

CHAMINADE UNIVERSITY OF HONOLULU  
RE 200 Contemporary Issues in Christianity  
Instructor: Larry Jones  
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Office hours by appointment and/or phone and/or e-mail

KE'00  
Pms

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Examines contemporary social issues which confront the Christian community, the relevant biblical and theological assumptions that Christianity brings to the debate on these issues, and the methods to bring about social change within the context of the Christian community.

**GOAL:** For students individually and in dialogue with each other and the instructor 1) to bring open yet critical and reflective minds to a number of issues in our society about which the Christians are (or ought to be) concerned, 2) to examine differing ways in which Christians (principally) as well as those from other traditions may view those issues and 3) to begin to formulate or reformulate a clearer understanding of how to engage these issues such that we can make a larger contribution toward humanizing the world.

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. To honestly examine the depth of our own commitment to justice and truth as a life priority and deepen our sense of caring for other human beings and the world around us.
2. To develop a more all around understanding of some critical moral issues such that we may participate wisely and lovingly in the process of social change.
3. To become familiar with various theological and biblical approaches to social issues within the Christian tradition and how they may agree with or diverge from other traditions.
4. To be able to be challenged by ideas which differ from our own and yet to respect and care about those who hold them.
5. To have a learning experience which is both challenging and fun.

**REQUIREMENTS**

1. An inquisitive yet open mind and a sense of humor.
2. Attendance (full period) and participation in all class sessions.
3. Completion of all reading assignments.
4. A one to two page response to the combined readings each session. (Extra credit for a response to optional readings for last session.)
5. Completion of a 6 - 8 page term paper. At Session #5 you will be asked to turn in a one paragraph statement and to report briefly to the class on your plan for your paper, which is due on last day.
6. Mid-term exam (Session #6) and final exam (Session #10). Essay exams focusing on information covered in preceding class sessions.

**READINGS:** Text: Paul T. Jersild and Dale A. Johnson, ed. *Moral Issues and Christian Response*, Sixth Edition  
The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, any translation  
Various handouts

**GRADING:** 20% class attendance (*unavoidable absences may be made up after consultation with instructor initiated by student*) and participation (*defined by quality, not quantity*)  
20% weekly reading responses (2.5% X 8 weeks)  
20% term paper (see next page for particulars)  
20% mid-term exam, Session #6  
20% final exam, Session #10

A = 90 - 100%      D = 60 - 70%      I=Incomplete  
B = 80 - 90%      F = anything below 60%  
C = 70 - 80%      SEE ATTACHMENT RE PLAGIARISM

*The instructor reserves the right to make changes in the content of the course depending on the needs of the class.*

**TERM PAPER:**

1. Based on a social issue related to one of the class topics. If you would like to choose another topic, please consult with instructor.
2. Six to 8 pages of written material. May be up to 10 pages, but no shorter than 6.
3. Use at least five research sources, three of which may be from the Internet and one of which shall be an interview of a specialist. You may use material from the text which was not assigned reading.
4. Discuss at least two differing points of view and conclude with your own.
5. Include discussion of why the chosen subject is relevant to Christianity.
6. Proposal for paper shall be summarized in a paragraph turned in at Session #5 and shared briefly with the class on that date.
7. Use MLA format (see handout) or APA format, including cites and reference list, double space and use proper grammar and punctuation.
8. When you turn in your paper at the last class session, also please provide instructor with a self-addressed envelope with 55 cents of stamps if you wish your paper returned to you.

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**FORM FOR TERM PAPER  
HEADING**

Term Paper

Name  
Date turned in

Title of Paper

[suggested outline]

Introduction

Statement of the issue or problem

(Example: The death penalty is of concern to Christians because it is a life and death issue, yet Christians disagree on both the usefulness and morality of the death penalty, etc., etc.)

Body

Arguments in favor of the death penalty

Arguments against the death penalty

Conclusion

Summary

What my views are after researching and reflecting on the above

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**STYLE**

Typed

Double spaced, 1" margins

Correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure

APA or MLA format, including reference list and cites (see handout)

**CITE ALL IDEAS, INFORMATION OR QUOTES WHICH COME FROM SOURCES AND LIST THEM IN A REFERENCE LIST AT THE END.**

## RESPONSE PAPERS

1. The purpose of the response papers is to show that you actually did the readings and that you gave some critical thought to them.
2. The papers are due at the class session dealing with those readings.
3. While doing the readings you should jot down ideas that impress you, things you disagree with, or questions you have.
4. After you have completed the readings you are to write one to two pages of your reflections on the readings using your reading notes per #3 above as a guide.

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### FORM FOR RESPONSE PAPERS HEADINGS

Readings for Session No. \_\_\_\_  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date turned in \_\_\_\_\_

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### STYLE

Typewritten  
double spaced  
1 inch margins  
correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure.

**THE QUESTIONS IN THE SYLLABUS ARE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHILE YOU READ; THEY ARE NOT NECESSARILY QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED IN YOUR REFLECTION PAPER.**

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### MAKING UP ABSENCES

Excused absences, such as military duty, may be made up by consultation with the instructor. However, since you will not have had the benefit of classroom presentations and discussions when absent, you will need to spend some extra time mastering the reading materials. Otherwise your lack of thorough information will show up on the tests.

**SESSION #1**

Do you think the following have been 1) more beneficial to our society or 2) more harmful to our society?

Automobiles	Death penalty	Food stamps	Right to die
Military intervention	“Don’t ask, don’t tell”	Television	Affirmative action

Introductions (name, home town, job, family, year in college and how you responded to above list)

Discussion of syllabus

Presentation and discussion: **HOW DO WE KNOW OUR BELIEFS ARE TRUE or IS YOUR GOD TOO SMALL?**

Video: *Jesus the Rebel*, from PBS series: “The Lives of Jesus” (50 min.)

Handouts for next week's reading

On the basis of the readings for next session, come prepared to discuss what role you think the church should play in regards to issues of social justice and why.

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**SESSION #2**

**SHOULD THE CHURCH BE INVOLVED IN SOCIAL ISSUES?**

Discussion of what role you think the church should play in regards to issues of social justice and why. Consider the following differing positions: 1) The church as institution should use its influence and power to affect issues of social justice or 2) The church should limit its justice role to moral training of lay people to play their separate roles in society, or 3) The church should play no role in relation to issues of social justice.

Case study: **THE ENVIRONMENT**

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**READINGS:**

**The church and social action:**

**Bible:** Amos 5: 21-24  
**Text:** Chapter 1:10-21, Robert Benne, *The Church and Politics: Hot and Cool Connections*  
**Handouts:** Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *A Concise History of Liberation Theology Kairos Document: Preface and Ch. 2*  
Bob Avakian, *Can We Be Good Without God?*

**The environment:**

**Bible:** Genesis 1  
**Text:** Chapter 9:208-213, James Martin-Schramm, *Toward an Ethic of Eco Justice*  
**Handouts:** Hawaiian Kalo myth  
Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Toward an Ecological-Feminist Theology of Nature*  
*An Environmental Fact Sheet* compiled by instructor.

### SESSION #3

#### WHEN IS VIOLENCE JUSTIFIED?

Things to think about while reading:

- What are the root causes of violence in society?
- How should we deal with domestic violence?
- Is the death penalty justified violence?
- Military violence vs. pacifism

Video and discussion: Nightline, 11/18/98, *Dead Men Talking: The Dangers of Executing the Innocent*

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#### READINGS:

- Bible:** Matthew 5:38-45, John 2:13-16
- Text:** Chapter 10:229-232, Paul Jersold and Dale Johnson, *Violence and War..*  
Chapter 10:232-237, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Wise as Serpents, Gentle as Doves?:  
Challenge to Nonviolence in the Face of Pleas for Intervention*  
Chapter 10:238-243, John Langan, S.J., *To Intervene or Not to Intervene*  
Chapter 11:251-254, Richard Nygaard, 'Vengeance is Mine' Says the Lord  
Chapter 11:256-265, Ernest Van den Haag, *The Collapse of the Case Against  
Capital Punishment*
- Handouts:** Pierre Berton, *Whatever Is Necessary*, Last television interview of Malcolm X  
Andrew Young, *Martin Luther King as a Political Theologian*  
*Kairos* document: pp. 20-22  
Randolph T. Holbut, *Teen Violence: The Myths and the Realities*
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### SESSION #4

#### WOMEN, SEX AND THE FAMILY

Things to think about while reading:

- How has the modern family changed?
- What is the proper role of women?
- What is a viable sexual ethic?
- How should we understand marriage in contemporary society?
- The debate about homosexuality and same sex marriage.

Video: *All God's Children* produced by Women's Vision

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#### READINGS:

- Bible:** Luke 10:38-42, Mark 5:25-34
- Text:** Chapter 2: 41-47, Sister Marie Vianney Bilgrien, *The Voice of Woman in Moral  
Theology*  
Chapter 3:59-62, Jean Ponder Soto, *The Church and Marriage: Looking for a  
New Ethic*  
Chapter 6:134-140, Julie Polter, *When Body Meets Soul*
- Handouts:** Gender Basics, pp. 365-368, Rosemary Tong, *Sexual Harassment  
religioustolerance.org, Policies of Religious Groups Towards Gays, Lesbians  
and Homosexuality*  
ABC News 11/24/99, *So Much for Tradition*

NOTE: A PARAGRAPH AND ORAL REPORT ON TEM PAPER PROPOSAL DUE NEXT SESSION.

SESSION #5

WRITTEN DESCRIPTION AND ORAL REPORT ON PROPOSED TERM PAPER DUE.

(Review syllabus instructions first.)

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**TECHNOLOGY: IN WHOSE HANDS AND TO WHAT END?**

Things to think about while reading:

Has technology destroyed our sense of awe and wonder?

What ethical questions have arisen because of the technical/computer revolution? How well are they being addressed?

Has the Internet brought us closer together or pushed us further apart as a human community?

What should be the church's response to the impact of technology: withdraw from it, accept it as inevitable or try to change it?

Video and discussion: Nightline: *Brave New World, Part I*

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**READINGS:**

Bible: Genesis 11:1-9

Handouts: Philip J. Cunningham, C.S.P, *Tielhard de Chardin and the Noosphere*  
Neil Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*  
Jerry Mander (interview), *Bad Magic: The Failure of Technology*  
*Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics*

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SESSION #6

MID TERM EXAM

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**ETHICS AND ECONOMICS: WHAT MONEY (OR LACK OF IT) DOES TO PEOPLE**

Things to think about while reading:

Is there an ethical dimension to the "shop 'till I drop" phenomenon?

Capitalism vs. socialism.

The causes of poverty in a rich country like the U.S.?

What are the causes of the economic lopsidedness between the industrialized and the "developing" nations of the world?

Presentation and discussion on the economics of why there are haves and have-nots on a world scale.

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**READINGS:**

Bible: Amos 6:4-6, Matthew 6:19-33, Luke 1:46-56

Text: Chapter 12:273-278, Robert C. Roberts, *Just a Little Bit More: Greed and the Malling of Our Souls*

Chapter 13:293-301, Paul Johnson, *The Capitalism and Morality Debate*

Handout: Raymond Lotta, *Investment for Whom, Development for Whom?*, from papers and talks delivered by Marxist political economist Raymond Lotta in November 1996 in the Philippines

SESSION #7

**RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR BODIES**

Things to think about while reading:

- Genetic engineering and cloning: miracle or mistake?
- Should parents be forced to give medical care to their children even if it's against their religion?
- Should abortion be outlawed?
- Who should decide about the quality of life and dying if we are terminally ill?

Video (if time allows): Nightline: *Brave New World, Part II* or  
48 Hours: *Marked for Life* or  
ABC News clip on conjoined twins

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**READINGS:**

- Bible: Luke 11:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:18-19; James 2:15-17
  - Text: Chapter 15:345-367, James Walter, *Presuppositions to Moral Judgments on Human Genetic Manipulation*  
Chapter 17:387-405, Harrison & Cloyes, *Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice*  
Chapter 18:417-429, Margaret Farley, *Issues in Contemporary Christian Ethics: The Choice of Death in a Medical Context*
  - Handouts: Ruth Macklin, *Mortal Choices: Bioethics in Today's World, Ethical Dilemmas in Medicine*  
Richard A. McCormick, *Should We Clone Humans?*
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SESSION #8

**THEM AND US: A FRESH LOOK AT RACE RELATIONS**

Things to think about while reading:

- Are race relations improving?
- Is affirmative action needed?
- Is there such a thing as "reverse racism?"
- Does the U.S. have an "immigration problem?"
- Is the church part of the problem or part of the solution?

Video: *A Time for Justice: American's Civil Rights Movement*

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**READINGS:**

- Bible: Luke 10:25-37; Exodus 23:9-12
- Text: Chapter 5:108-131, National Council of Churches, *On Racial Justice*  
Chapter 8:190-198, Dana Wilbanks, *The Moral Debate between Humanitarianism and National Interest about U.S. Refugee Policy: A Theological Perspective*
- Handouts: Newsweek, 6/7/99, *The Good News About Black America (and Why Many Blacks Aren't Celebrating)*  
Tomi Kaizawa Knaefler, *Our House Divided*, "Introduction"  
Robert Bellah, et al., *The Good Society*, "Mass at Zapata Canyon"

SESSION #9

**SOVEREIGNTY: NECESSARY TO RIGHT A WRONG OR BACKWARD LOOKING WISHFUL THINKING?**

**Things to think about while reading:**

- The history behind the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.
- The church's role from the overthrow to the present.
- Should there be redress for Hawaiians?
- Is full independence for Hawaii a proper goal?

**Video:** *Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation*  
**Guest Speaker**

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**READINGS:**

**Bible:** Leviticus 25:1-13; I Kings 21

**Handouts:** Selections from *The Apology to Native Hawaiians*, (Public Law 103-150 and speech by Grover Cleveland), Ka'imi Pono Press  
Rev. Dr. Paul Sherry, [former] President, United Church of Christ, *An Apology to Na Kanaka Maoli*  
American Friends Service Committee, He Alo A He Alo, *An Interview with Mililani Trask*  
"Let's open a second dialogue," Honolulu Advertiser, 12/26/99  
H. William Burgess, et al., *Let's have a real second dialogue*

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SESSION #10

**FINAL EXAM**

**TERM PAPER DUE** (Include self-addressed envelope with 55 cents of stamps if you want it returned>)

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**OVERVIEW, WRAP UP AND EVALUATION**

Potluck meal and "talk story" discussion of how our views have been strengthened and/or changed as the result of this class.

Evaluation of the course and instructor

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**READINGS: (Optional. Extra credit for response paper.)**

**Bible:** Amos 7:7-8, Micah 6:8

**Handout:** Robert Bellah, et al., *The Good Society*, "The Public Church"