ST528 : PASTORAL & SOCIAL ETHICS

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Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, DC
Summer 2016 : Course Syllabus

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Course Description: Today's ethical issues are not all found in a concordance; yet God's Word provides instruction that touches the most complex matters: moral responsibility, bioethics, conscience, environment, war, the state, worship, and more. This is an opportunity to explore the complexities of life's perplexing questions from a relevant and scripturally grounded perspective.

Texts:

Jones, David Clyde, Biblical Christian Ethics (Baker Academic, 2004, ISBN 0801052289; 204 pages, used OK)
Plantinga, Cornelius, Not the Way it’s Supposed to Be (Eerdmans, 2005, ISBN 978-0802842183; 216 pages, used OK)
Westminster Standards (Confession of Faith, Larger & Shorter Catechisms) [available on line at http://www.pcaac.org/resources/wcf/]
Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism [available on line at http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html]


Exams: Final Exam distributed by email/CANVAS by the end of Tuesday, June 7. The completed exam is DUE midnight, June 24, 2016. Open Bibles, texts, and notes.

Papers: Complete ONE of the following:

Book Review: A 3000 word summary and analysis (Biblical and pastoral) of book published after 2003 (or pre-approved by the professor) that deals with an ethical matter that the author is likely to confront. This requirement has two parts:

Proposal: A four-paragraph (total) description and rationale for a book appropriate for this assignment. For the book, the student will provide a two-paragraph vindication of the choice: (a) a brief explanation of the ethical issue(s) treated by the book, and (b) a brief justification that the issue will be of relevance to the student’s likely future role in the church. This should include a reason to
believe that the book is biblically sound enough for consideration. 
Due by midnight on June 11.

**Rough Draft (not required, but urged):** A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the review. **Optional Due Date: July 1, 2016.** Drafts received by this date are guaranteed a detailed response with sufficient time to make revisions. Drafts received after this date will be considered as time permits.

**Final Draft:** Completed review. **DUE** ten days after receiving the professor’s comments on the rough draft (if submitted prior to July 1), or **July 16, 2016**, whichever is later.

**Pre-approved ideas (but still just illustrative):**
- Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror* (2004) (for those likely to serve military personnel and their families); or, with the same focus, Charles & Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity: Questions and Answers from a Just-War Perspective* (2010).
- Hill, Wesley, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (especially for those working with young people)
- Houston, Fleur, *You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees and Asylum* (for those working with migrants or world relief)
- Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (for those likely to assist with reconciliation efforts)
- PCA Study Committee Report on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage, including the chapter on preventing divorce. Available on line from the PCA website. (88 pages, total, but it is dense writing)

**Interview Report and Analysis:** A 3000 word summary and analysis of three interviews of sources of mature Christian guidance regarding a specific area of pastoral concern. The interviewees may include ruling or teaching elders, counselors, godly lay people, etc. This assignment as two parts:

**Proposal:** A four-paragraph (total) description and rationale for a SET of interviews and questions appropriate for this assignment. The student will provide a two-paragraph vindication of the choice of a topic: (a) a brief explanation of the ethical issue(s) to be discussed in the interviews, and (b) a brief justification that the issue will be of relevance to the student’s likely future role in the church. The proposal should include the names of at least two of the interviewees and a sketch of the questions to be used to start the interviews. **Due by midnight on June 11.**

**Rough Draft (not required, but urged):** A 2400 word (target) draft of the text (not just an outline) of the report and analysis. **Optional Due Date: July 1, 2016.** Drafts received by this date are guaranteed a detailed response with sufficient time to make revisions. Drafts received after this date will be considered as time permits.
Final Draft: Completed review. DUE ten days after receiving the professor’s comments on the rough draft (if submitted prior to July 1), or July 16, 2016, whichever is later.

Attendance: Attendance is expected. Students who miss a significant portion of class meeting time will have their grade adversely affected.

Grading: Grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

- Final Exam……………………………… 40%
- Book Review or Interview Proposal…………… 10%
- Book Review or Interview Report……………… 40%
- Participation……………………………… 10%

Schedule of Topics & Summary of Due Dates:

(Note on the readings: in a one week intensive class it is unlikely that these readings assignments will be completed before the lecture/discussion. Crucial passages will be identified where necessary; but mostly the readings listed are for future consideration prior to completing the final exam.)

May 31 T  God’s Character and Will:
- The foundation of all ethical considerations
- The necessity of this transcendent foundation

An Overview of Systems of Ethical Deliberation
- Everything you need to know about Kant’s Deontology, Mill’s Utilitarianism, Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics, recent reworkings of those systems and a bestiary of Relativisms
- Identifying the most pressing pastoral challenges in our future
- A messy game involving a cream pie

Reading Assignment (if possible): Douma, “The Prologue”
Jones, Chapters 1 & 6.
VanDrunen, Section I

June 1 W  Social Ethics and the Current Landscape in Ethics
- Rawls & Reflective Equilibrium
- Singer’s Anti-speciesist Utilitarianism
- Feminist Ethics of “Care”
- Another game that will test your fairness

The Decalogue: Prologue
The First Commandment

Reading Assignment: Douma, “The First Commandment” & “Appendix: The Use of Scripture”
Jones, Chapters 2-5, 7
June 2 R

The Second Commandment
The Third Commandment
The Fourth Commandment
- Sabbath-keeping as a delight
- The abiding ordinances
The Fifth Commandment
The Sixth Commandment
- Just War Theory
- End-of-Life Decision-making

Reading Assignments:  
Douma, “The Second Commandment” through “The Sixth Commandment”
Jones, Chapters 1 & 6.
Plantinga, chapters 2-4
VanDrunen, sections II & III

June 3 F

The Seventh Commandment
The Eighth Commandment

Reading Assignment:  
Plantinga, chapters 5-7
Douma, “The Seventh Commandment” & “The Eighth Commandment”
Jones, Chapters 8 & 9

June 4 Sat

The Ninth Commandment
The Tenth Commandment

Reading Assignment:  
Douma, “The Ninth Commandment” and “The Tenth Commandment”

June 7 (Tues.) Final Exam sent/posted
June 11 (Sat.) DUE: Book Review/Interview Proposal
June 24 (Fri.) DUE: Final Exam
(Optional : July 1 (Fri.) Rough Draft of Book Review/Interview)
July 16 (Sat) DUE: Final Draft of Book Review or Interview Report

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Student Services Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 42 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 14)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 42)