

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW AND ETHICS

ET 2XE3

McMaster Divinity College
Franklin Pyles, Ph.D

Autumn 2013 (Term 1)

Location:

Day and Times: Tuesdays 7:00 – 9:00

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Description

The course we will examine various worldviews and their development in relation to ethics; how to think clearly about ethics; how to understand Christian ethics from the Sermon on the Mount, and how to sort through various ethical situations that arise in personal life and in the church, such as:

- Relationships to the governance structure
- Inter-staff relationships
- Congregational relationships including confidentiality, authority/submission, and handling of church assets and counseling/relationships to the opposite sex
- Assisting others in ethical decisions including bio-ethical issues

all with a view of actually living lives that please God and bring glory to Christ and which leave both the person and the church whole.

Course Objectives

Every day, every person makes, and frequently discusses, ethical decisions. How you make your own ethical decisions and how you participate in ethical decisions in the church and in the wider community depend on your worldview. The course will seek to accomplish the following objectives to both inform and enable you in this vital task.

KNOWING

To teach the student to know various world views and the Christian world view as it grows from the Sermon on the Mount and thereby to have a framework for making ethical decisions.

BEING

To lead the student into being a person of Christian character which is more than effort, but which is a life where Christ's life is lived out.

DOING

To enable a student to practice righteousness in his/her private and public life.

Schedule

BEING

1. Introduction to World Views and Ethical Formation
2. World Views and Ethical Formation (Have Sire book read before class)

KNOWING

3. Ethical Foundations: Philosophical
4. Ethical Foundations: Philosophical
5. Ethical Foundations: Philosophical
6. Guest Lecture
7. Ethical Foundations: Old and New Testaments – Law and Grace
8. Ethical Foundations: Sermon on the Mount/People and Church in Community
9. Ethical Foundations: Sermon on the Mount/People and Church in Community

DOING

10. People and Church in Community
11. People and Church in Community
12. Power relationships in the Church
13. Current Ethical Issues in Application
14. Current Ethical Issues in Application
15. Current Ethical Issues in Application

Required Texts

Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Dallas Willard. *The Divine Conspiracy: Discovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY, HarperOne, 1997 Note: Pages 1 – 239 are required.

James Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (4th edition). Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004

KNOWING

PAPERS: Note: Papers should be submitted electronically to a Dropbox Account. Instructions will be emailed to you.

Please don't neglect to put your whole name on the paper itself. Use sources, but tell me what the sources are in standard McMaster University footnoting protocol. Much of your grade will be on how deeply you analyze the topic and give your answers.

Paper #1. Due: October 8, 2013 Length: Approximately 2000 Words. Weight: 25%

Describe a situation that you have directly experienced which created for you the need for a personal ethical decision. It is important to describe the situation with accuracy so that an accurate analysis may be made. Describe the full complexity of the situation and give an ethical analysis. That is, what was it about the situation that created tension because there seemed to be conflicting ethical demands? What biblical/philosophical framework(s) were brought into play? What was the outcome? What errors do you now note in the original analysis? What would you now do differently if you had to do it again?

Paper #2. Due, October 29, 2012. Length: Approximately 3000 Words. Weight: 40 %.

Pick one of the following three ethical problems and show how each of the four ethical world views would approach and seek to give an answer to the problems. Then, give your final answer, considering as you do if insight might be gained from the various standpoints. Be sure that your conclusion is oriented to the real world and personally satisfying.

Note: the scenarios are purposefully vague and somewhat ambiguous.

Scenarios:

1. Some people who have sought to have a child through artificial insemination have sometimes left embryos in storage. What should be the ultimate fate of these embryos?
2. If a person has promised to keep certain secrets secret, but discovers that the secrets hide actions which are harmful to people, should that person continue to keep them secret?
3. Should marijuana be legalized?

World Views:

1. Utilitarian
2. Deontological
3. Relativism
4. Sermon on the Mount/Kingdom Ethic

You should use a variety of sources and footnote your sources.

DOING

OR – INSTEAD OF PAPER 2

**Due at one of the course times, a 1 hour presentation of a case study to the class. Weight: 40%
Note: this option may be limited to SIX people.**

The text by Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee contains a number of chapters dedicated to a particular ethical issue. Choose a situation from real life that involves or affects a church community. This may be a situation you are personally acquainted with, or one which you research. In class make the following presentation:

- How is the church community currently handling the situation? Specifically, what world view are they using to frame their response? How is the congregation being affected? The surrounding community? And are there any others who are being affected and if so how?
Find out this information from reading such as newspapers, interviews, and by examining available documents, such as board minutes.
- How would Stassen and Gushee and Dallas Willard's Sermon on the Mount ethical approach change the above status quo, that is, both the ethical interpretation of the situation, the situation itself (an assumption here that an interpretation of a situation affects the reality of the situation) and the response to the situation?
- An opportunity for class interaction which should constitute one third of the class time.

BEING

Paper 3 Due November 19, 2012. Length: Approximately 2000 words. Weight: 25%.

Pick two books from the Bibliography, and, with the two required text books (total of four).

- Can you identify any shifts in your own world view that have occurred by reading these books?
- Set forth a plan for change in your personal life drawn from new things you have learned from these books.

You will be graded on the depth and insight of your presentation.

AND, LAST BUT NOT LEAST:

It is your professor's desire to conduct the course paperless. To accomplish that everyone is requested to open a Dropbox account. Go to Dropbox.com and set up a personal account. Then, **while on line**, set up a folder called Worldview. Then, invite me to it. You may use my McMaster email: pylesf@mcmaster.ca for the invitation. You may then drop your papers into that folder, I will be able to retrieve them, grade and mark them, and put them back in. No one else will see your paper. As well, after you sign up for the course, I will be setting up a folder called WldviewEthics and I will invite everyone in the class into that folder. I will, from time to time, put articles and other resource material into that folder and you can then retrieve it at will. Just remember that whenever you want material to flow between people you must have your Dropbox live with the internet – this is sometimes confusing because it will also appear as on your homescreen.

Textbook Purchase

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

Style

All assignments are to be typed in double-spaced format, with footnotes and bibliographic references conforming to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses* (found on the McMaster Divinity College website). Failure to observe appropriate format and style will result in grade

reductions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Penguin, 1963, 2006.

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Classics.

Barron, Bruce. *The Health and Wealth Gospel*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987.

Blue, Ron. *Generous Living: Finding Contentment Through Giving*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

Colon, Christine A. and Bonnie E. Field. *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009.

Gill, David W., *Becoming Good, Building Moral Character*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Gula, Richard M. *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*. New York, New York: Paulist Press, 1996

Hanna, Frank J. III, *What Your Money Means: and how to use it well*. New York: Crossroad, 2008.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: An Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. Harper, San Francisco, 1996.

Higgenson, Richard. *Dilemmas: A Christian Approach to Moral Decision Making*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988.

Hill, Alexander. *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Holmes, Arthur. *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003

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Lovelace, Richard. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

MacDonald, Gordon. *Ordering Your Private World*. Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1984.

Noyce, Gaylord. *Pastoral Ethics: Professional Responsibilities of the Clergy*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.

Sandel, Michael J., *Justice, What's the Right Thing To Do?* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2009.

Smith, Ervin. *The Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Studies in American Religion 2. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981.

Struthers, William M. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Joe E. Trull & James E. Carter. *Ministerial Ethics*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorothy C. Bass editors. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Wallace, Catherine M. *For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives*. NY: Vintage, 1999.

Wilson, Earl. *Steering Clear: Avoiding the Slippery Slope to Moral Failure*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Wind, James P., Russell Burck, Paul F. Camenisch, and Dennis P. McCann. *Clergy Ethics in a Changing Society: Mapping the Terrain*. Louisville, Westminster, John Knox, 1991

Winner, Lauren F. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.

The Following May Be Accessed on the Internet Using GOOGLE Search:

Martin Luther King: Letter from a Birmingham Jail

The Following are websites that may prove helpful

<http://www.summit.org/resources/worldview-chart/>

What is a Christian Worldview? Everyone has a worldview. Whether or not we realize it, we all have certain presuppositions and biases that affect the way we view all of life and reality. A worldview is like a set of lenses which taint our vision or alter the way we perceive the world around us. Our worldview is formed by our education, our upbringing, the culture we live in, the books we read, the media and movies we absorb, etc. For many people their worldview is simply something they have absorbed by osmosis from their surrounding cultural influences. They have never thought strategically about what they believe and wouldn't be able to give a rational defense of their beliefs to others. Christian worldview (also called biblical worldview) refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which a Christian individual, group or culture interprets the world and interacts with it. Various denominations of Christianity have differing worldviews on some issues based on biblical interpretation, but many thematic elements are commonly agreed-upon within the Christian worldview. Is the Christian worldview compatible with research ethics in the field of psychology? Why or why not? To what extent should the Christian worldview influence the type of psychology research conducted and the ethics of that research? Why? To what extent do you perceive that the Christian worldview will influence a dissertation research? In the previous session we considered a Christian world-view and its influence on ethics. We would like to analyze two other world-views (African and Islamic) and the ethical patterns that spring from them. What is a Worldview? (by Kasongo Munza) Compare a worldview to putting a pair of colored glasses. Some sunglasses are pinkish in color, some are green and some are brown. Home Content Index Worldview Worldview and Ethics Christian ethics. Question. What is Christian ethics? Answer. Christian ethics is well summarized by Colossians 3:1-6: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.