

# Addressing Contemporary Ethical Issues in the Classroom

**Bible School  
Consultation 2016**





# Introduction

- 1997: George Whitefield College, Cape Town
- Taught 1<sup>st</sup> years Ethics
- I did not know where to start & what to do
- I didn't get it right in 1997 but by 1998 I knew where to start!



# Introduction

- From there Ethics evolved to Ethics 1, 2 & 3
- And with it addressing Ethics in the classroom
- In this I'm indebted to my students





# Introduction

- **Ethics is important**
  - ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ... And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbour as yourself.** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt 22:37-39)
  - ‘Only **let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel**’ (Phil 1:27)
- **If the gospel is important ethics is important!**





# Introduction

- I have **2 choices** in answering ‘Addressing ethical issues in the classroom’
- 1. Taking a single ethical topic & show how I would tackle it in class
  - I’m rejecting that as we’ve all done that
  - To choose one issue & one or two ways to handle it is just too narrow
- 2. Look at the **Big Picture**: how we address ethical issues in the 3 year curriculum
  - So we’ll look our **overall** Ethics programme
  - And how & what issues we address





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- Ethics is a **core** theological discipline
- The GWC Ethics programme goes hand in hand with a solid grounding in:
  - systematic & historical theology
  - biblical theology
  - & knowledge of the Bible





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- Before addressing ethical issues we have to lay a solid **foundation** in **biblical theology** & the relation between **law & gospel**
- We teach a **Christian ethics** that is **rooted** in the **law**, **fulfilled** in the **gospel** & lived out in the world





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- We believe that while ethical principles are **built into the creation** they are **explicitly revealed** in the Mosaic law
  - *Natural law* is insufficient to discover ethics as both creation & our minds are fallen
- The **law** was for Israel – yet it is **not abolished** but **fulfilled by Christ** through his life & death (Mt 5:17)





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- Christ's fulfilment of the law means **one cannot just jump directly from the Mosaic law to today** to resolve contemporary ethical problems
- One has to **go via Christ**
- All the OT, including the law, has to be interpreted in the light of Christ & his work (Lk 24:27, 44-45)
  - Cf 1 Cor 9:21: 'not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ'
- This is not always easy





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- The **Mosaic law** is the **foundation of ethics** in the Bible so we give a **detailed exposition of the ten commandments**
  - with reference to the **case laws** which expound & apply the law
  - & try to interpret them in the light of the apostolic teaching in the NT
- The **fulfilment** of ethics is found in the **gospel** so we look at gospel ethics in year 2





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- Ethics is covered in 3 semesters over 3 years
- **Year 1**
  - *One semester, 28 x 50 mins lectures + 3 tutorials*
- Introduction to Ethics
- The Ten Commandments
- Contemporary Ethical Issues





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 1**
- **Introduction to Ethics**
  - What is ethics?
  - The basis of ethics
  - Ethical systems
  - How do we do ethics?





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 1**
- Introduction to Ethics
- **The Ten Commandments**
  - The **3 purposes** of the law
  - The **interpretation** of the law
  - The Ten Commandments
    - Expounding & applying each command
    - Addressing selected ethical issues e.g. marriage & divorce
  - A **Christian interpretation** of the Decalogue





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 1**
- Introduction to Ethics
- The Ten Commandments
- **Contemporary Ethical Issues**
  - Group student presentations in tutorials
  - Topics will be listed later





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 2**
  - *One semester, 28 x 50 mins lectures*
- The Big Picture
- New Testament Ethics
- African Ethical Issues
- Violence





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 2**
- **The Big Picture**
- **The Gospel & Christian Ethics\***
  - Resurrection & creation
    - **‘Christian ethics depends on the resurrection’** O’Donovan
  - The Spirit & freedom
- \* Oliver O’Donovan, *The Resurrection of Moral Order*, ch 1





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 2**
- **New Testament Ethics**
- We look at NT ethics through the **focal images\*** of:
  - Community (church)
  - Cross
  - New creation
- This is a **cross-shaped ethics**, a gospel ethics
- \* Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 2**
- **African Ethical Issues**
- Students choose African ethical topics, work in groups & present to the rest of the class
- Topics will be listed later





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 2**
- **Violence**
  - *Should Christians renounce violence?\**
  - Motivation: violence is endemic in South African society & conflict abounds in Africa
  - Must exegete Mt 5:38-48 & relevant NT texts
  - Must read **Peace Church** scholars on non-violence/pacifism (introducing a new tradition)
- \* This is not a just war essay





# The GWC Ethics Programme

- **Year 3**
  - *One semester, 28 x 50 mins lectures*
- Discrimination – racial & gender
- Professional Ethics: pastoral ministry
- Sexual & social ethics - presentations





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 1**
- Mini-assignments
  - While still introducing ethics the students do 2 mini-assignments on ethical issues
  - **1. Key arguments 1**
  - Students choose one of 26 topics & **list 5 key arguments**
    - e.g. Arguments against female genital mutilation
    - Is it right to download copyright music?
  - Each argument is one, at most 2, sentences
  - Students struggle to identify arguments, especially the key arguments





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 1**
- Mini-assignments
  - **2. Key arguments 2**
  - Identify 3 key arguments & develop in a **paragraph**
  - A key skill in moral persuasion
  - **In preaching** one has to be able to argue cogently & convincingly, focussing on a few key arguments





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 1**
- Mini-assignments
  - **3. Thesis of a book**
  - Students **identify the thesis** of Christopher Ash's *Marriage: sex in the service of God* & from ch 7 list the arguments in support of his thesis
  - Students learn to discern an author's arguments – most find it difficult!
  - Bonus: discover the **purpose/s of marriage** & what sort of **partner** to look for if they're going to serve God together!





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 1**
- Mini-assignments
  - **4. Letter to the Editor**
  - Write a letter on a trending (or new) ethical topic & submit to a major local newspaper without Bible bashing
  - About a third get published!
  - The students generally do quite well in this assignment





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 1**
- **Group assignment**
- Students in groups of 4-5 research a topic & present in a tutorial (10-15 mins), followed by discussion
- Topics chosen in 2016:
  - Creation stewardship
  - Human rights
  - Racism
  - Abortion
  - Same-sex marriage





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 2**
- **African Ethical Issues**
- Group assignment
- Students suggest many topics & then vote
- 2016 topics:
  - Land reform
  - Initiation
  - The Big Man Syndrome
  - Bribery
  - Should Christians enter politics?





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **1. Discrimination**
- Main focus is **racism** – *tribalism* is included
- Secondary focus on **gender** discrimination
- An opportunity to do a topic in depth
  - 10 lecture periods + 3 movies





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **1. Discrimination**
  - Lecture: Ethnicity & race
  - Sharing our **stories** of racism/gender discrimination
  - Theory: Jonathan Jansen's *Bearing whiteness*
  - **White privilege** – listening to one another
  - Gender discrimination – **video** & discussion





# Always #LikeAGirl





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **1. Discrimination**
  - The gospel & ethnicity: **transforming our churches**
  - Reading: John Piper, *Bloodlines* (selections)
  - Theory: Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (selections)
  - Writing: **Reflection on racism** (based on the whole series)





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **1. Discrimination**
  - **Movies:** students must choose, watch & discuss 3 assigned movies e.g.:
    - **Cry freedom** (compulsory for South Africans)
    - Red Dust
    - Skin
    - Shooting Dogs
    - To Kill a Mockingbird
    - The Help
    - Selma





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **2. Professional Ethics for Pastors**
- Professional ethics
  - in law schools, medical schools, business schools
  - rarely in theological colleges
- Examine & discuss **3 codes of ethics** for pastors
- REACH\* South Africa's **Child Protection Policy**
- \* Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of SA





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Year 3**
- **3. Sexual & Social Ethics**
- **Final term: students present papers on chosen topics**
  - Formal response
  - Class discussion
- Major research paper
- **Complex topics (grey) – high level ethical argument**





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Conclusion**
- In addressing ethical issues there is:
  - laying a **biblical foundation** of law & gospel
  - understanding ethics in **biblical theological perspective**
    - ethics rooted in **creation**
    - ruined by the **fall**
    - restored in **redemption**
    - consummated in the **new creation**





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Conclusion**

- **graded development** of students

- In ethical thinking, analysis & skills
- In reading & writing
- In speaking

- **progressive involvement** of students

- Year 1 – mainly participative lectures + group presentations
- Year 3 – mainly student participation & presentations





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Conclusion**
- In addressing ethical issues we cover:
  - A wide **variety of topics** e.g.:
    - personal issues – marriage, lobolo, honouring parents, child discipline, copying music, abortion, sexual ethics
    - justice issues – capital punishment, restorative justice
    - political issues – human rights, hate speech
    - social & economic issues – land, poverty, corruption
    - environmental issues – appreciation & stewardship of nature
    - Western topics – homosexuality, consumerism
    - African topics – initiation, FGM, sexism, authoritarianism





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Conclusion**
- In addressing ethical issues we employ:
  - **A wide variety of teaching methods**
    - lectures & student questions
    - small group & class discussions
    - reading & research
    - writing – mini-assignments, essays, reflections, PowerPoints
    - testimonies
    - video clips & movies
    - student presentations & responses
    - group presentations





# Addressing Ethical Issues

- **Conclusion**
- Our students are well **equipped** to handle ethical issues that arise in their ministry, nation, community, family & personal lives
- They hopefully see the **importance** of addressing contextual ethical issues
- I trust they will be in a position to say: **‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’** (1 Cor 11:1)
- And exhort: **‘Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ’** (Phil 1:27)





