

# Religion, Ethics, and Modern Moral Issues

Scott C. Williamson

TH3113

January 4-22, 2016

9:00-11:30

Schlegel Hall 121

(Office: Schlegel 306; ext. 284)

## **Course description:**

Many critics of Western culture argue that we have lost our moral compass. Deluged by volatile social issues, we lack a common moral system necessary for adjudication. We are seemingly rudderless on the turbulent seas of moral quandary, guided by only contextual and competing moral commitments. How can Christians in the west respond faithfully and persuasively to public disputes in an era marked by multiplicity, and nonfoundationalism? The interests of this course include: 1) to investigate the resources of Christianity for brokering social justice; and 2) to apply these resources to a contemporary ethical issue. Our issue for this term is conflict and peace.

## **Learning Goals and Outcomes:**

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, and contextually about conflict and peacemaking. (SLO 8)
2. Students will be able to articulate orally and in writing their own theological perspective on peacemaking, mindful of their own distinctive ecclesial tradition and the global, multicultural, multi-religious context of contemporary ministry. (QEPSLO 2).
3. Students will practice public leadership. (SLO 14)

## **Requirements:**

1. **Preparation and participation.** In order to meet learning outcome 1, students are expected to attend class regularly, to complete all assigned readings, to actively participate in discussion, to prepare oral responses to the assigned study questions for each class from 1/5 to 1/14, and to write one paragraph in response to one of these questions. These paragraphs will be collected. (33%)
2. **Ethics paper.** In order to meet learning outcome 2, students will submit a 5 to 7-page, double-spaced position paper on a chosen issue in the ethics of peacemaking. The paper should have a focused thesis, disclose the author's theological context, and attend to the tasks of theological ethics (see CAMS document). The essay is due in class on Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>. (34%)
3. **Local Engagement.** In order to meet learning outcome 3, students will demonstrate their ability for public leadership in the local context by: (1) issuing a public statement on peace in the form of a letter to the editor of a Louisville newspaper, a sermon on peace, a blogpost, or an alternate public forum; or by (2) participating in a peacemaking activity, organizing a peacemaking activity, or interviewing someone unfamiliar to you who is a peace advocate—before the end of January 2016. If you choose option 2, a brief 3-page write-up should be submitted by Friday, January 29<sup>th</sup>. (33%)

**Required texts:**

1. David P. Barash, editor, *Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies*, second edition, (Oxford University Press, reprinted 2010).
2. Glen Stassen, et al., *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Brazos Press, 2009)
3. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, editor, *Interfaith Just Peacemaking: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

**Class Schedule:** each class session will follow a pattern that includes (1) general reflection on the assigned reading materials and identification of questions to investigate in plenary discussion; (2) commentary (from the professor and class members) that addresses the theme of the day; (3) plenary discussion of questions; and possibly (4) small-group reflection (2-3 students per group) on the practice of peacemaking in ministry, therapy, and/or public leadership.

**Section I: Peace Studies and the Ethics of Peacemaking**

- 1/4: Introduction to the course  
Housekeeping details  
Syllabus (CAMS)  
Three Tasks of Theological Ethics (CAMS)

**Required Reading:**

*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 1, essays by Freud, Mead, Janis, Boulding, and Klare

- 1/5: **Why War? Approaches to War**  
Study questions 4 & 5 on page 61 of the *Approaches* text:  
(1) Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of looking for the causes of “war” as opposed to looking for the causes of specific wars?  
(2) If people are “naturally” inclined to be warlike, is the hope for peace unrealistic and doomed to failure

**Required Reading:**

*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 2, essays by James, Fisher, Dumas, Barash, and Fasulo

**Recommended Reading:**

“The Trouble with Saving the World” (CAMS)  
“The Einstein-Freud Correspondence, 1931-1932 (CAMS)

- 1/6: **Building “Negative Peace”**  
Study questions 3, 7, & 10 on pages 112-113 of the *Approaches* text:  
(1) Take a current source of conflict and describe how “principled negotiation” might help both reach an acceptable agreement.  
(2) What are some reasons for thinking that the current system of sovereign states is inappropriate for meeting the problems of the twenty-first century?  
(3) What similarities exist between attempts to achieve negative peace on the international level and on the personal level? Differences?

**Required Reading:**

*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 3  
*The War of the Lamb*, Introduction

**Recommended Reading:**

Perry, “Ethics and the American Empire” (CAMS)

- 1/7      **Understanding Terrorism**  
 Study question 8, and any two additional study questions on page 145 of the *Approaches* text  
 (1) Develop a menu of possible nonviolent responses to the problem of terrorism.
- Required Reading:  
*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 4, essays by Freire, Sachs, and Barash  
*The War of the Lamb*, chapters 1 & 2
- Recommended Reading:  
 Grewal, “Johan Galtung on Positive and Negative Peace” (CAMS)
- 1/8      **Building “Positive Peace”**  
 Study questions 2, 7, & 10 on page 186 of the *Approaches* text:  
 (1) The question of “human rights” can be enormously controversial. Explain.  
 (2) Is positive peace as much a matter of national security as negative peace?  
 (3) Describe some successes and failures in achieving positive peace.
- Required Reading:  
*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 5  
*The War of the Lamb*, chapters 3, & 5
- Recommended Reading:  
 U.S. Institute of Peace, “Nonviolent Civic Action” (CAMS)
- 1/11      **NO CLASS**      (Prepare for Requirement 3)
- 1/12:      **Nonviolence**  
 Study questions 6, 7, 9, & 10 on page 218 of the *Approaches* text:  
 (1) If it is true that “no army can withstand the force of an idea whose time has come,” is there evidence that nonviolence is such an idea?  
 (2) What about “selective nonviolence,” that is, using violence in some circumstances and nonviolence in others?  
 (3) Is there anything in the events of the twenty-first century that renders nonviolence especially compelling—or alternately, less appropriate than in the past?  
 (4) Compare the nonviolent conceptions of Gandhi, Tolstoy, King, and one or more modern leaders.
- Required Reading:  
*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 6  
*The War of the Lamb*, chapters 6, & 7
- Recommended Reading:  
 Catholic Just War Theory (CAMS)  
 Walzer, “Arguing About War” (CAMS)
- 1/13:      **Religious Inspiration**  
 Study questions 4, 5, & 9 on page 242 of the *Approaches* text:  
 (1) Compare Christian “realism” with antiwar “idealism.”  
 (2) Can you begin to identify a truly encompassing, ecumenical, and nonsectarian religious peace tradition that is not limited to your own personal upbringing?  
 (3) What does “theodicy” have to do with questions of war, violence, and peace?
- Required Reading:  
*Approaches to Peace*, chapter 7, essays by Boulding, Reardon, Dalai Lama, Tutu  
*The War of the Lamb*, chapters 8, & 9

Recommended Reading:

CIDCM, "2012 Executive Summary" (CAMS)

Mirbagheri, "Islam and Liberal Peace" (CAMS)

1/14: **The Future of Peace**Study questions 1, 3, & 5 on page 286 of the *Approaches* text:

- (1) What are some important lessons to be learned from peace movements of the past?
- (2) What would you *like* to see as one or more likely scenarios for the world in the near future?
- (3) Suggest a classification of peace movements other than those presented in this chapter.

Required Reading:*Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, Preface, Introduction, and chapters 1 & 2*The War of the Lamb*, chapter 11**Section II: The Norms of Just Peacemaking**1/15: **Just Peacemaking Practices 1 & 2**

Discussion of nonviolent direct action and independent initiatives to reduce the threat of violence.

Required Reading:*Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, chapters 3, & 4*The War of the Lamb*, chapter 12Recommended Reading:

Gopin, "Judaism, the Limits of War and Conflict Resolution" (CAMS)

1/18: **NO CLASS**1/19: **Just Peacemaking Practices 3 & 4**

Discussion of cooperative conflict resolution, repentance and forgiveness.

Required Reading:*Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, chapters 5, & 6*The War of the Lamb*, chapter 131/20: **Just Peacemaking Practices 5 & 6**

Discussion of democracy and sustainable economic development.

Required Reading:*Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, chapters 7 & 8*The War of the Lamb*, chapter 14Recommended:

U.N. Global Issues Website (CAMS)

1/21: **Just Peacemaking Practices 7 & 8**

Discussion of the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation.

Required Reading:*Interfaith Just Peacemaking*, chapters 9 & 10*The War of the Lamb*, chapter 15

- 1/22: **Just Peacemaking Practices 9 & 10**  
Discussion of the weapons trade and grassroots peacemaking.
- 1/28: **\*\*Papers due 12pm\*\***

## LPTS Policy Statements

### 1. Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. See for further assistance,

[http://www.lpts.edu/Academic\\_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp](http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp).

### 2. Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

### 3. Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center ([kmapes@lpts.edu](mailto:kmapes@lpts.edu)) during the first two weeks of a semester and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

#### 4. Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

#### 5. Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.