

**Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary**  
**Internet Course: DISCIPLESHIP & ETHICS**

TS-630 IC (2 or 3 Units)  
Spring 2008 (January 30 to May 14)  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A study of the theological basis and practical application of Christian ethics that will enable a church community to become an alternative culture that resists forces of alienation and death in our society. Time will also be devoted to learning a method for using scripture in making ethical decisions.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Through this course students will be able:

- to distinguish the difference between an ethic of Christian discipleship and an ethic of religious morality;
- to practice giving ethical exhortation in a Christian way;
- to articulate the necessity and the promise of Christians practicing a community-based ethic of resistance to the alienating powers experienced in society today;
- to identify seven alienating forces in our society; describe how they alienate; and begin to think about how a Christian community might resist these forces;
- to learn and apply a method for using scripture in making ethical decisions

**RELATED DEGREE OBJECTIVES**

Within the larger curriculum goals of the Seminary, this course will facilitate growth in ability to:

- Describe an alternative cultural lifestyle that rejects godless values (2.2.4)
- Describe discipleship as following Jesus with other faithful followers (2.2.5)
- Describe the biblical community as the home of countercultural discipleship and missional church (2.2.7)
- Analyze, synthesize, and engage contemporary church and world issues from a biblical theological perspective (2.4)

**HOW THE INTERNET VERSION OF THE COURSE FUNCTIONS**

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary is committed to education and training that is engaging and transforming, that involves personal relationships, and that maximizes the relationship between the information, self-knowledge, and accountability. Therefore very few of our courses are offered in an Internet format. When we do offer a course via the Internet we seek to do so in a way that makes the learning process as interactive and relational as possible. Students will interact with the professor and the teaching assistant via e-mail and participate in e-mail “group discussions” with other students throughout the semester. In addition, students will be asked to

select a friend and/or partner in ministry who would be willing to read a short reflection the student will write on each class and discuss it with him or her.

As the previous paragraph communicates we at MBBS are committed to making an Internet course a significant educational experience. As a student you should know that we expect you to do as much work for this course as you would if you were taking the course on campus. The Internet format offers you convenience and flexibility in covering the same amount of material as the on-campus version of the course.

The weekly assignments and class sessions are accessed through the course website. Weekly class sessions will usually consist of on-line lectures you will read. At times the assigned reading or a video will be the primary content for the class and the on-line session itself will consist of reflection questions. Because of the interactive nature of the course it is necessary that all students move through the course at the same pace--doing the assignments and "attending" class each week. We will consider this course to "meet" on Wednesdays. That means that each week by Wednesday night all students will have completed all of the pre-class reading and pre-class assignments and will have "attended" class by reading the class session for that week on the course website. All the post-class assignments must be completed by the following Monday morning (8:00 AM Pacific Time).

#### **COURSE TEXTS**

Baker, Mark D. *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom*. Wipf & Stock, 2005 or IVP, 1999.

Hallie, Philip. *Least Innocent Blood be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There*. HarperCollins, 1994.

Hays, Richard. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Harper, 1996 (required for 3<sup>rd</sup> unit).

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wind in the Door* (various editions available).

Course Pack (CP) which contains a number of photocopied articles and selections from books.

The Course Pack will be mailed to you after you register for the Course. The cost will be from \$20 to \$25 which covers the cost of copying, postage, royalty fees paid to publishers, and mailing. This will be billed to your account as a materials fee.

We will use some on-line readings. The links for these readings are listed in the pre-class assignments under the individual class sessions.

The course also includes one video which will be used in class number 8. You should make arrangements early in the semester to buy, borrow or rent the video so that you can watch it at least two days before class 8. The video is a PBS special called *Affluenza* (produced by John de Graf and Vivia Blue, 1997). You can purchase a home video version for \$29.99 at:

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/afflhv.html>

Mennonite Central Committee's regional offices have this video available for use. Contact your regional office or call 717-859-1151 (US); 204-261-6381 (Canada) for the number of the office nearest you. They request you do this at least three weeks before you need it. You might also be able to get the video through a library or inter-library loan.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Part I: Following Jesus in Resisting Powers of Alienation and Forming an Alternative Culture**

- 1 - **Following Jesus: From Alienation to Restored Relationships** January 30
- 2 - **Communities that “Name,” Resist the Powers, and Form an Alternative Culture Part I** February 6
- 3 - **Communities that “Name,” Resist the Powers, and Form an Alternative Culture Part II** February 13
- 4 - **Freedom From Religion: What is a Religious Ethic and What Does it Produce? & Resisting Individualism: An Alternative Culture of People in Covenant Community** February 20
- 5 - **Resisting Religion: Developing an Antireligious Ethic that Frees Community Members to Live Out Who They Have Been “Named” to Be.** February 27

*Ethical Exhortation: Best draft due Monday, March 3, by 8:00 AM; final draft due Sat., March 8.*

- 6 - **An Alternative Culture: Resisting Technique’s Alienating and Enslaving ways** March 5
- 7 - **An Alternative Culture: Resisting Mammon** March 12
- 8 - **An Alternative Culture: Resisting Consumerism** March 19
- 9 - **An Alternative Culture: Resisting TV’s Alienating Power & Busyness** March 26
- 10 - **An Alternative Culture: Resisting the Destruction of Creation & Concluding Thoughts** April 2

**Break/Reading week** — no class the week of April 9

*Program Plan Due Thursday, April 10*

*Students taking the course for two units are not required to do Part II of the course.*

### **PART II: A Method for a Christian Community to use Scripture in Making Ethical Decisions**

- 11 - **The Descriptive and Synthetic Tasks** April 16

- 12 - **Five Representative Hermeneutical Strategies** April 23
- 13 - **Hays's Method Observed and Evaluated, Part I** April 30
- 14 - **Hays's Method Observed and Evaluated, Part II & Peacemaking and Resisting a Culture of Violence** May 7

*Ethical Decision Making Project Due on Wednesday, May 14.*

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

There are "pre" and "post" class assignments for each class session. You can access these assignments through the course website. In the following paragraphs you will find descriptions of the major assignments.

**All assignments should be sent to:** [bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu](mailto:bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu)

Identify the assignment in the subject line (for example: Response Essay-Class 3). Send assignments by attached file. Please send me your assignments as either a MS Word document, or Rich Text Format document. If you have questions about the mechanics of sending assignments please contact my Teaching Assistant.

### **Assignment policies:**

1. Students are expected to submit assignments on time; if they are late they will be graded down one grade level (a B+ becomes a B), and after four days another grade level. If you are not able to send an assignment because of problems with your e-mail or Internet service provider it is your responsibility to find another means of getting the work in on time. (For instance use a friend's e-mail or send the assignment by fax.)
2. In the assignment descriptions below, and throughout the course, one page is considered a single spaced page with one-inch margins and Times Roman 12pt font.
3. All course work must be completed by the end of the semester, May 16. If something arises that keeps you from meeting that deadline you may contact the MBBS Registrar ([registrar@mbseminary.edu](mailto:registrar@mbseminary.edu)) about applying for a possible 30 day extension. You must do so before the end of the semester. There is a fee. (See *Academic policies* for details).

**Class Response letters:** After most class session students will be asked to write a one-page response to the class session and the reading for that week. You will write this letter to a nearby friend or partner in ministry. Give one copy to this person and send another copy to the professor by e-mail. You are to write about one to three things you found most engaging; describe the concept or ideas, and explain their importance to the person you are writing to through relating the material to your life. The aim of the assignment is **not** for the students to summarize the entire class session. Rather, these letters will help students sort through content and identify and reflect upon that which is of central importance to them. You will be graded on clarity of thought and communication, and level of personal engagement. (Grading standards: B+ for adequately meeting the above criteria; B for clearly communicating content, but with little or no personal

engagement; B- or lower for failing to meet the stated criteria; A- or A for an above average level of personal engagement and insight in to class or reading content and a high quality of writing.) Each week you should send a copy of the letter to [bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu](mailto:bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu) no later than Monday, 8:00 AM Pacific Time.

**Weekly Conversation:** The weekly class response letters also provide the basis on which to have a weekly conversation with someone about the course, and thus not have all the interaction be through cyberspace. Meet in person or by telephone with the person you give the letters to each week; discuss the letter and process your thoughts and questions about the course. This is a required assignment; missed meetings will lower your grade. You do not have to report the content of your discussion, but to receive credit for this assignment you must inform the teaching assistant by e-mail each week after you have completed this assignment. Please send an e-mail to ([bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu](mailto:bakerassignments@mbseminary.edu)); in the subject line write, for example: “met with discussion partner week # 2.”

**Group Discussions:** Almost every week you will be asked to participate in “group discussions” about reading assignments before a class session or as a response to a class session. These discussions will happen on the discussion forum section of the course website. You will be placed in a group at the beginning of the semester. Just as in a class room setting when I split the class in to discussion groups, I or the TA will drop in on your discussions--“listen” and perhaps respond, but I will not always be there (read all the discussion) nor seek to answer every question that comes up. Primarily this is your opportunity as students to interact. Participation in these discussions is required. To get a B or B+ for this part of the course students must participate in all discussions and do so in a timely manner (before Monday). To get an A or A- students will have to demonstrate engagement in the discussion both through the quality of their comments as well as through interacting with the responses of others in their discussion group and not just leaving the discussion after having made one contribution.

**Essay on Galatians and a holistic gospel:** Many Christians’ concept of the gospel is heavily influenced by their reading of Paul. They describe salvation in individual and spiritual terms. For them Paul’s central message is that we are justified by faith, meaning that we can have our guilt removed, and thus go to heaven when we die, not by our efforts, but through believing, having faith, and receiving God’s gracious gift. Because I had that concept of the gospel, concern for justice, helping the poor and the church seeking to live as an alternative culture felt like good things, but not central to Christianity. So that even after years of my passionately emphasizing Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God and the prophets’ calls for justice, the reality was that I could not integrate them with the gospel in my own mind let alone for those I was teaching. Simply talking more about justice and the church as alternative culture was not enough to make it central or foundational. For me, and many others, the reality was that the heart of Christianity was the gospel, the heart of the gospel was articulated by Paul and it was individual, spiritual and heaven oriented. Then, however, I read an essay on Galatians by Richard Hays which offered a different reading of Paul, and led me to think that a key element in helping myself and others sense that the Kingdom of God and a concept of church as alternative culture were central to the gospel was not just to talk more about biblical passages on justice and the Kingdom of God, but to change our interpretation of Paul. **Write** a two page essay (single spaced) reflecting on what

aspects of the interpretation of Galatians articulated in *Religious No More*, in contrast to the traditional reading described in chapter five, might help Christians change their understanding of Paul in a way that would facilitate their thinking of the gospel more holistically. A holistic gospel includes individual salvation, but also considers Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, concern for justice, helping the poor and the concept of church as alternative culture as being central to the gospel. Compare and contrast specific elements of the two readings as you answer this question. This essay is not meant to be a review of the book, but a focused essay on the specific question stated above. You are encouraged to read Galatians as you read the book. Due for class four, Feb. 20.

**Ethical Exhortation:** Students will practice communicating in a way that promotes an ethic of freedom and undermines a religious lifestyle by writing an ethical exhortation (two-pages). More detailed instructions are in the Post-Class assignments for Class Five.

**TV Essay:** See instructions in Class Nine assignments.

**A Program Plan for Helping a Christian Community to Begin to Form an Alternative Culture in relation to a Specific Issue:** Students will select one of six areas (technique, Mammon, caring for creation, consumerism, busyness, TV) in which following Jesus calls for a stance of resistance to the powers and currents of the day. You are encouraged to use resources listed in individual class sessions and books from the course bibliography to explore the topic in more depth. You will develop a plan for a one-day workshop or series of four to six Bible studies, Sunday school classes or small group meetings. The purpose of the program you plan is to help the participants begin to form an alternative culture in relation to the selected theme. You will present your plan to me in *outline form* (no more than four pages.) Therefore, you do not need to write all you will say. Rather your outline should include main ideas you will try to communicate, activities and resources you will use, and questions you will ask. Yet, you do need to include enough on your outline so that someone else could conceivably use your program. So, for instance, do not just say: "study Luke 12:13-34" or "discuss Grossman article." Please also list discussion questions you will ask and the key ideas you want to communicate.

Your program should lead potential participants to understand: why the issue selected is of concern to a follower of Jesus, the alienating nature of the selected force, and how it hinders authentic Christian community. The program should lead the participants to concrete action steps as a community (which will include helping them understand why a community, and not just individual effort, is necessary to resist this force.) Be realistic about what can be accomplished in six hours. The action steps that flow from the program may include further activities and meetings. *It is very important* that your plan clearly reflects the foundational approaches to Christian ethics discussed in the first weeks of the course. Therefore, you should work carefully to address this ethical issue in a non-religious way--present an ethic of promise and possibility.

**Ethical Decision Making Project: Applying Hays's Method** (3 unit students only): Students will select an ethical question on which Christians have differing opinions, and use Hays's method to explore the issue and argue for a particular response. You may not choose one of the five issues Hays explores in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. A broad range of

topics, however, are acceptable, for instance: Sabbath practices, drinking alcoholic beverages, euthanasia, refusing to pay taxes as a protest against a gov't policy, women in ministry, involvement in politics, any number of medical or business ethics questions, capital punishment, providing assistance to people who are working in the country without legal permission (or placing yourself in Asian, Mexican, or Central American context--is it appropriate to go to the US or Canada and work without legal permission?).

Each student will prepare a two to three page outline that displays the main points of their work. The outline should be divided into four sections: descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutical, and pragmatic and you should follow the guidelines on page 310 of Hays's book. Please look at the "ethical project example" in the handouts section of the course website as a reference for what this project should look like.

### **Grading Scheme**

3 Units: Class participation through threaded e-mail discussions 10% ; Meeting with discussion partner 10%; Class response letters 25% ; Galatians essay 5%; Exhortation 10% ; TV essay 5%; Program plan 20% ; Written Assignments on Hays 5% ; Ethical decision making project 10%.

2 Units: Class participation through threaded e-mail discussions 10% ; Meeting with discussion partner 10% ; Class response letters 25% ; Galatians essay 10%; Exhortation 15%; TV essay 10%; Program plan 20%.

As stated in the *Academic Policies* a "B" is the baseline grade. A "B" means the student is doing satisfactory work. The "B+" or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The "C" grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level. I will write a letter grade on your assignments. In my grade book each letter grade will be given a numerical equivalent (B+ = 3.33; A- = 3.67). At the end of the semester your numerical average will determine your final letter grade based on the following scale:

4.00 to 3.83 = A  
3.82 to 3.5 = A-  
3.49 to 3.17 = B+  
3.16 to 2.83 = B etc.

### **Academic Policies:**

MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodations for disability, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, grading templates, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to your professor or consult the Registrar. Course evaluations are to be completed online and are due one week after the completion of the course. Official grades will not be posted until the student's evaluation of the course is completed.