral Principles of Conduct and Moral Responsibility**

Reading: Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 35-71.

D. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Requirements for the course include prompt and regular attendance of all class sessions; participation in class discussion of assigned readings; and mailing the research paper or the reflective essay to the instructor postmarked **no later than Friday, September 2, 2005**.

Option A: Submission of a research paper of between 15 and 20 pages that focuses on an area of concern within the general area of the Church & Contemporary Moral Issues. A list of suggested topics is included in this syllabus. These topics are not exhaustive but are designed to stimulate your thinking toward an area of interest that you may wish to investigate. The research paper must be postmarked mail no later than Friday, Friday, September 2, 2005, two months after the final class session.

Option B: Submission of a reflective essay of between 15 and 20 pages designed to demonstrate integrative mastery of the course materials in formulating a theology of the church's moral mission in society. The take-home final examination is included in this syllabus. The take-home final examination must be postmarked no later than Friday, September 2, 2005, two months after the final class session.

Please mail your research paper or reflective essay to the following address:

Dr. Murray W. Dempster
Office of the President
Vanguard University
55 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

E. COURSE GRADES:

OPTION A: If you choose to fulfill the requirements of the course by writing a research paper, then your course grade will be largely determined by the quality of your research paper. The grade will be determined by the following seven criteria:

1) the organization of the paper centers around a clearly discernible statement of purpose and procedure;

- 2) the alternative options on the moral issue under investigation are articulated with clarity and fairmindedness;
- 3) the sub-issues relevant to the moral problem are analyzed with precision and scope;
- 4) the biblical exegesis, the theological concepts, the social, economic, and political factors, and the philosophical reasoning brought to bear on the analysis of the moral issue are valid, sound and pertinent;
- 5) the main argument of the paper is clearly identified and persuasively sustained;
- 6) the conclusions of the paper are based on the evidence identified in the research presented;
- 7) the overall coherence of the paper is maintained by strong transition statements which link together the various sections of the paper into an integrated, cohesive whole.

OPTION B: If you choose to fulfill the requirements of the course by writing a reflective essay, then your course grade will be largely determined by 1) the comprehensiveness of your essay in incorporating the course materials into your narrative, 2) the capacity to interpret the course materials accurately, and 3) the ability to integrate the materials into your own theological perspective on the church's moral mission in society.

THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES Option A: Suggested Research Topics to Stimulate Thinking

Issue-oriented Analysis

The Church and the Moral Issue of...

Violence and Revolution

Conscientious Objection

Poverty and the Welfare System

Civil Disobedience

Criminal Justice and Penal Reform

Gun Control

Abortion

Homosexuality

Domestic Violence

Child Abuse

In Vitro Fertilization

Sexual Equality

Racial Justice

The Morality of War

Nuclear Arms

Prayer in the Public Schools

Tax Exemption for Churches

Capital Punishment

Birth Control

Pre-marital Sexual Relations

Divorce and Remarriage

Pornography, Obscenity and Censorship

Genetic Engineering

Artificial Insemination and Surrogate Motherhood

Euthanasia

Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Environmental Responsibility

The AIDS Crisis

The Social Responsibility of Corporations

Structural Evil and World Hunger

Exegetical Papers

The Ethical Teaching of the *Haustafeln* in Ephesians and I Peter

A Comparative Ethical Analysis of the State in Romans 13 and Revelation 13

The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Formation

The Moral Significance of the Concept of "Servanthood" in the Teaching of Jesus

The Economic and Ethical Implications of the Levitical Jubilee Principle

The Moral Meaning of the Decalogue

The Ethical Justification of Outlawing Interfamily Sexual Relations in the Mosaic Law

The Apostle Paul and the Role of Women in the Church

The Meaning and Function of New Testament Ethical Lists

The Indicative-Imperative Relationship in Paul's Moral Counsel

The Ethical Appraisal of Homosexuality in the Bible

Interpretive Studies

The Materialist Reading of Scripture in Third World Liberation Theology

The Role of Scripture in Karl Barth's View of the Moral Problem of War

The Role of Scripture in Helmut Thielicke's Assessment of Sexual Ethics

The Role of Scripture in Reinhold Niebuhr's Thought on Racial Justice

The Ethical Significance of John Calvin's Third Use of the Law

An Analysis of Ernst Troeltsch's View of Eschatology and Social Ethical Quietism in the Early Church

An Assessment of the Role Played by Charismatic Gifts in Confronting "the Powers" in the Ethical Thought of William Stringfellow

A Critical Exposition of Wolfhart Pannenberg's Ethics of the Kingdom of God

An Analysis of the Biblical Fidelity of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's View of Lying and Telling the Truth

A Comparison of Liberation Themes in the Thought of Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether

The Concept of Justice and the Practice of Civil Disobedience in the Social Ethics of Martin Luther King.

Virtue and Character in the Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas

Richard Mouw's "Divine Command Ethics" and the Application of His Imperative Approach to Medical Care

CLSG 715: THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES
Option B: Reflective Essay

Write a coherent essay on the nature of the church's moral mission in society that includes your response to the following three areas of concern.

In concert with the source material from class lectures and Maston's *Biblical Ethics*, describe your understanding of the diversity and the unity of New Testament ethical teaching. What implications do you see in the diversity/unity of New Testament ethics in terms of viewing the Bible as the canon rule for faith and practice in developing a Christian ethic?

Utilizing Birch and Rasmussen's *Bible and Ethics in Christian Life* as a guide, comment on your view of the normative role of the Bible as an "authority" in reflecting on current moral issues in today's world. Particularly address the issue of whether or not

you believe that Birch and Rasmussen are heading in the right direction by bridging the gap between biblical studies and today's Christian moral concerns by recourse to the categories of philosophical ethics, such as those developed by William Frankena in *Ethics*.

Drawing from Mott's typology of strategies for implementing social change identified in *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, what tactics do you view as particularly effective in aiding a church fulfill its moral mission in society? Do you agree with Mott's view of the church as "a counter-community"? Indicate how Mott's view of the church fits into a more wholistic model of the church's mission and ministry in the world.

Do you buy into Hauerwas' critique that the modern agenda of establishing absolute human knowledge has led Christian theology and ethics down a path that is not compatible with Christian conceptions of truth? In what sense is Hauerwas's approach a post-modern construction of Christian ethics? Do you agree with Hauerwas's narrative approach to Christian ethics and his emphasis on Christian ethics as an ethics of virtue? Do you think that Hauerwas is charting the way of the future for a Christian ethic that has relevance in a growing pluralistic society and a post-modern world?