

Contemporary Issues in Christian Ethics

CHR 244

MWF 9, Jennings 325

3 hours credit

Dr. David P. Gushee

Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy

Senior Fellow, Carl F.H. Henry Center for Christian Leadership

Office: Jennings 328

Tel: 661-5024 (o), 668-9837 (h)

email: dgushee@uu.edu

website: www.davidgushee.com

Office Hours:

MW 1-4 &

by appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

An examination of the most significant contemporary moral issues facing the church and American society, with emphasis on Christian response both in terms of moral conviction and moral engagement.

Note: This course is the second in a two-part introductory sequence in Christian ethics. The first course, Approaches to Moral Decision Making, is offered each Fall. Either course can be used for the Christian studies core, and both are required for the major or minor in Christian ethics.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. To achieve personal moral growth--toward sound character, wise moral decision making, honorable personal conduct, responsible Christian citizenship, and a passion to serve and obey Jesus Christ as Lord.

B. To become familiar in an introductory way with the most significant contemporary moral issues facing the church and our society, leading to a greater ability to function as a morally responsible Christian disciple, church member, and citizen.

C. To develop or deepen the habit of reading a range of reputable national newspapers and magazines.

D. To grow in the ability to research, analyze, and discuss moral issues from within the framework of a genuinely Christian worldview and an informed approach to Christian ethics.

E. To come to a greater understanding of the sources and implications of the bitter moral conflicts that divide religious bodies, American society, and the international community.

F. To begin to be personally and concretely involved in responding to moral and social problems as an expression of Christian faith and discipleship in a suffering world, considering personal, church, cultural, and political engagement.

G. To gain knowledge of some of the many agencies and organizations both within and outside the church that are engaged in addressing the pressing moral issues of our time, and to begin regular involvement with some of these agencies.

H. To obtain a firm foundation for further study of Christian ethics in the classroom and beyond.

III. TEXTBOOKS AND ASSIGNED READING

A. We read the Bible in most class sessions. Please bring a modern translation of the Bible to class, and do all assigned Bible reading.

B. In addition to Scripture, you are required to read selections from the following two textbooks. They are available in the bookstore.

Clark/Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 2. Baker, 1996.
Gushee/Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*. IVP, 2003.

C. Several handouts will be distributed during the semester, which will be required reading unless otherwise indicated.

D. Please read a reputable national newspaper or newsmagazine—in print or online—at least three times a week throughout this course. For the purposes of this class, these include: the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, and USA Today; of magazines, Time, Newsweek, the New Republic, and the Weekly Standard.

E. Suggestions for further reading will be given throughout the semester.

IV. METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

A. Class time will be spent in class discussion of required readings, current events, and structured lectures.

B. All assignments are intended to be means of instruction rather than merely methods of evaluation.

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND METHODS OF EVALUATION

A. Course Requirements/Grade Determination

Grades will be determined on the basis of the following criteria. Full descriptions follow.

1. Exams.....300 points
2. Insight/Question Papers.....100 points
3. Current Events Awareness.....50 points
4. Service-Learning Project.....50 points
5. Moral Issue Paper.....100 points
6. Extra Credit.....up to 25 points
7. Attendance/Participation..... (see policy statement below)

The official Union University grading scale will be used in the course. Translated into point values for this course, it runs as follows:

570-600 A 510-569 B 450-509 C 390-449 D 000-389 F

B. Description of Assignments

1. Exams (3/3, 3/31, 4/28)--There will be three exams in the course. These will be rigorous objective tests. They will encompass the lectures, class discussions, handouts, and assigned reading of the section of course material we have just covered.
2. Insight/Question papers (10 such papers will be due on most Fridays at the start of class)--These one-page, typed, single-spaced papers, each worth 10 points, are designed to enhance your attention to, and engagement with, the assigned reading (and sometimes the lectures and class discussions). Each paper should have two parts: the "insight" section simply reports on something significant you have learned in the reading assigned for the week. You will report where you found this important nugget and interact briefly with it. The "question" section asks one nagging, unresolved, important question related to the reading, or perhaps in dialogue between the reading and class lectures. You will bring these to class on Fridays. They will help form the basis for our discussion on many of those days. **NOTE: TO RECEIVE CREDIT, THESE PAPERS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON THE DAY THEY ARE DUE. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**
3. Current Events Awareness (with Insight/Question papers)—Christians need to be newspaper readers. We need to pay attention to what is going on in the world and learn to interpret it well from within a Christian worldview. This is essential to any kind of social and ethical awareness. What I ask you to do each week that you turn in an I/Q paper is to attach at least one relevant article (from a reputable print or online newspaper or newsmagazine, as listed above). The best articles relate directly to the issue under discussion that week in class. I will give up to 5 points credit for each of these. They will be looked upon even more favorably if you jot down a comment or two discussing the significance of the article.

4. Service-Learning Project (5 pages, due 4/24). Christian ethics is not just about forming moral convictions, but also about crossing the line from knowledge to action by becoming personally involved in addressing moral problems. Therefore I want you to pick one form of hands-on action this semester that relates to issues discussed in this class. Your assignment is to spend at least one half-day involved in a ministry or project, then write a 5- page report on your experience, with the following dimensions:

a. Describe the experience and why you selected this particular project or assignment.

b. Concisely answer the following questions:

Did this experience deepen your interest in the issue involved? Why or why not?

Did it change your understanding or interpretation of the realities of this issue? Why or why not?

Did it surprise you in any way? Why or why not?

Did it challenge or confirm the moral norms you carried about this issue entering in?

What biblical texts are most relevant to this issue? How do they apply?

Find an assigned reading that speaks directly to this issue and discuss it.

What impact is this experience likely to have on your thinking and action about this issue in the future?

Examples of places of service: crisis pregnancy center, urban or overseas mission trip, homeless ministry, political activity, soup kitchen, IJM, clothes closet, nursing home ministry, hospital visitation, etc.

Note: This service experience must occur this semester, and cannot be a reflection on a prior experience. Get to work early on arranging such an opportunity. I will help you do so if necessary.

5. Moral Issue Paper (14-15 pages, due 5/15, 4 pm). **Proposal due on 4/3.** You will culminate your experience in this class by attempting to make a sound and compelling moral argument related to an important contemporary issue. Frame the paper in terms of this question: **What should Christians think and do about _____.** The paper should include the following elements:

a. *Define the Problem.* Define the issue you are considering as carefully as possible. Say why this is an important moral issue for the church today. Perhaps indicate any personal contact you have had with this issue or problem.

b. *Consider the Facts.* Lay out what the key facts and data are relevant to this issue. Research this part very carefully, showing in your paper that your sources of information are reliable and as unbiased as possible. Situate the issue within broader contexts--moral, legal, political, etc. Is the problem getting better or worse?

c. *Probe the Sources of Authority for Moral Insights.* Explore what the sources of authority have to say on this issue, through your own direct study of these sources and through your research of current books and articles relevant to this issue. Be especially thorough in your discussion of Scripture in its various genres.

d. *Take a Clear Position.* Describe and assess the various opinions within Christian circles about this issue. State what *you* think the church should teach related to this issue. Indicate why this is your conclusion. Respond to criticisms that might arise concerning your viewpoint.

e. *Offer a Ministry/Action Strategy.* A full moral response involves both conviction and engagement/action. Are there ministries the church could/should develop as a way of responding to this issue? What social or political actions must the church undertake in order to be a faithful people of God in dealing with this particular problem?

The issue you select should be something we discuss during the course. If you wish to tackle a different issue, I must approve it.

This is intended as a research *and* reflection paper. In terms of research, I expect that you will use course lectures and assigned readings, as well as at least 10 other books or serious articles one can find in the library or on the web. Be sure that most of your sources are timely, published within the last 5-7 years.

The proposal should name the topic and include at least six bibliographical entries. If I think you need to change the direction of your paper, I'll let you know then.

6. Extra Credit--A variety of extra credit opportunities will be presented this term. They include:

a. Credit for papers related to major guest speakers and events on campus. I will let you know which events I will consider Extra Credit events.

b. A movie night at the Gushee home. Come see us, watch a morally significant film, eat and drink and be merry and talk about the movie, then write a paper about it. I will announce the date later in the term.

c. A well-written letter to one or more of your government representatives related to an issue we discuss in class this term.

You may do one extra credit project only, with a value of up to 25 points. **All extra credit papers must be received by the last day of class, May 12 at 4 p.m.** Otherwise, there is no deadline for extra credit papers.

With the exception of letters to government officials, extra credit papers should be 3-4 pages in length, offering a summary of the event's content, major issues raised and new learning experienced, and, if possible, critical interaction with the material.

7. Attendance/Participation--I assume that you will attend class unless illness or other emergency prevents your attendance, and that you will participate vigorously and effectively. Attendance and participation can affect the grade up or down by 25 points, enough to determine a grade. Very poor attendance can result in automatic failure of the class. See below for official statement of attendance policies.

ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS

On Papers and Their Presentation: I prefer to receive papers in 12-point Times New Roman font, printed on a well-functioning printer, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, no plastic covers needed. Term papers should be double-spaced, follow the Chicago Manual of Style (Turabian) or MLA style, with a title page and full bibliography including all works cited. While small variations in referencing style are common, be consistent with whatever form you employ throughout the paper. If using Turabian, either endnotes or footnotes are acceptable. Paper grades include consideration of both literary/presentation quality and substantive content. Use inclusive language with reference to human beings ("humanity" rather than "man").

On Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft in which a writer passes off someone else's words as his or her own, either intentionally or unintentionally (through inadequate quotation use and footnoting). While intention is sometimes hard to judge, intentional plagiarism is expressly forbidden and will result in automatic failure, as discussed in the Union catalog. All other forms of cheating are, of course, forbidden as well. Be very careful about downloading material from the internet and using it in your term paper. Proper citation and quotation is required here as with all other bibliographic resources.

On Doubling Up Papers: The School of Christian Studies generally does not permit two uses of a single paper in two different classes. Please do not "double up" papers in this way. One alternative can be to write one paper of much greater depth. Do discuss this with me (and any other professor) if you are interested in doing this.

On Late Work: All papers and assignments are due at the start of class on the date assigned. Papers lose 5 points credit for every day that they are late, excluding Sundays. Papers turned in after the start of class are treated as if turned in the next day. If you turn in a late paper, be sure to note on the paper the date and time it was turned in. The *only* exceptions to this policy include family emergencies and bereavement. Absence from class due to official college functions does not constitute grounds for a no-penalty extension on a paper, nor do computer problems, relationship hassles, or other common stresses of university life. **NO PAPER WILL BE RECEIVED AFTER THE SCHEDULED START OF THE FINAL EXAM, WEDNESDAY 5/17 AT 8 A.M.**

On Lost Papers: Students are wise to keep both a hard copy and a computer version of every paper they write. If a paper turns up missing in this class, you are responsible for turning in a replacement version as soon as we discover the paper is missing.

On Attendance and Participation:

A. Regular class attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. The student is expected to attend classes regularly in accordance with Union's attendance policies. See catalog for official policy statement.

B. Class absences will be considered in two categories: excused and unexcused.

C. Excused absences include the following: emergencies, bereavement, documented illness, or official college functions approved by the Academic Affairs Office. The professor reserves the right to determine the validity of all absences.

D. Request for an absence to be excused must be made *in writing* either in advance of the absence or at the next class attended after the absence. Verbal communication of the absence or its reasons is insufficient.

E. If an exam is missed because of an excused absence, it may be made up. If the absence is unexcused, the student receives a 0 on that exam. This includes exams missed due to oversleeping. Whenever a student has advance knowledge that an exam must be missed due to an excused absence, the professor should be informed so that arrangements can be made.

F. Excessive absences by a student will be reported to the appropriate officials for counsel with the student.

G. Attendance and participation problems generally will be punished roughly as follows:

0-1 absences—great job	2 absences – -10 points
3 absences – -15 points	4 absences – -20 points
5 absences – -25 points	6 absences – -30 points
7+ absences—automatic F	

The professor reserves the right to adjust these attendance grades based on the quality of class participation.

H. Tardiness--arrival in class at any point after it starts--will be counted against the attendance grade. *Three tardies=one absence.*

I. Participation--The criteria of quality participation include the following: obvious completion of reading prior to coming to class, intelligent and informed participation in classroom discussion and any assigned projects or tasks, evidence of note-taking and active listening, and general quality of demeanor, engagement, and enthusiasm for course activities.

CHR 244 Contemporary Issues in Christian Ethics
 MWF 9-8:50 a.m.
 Tentative Course Schedule, Spring 2006
 Dr. David P. Gushee

PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

- 2/1 Course Organization and Requirements
- 2/3 Laying (Reviewing) the Groundwork: The Task of Christian Ethics
Clark/Rakestraw (CR), preface; Gushee/Stassen (GS), preface, ch. 1.
- 2/6 Key Vocabulary for Christian Ethics
GS, ch. 5
- 2/8 Learning to Think Ethically: Sources of Authority for Christian Ethics
GS, ch. 4
- 2/10 Learning to Argue Ethically: Constructing a Sound Christian Moral Argument
GS, ch. 3 (especially pp. 59-68)
Insight/Question Paper 1 due

PART TWO: LAW AND GOVERNMENT

- 2/13 The Source and Vocation of Government
Romans 13:1-7; GS, ch. 23
- 2/15 Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society
Mt. 13:24-30; Handout: Gushee, Christians and Politics, ch. 13
- 2/17 Historic Christian Social and Political Engagement
Mt. 5:13-16, 2 Sam 12:1-14; Handout: Gushee, Christians and Politics, ch. 1
Insight/Question Paper 2 due
- 2/20 Civil Disobedience and Resistance to Unjust Governments
Ex. 1-2, Acts 5; CR, ch. 11

PART THREE: RELATIONSHIPS OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

- 2/22 Race and Racism in Theological Perspective
Acts 2:1-21, Gal. 3:26-28; CR, ch. 7
- 2/24 Racial Injustice in American History and Contemporary Culture
GS, ch. 19; Insight/Question Paper 3 due

- 2/27 Capital Punishment: The Contemporary Context
GS, ch. 9
- 3/1 Capital Punishment: The Biblical Arguments
Gen. 9:5-6; Mt. 5:21-48, Jn 8:1-11; CR, ch. 12
- 3/3 **Midterm Exam 1**
- 3/6 Dimensions of Biblical Economic Ethics
Mt 6; GS, ch. 20, pp. 409-419
- 3/8 The Economic Systems Debate
GS, ch. 20, pp. 419-426
- 3/10 Economic Ethics: Elements of a Christian Lifestyle Response
1 Tim 6:3-10, 17-19; CR, ch. 9
Insight/Question Paper 4 due
- 3/13 Christian Environmental Ethics: Dimensions of the Ecological Crisis
Ps. 104; GS, ch. 21, pp. 427-435
- 3/15 Approaches to a Theological Ethic of Creation Care
Gen. 1; GS, ch. 21, pp. 435-443; CR, ch. 10
- 3/17 Personal and Social Lifestyle Implications of Creation Care
Gen. 6:11-22; GS, ch. 21, pp. 443-446
Insight/Question Paper 5 due
- 3/20-24 *Spring Break*
- 3/27 Learning to Tell the Truth
Mt 5:33-37; GS, ch. 18, pp. 369-380
- 3/29 Is It Ever Permissible to Lie or Deceive?
Josh 2; GS, ch. 18, pp. 380-388
- 3/31 **Midterm Exam 2**

PART FOUR: SEXUAL AND FAMILY ETHICS

- 4/3 A Biblical Perspective on the Marriage Covenant
Gen. 2:18-25, Mk 10:1-12; GS, ch. 13
Moral Issue paper proposal due
- 4/5 A Biblical Perspective on Divorce and Remarriage
Mt. 19:1-12; 1 Cor 7:1-15; CR, ch. 6
- 4/7 Sexuality in Biblical and Theological Perspective
Mt. 5:27-30; CR, ch. 4, pp. 166-173; GS, ch. 14, pp. 290-301
Insight/Question paper 6 due
- 4/10 Homosexuality
Rom. 1:18-32; CR, ch. 5; GS, ch. 14, pp. 307-311
- 4/12 Sexual Ethics: Situations and Applications
1 Thess 4:1-8; GS, ch. 14, pp. 301-307; CR, ch. 4, pp. 139-166
Insight/Question paper 7 due
- 4/14 Good Friday—class cancelled
- 4/17 Gender Roles: Historical Perspectives
GS, ch. 15
- 4/19 Gender Roles: Assessing the Biblical Arguments
Mt. 9:18-26; Gal. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; CR, ch. 8

PART FIVE: THE GOSPEL OF LIFE IN A WORLD OF DEATH

- 4/21 Peace and War: Introduction and Just War Theory
Mt. 5:38-48, Rom. 13:1-7; GS, ch. 7, pp. 149-165; CR, ch. 13, pp. 495-505
Insight/Question Paper 8 due
- 4/24 Pacifism
Rom. 12:9-21; GS, ch. 7, pp. 165-169; CR, ch. 13, pp. 505-524
Service-Learning Paper due
- 4/26 Just Peacemaking Theory/Conclusion
Mt. 5:21-26; GS, ch. 7, pp. 169-174
- 4/28 **Midterm Exam 3**
- 5/1 Abortion: Biblical and Theological Issues
Ex. 21:22-25, Lk 1:5-2:14; GS, ch. 10, pp. 215-225; CR, ch. 1

- 5/3 Abortion: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response
GS, ch. 10, pp. 225-236
- 5/5 Reproductive Technologies
Gen. 16; CR, ch. 2, pp. 57-82
Insight/Question Paper 9 due
- 5/8 Issues in Biotechnology
Gen. 11:1-9; CR, ch. 2; GS, ch. 12
- 5/10 The Euthanasia Debate and End of Life Care
Lk 7:20-22, 1 Cor 15:20-28; GS, ch. 11, CR, ch. 3
- 5/12 Conclusion: Practicing the Way of Jesus
Mt 7:13-27; GS, ch. 24
Insight/Question Paper 10 due
- 5/15 **4 pm—Term Paper Due**