

**A BOOK REVIEW**  
**CHRISTIAN ETHICS/CONTEMPORARY ISSUES & OPTIONS/Second Edition**

**September 1, 2025**

**TITLE OF BOOK:** Christian Ethics/Contemporary Issues & Options

**AUTHOR:** Norman L. Geisler, PhD, Loyola University of Chicago, who is a distinguished professor of Theology and Apologetics at Veritas Evangelical Seminary, and who has written over 70 books. Dr. Geisler is considered to be a giant of Evangelical Theology. His views are widely respected in Evangelical Theological circles.

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**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

I have hesitated to write this Review. In fact, I have put off doing so for months, finding every excuse for even starting to do so. Why? My reluctance stems from two factors. First, and maybe I should say foremost, I don't feel qualified to evaluate the work of a distinguished scholar like Dr. Geisler. I consider myself to be a poorly educated person, since I attended what I consider to be two "professional trade schools", engineering school and law school. Yes, I have a degree in Civil Engineering, and a J.D. from law school, and I have practiced law for 53 years. That said, I have had a very limited exposure to the Humanities and the Arts, and my only exposures to Philosophy have occurred from my readings, generally those readings of books which I read for purposes of writing these Reviews. So, I am in no way qualified to evaluate the work of Dr. Geisler.

Secondly, I found myself as being somewhat confused by this book, if not, in fact, as being somewhat disappointed by it. It is what I would consider to be a higher-level college (or perhaps graduate level) text book. So, perhaps because of my limited education as it is described above, I thought that I would find a book that presents, first, the theories and methodologies to be applied to the problems that are to be confronted, and, then second, examples of the application of those theories and methodologies to the solving of various problems and issues. Admittedly, engineers and lawyers use a somewhat linear approach to their work. We learn the rules and theories and methodologies of our trade (or profession if we should, more properly use that word as opposed to the word "trade"), and then we learn how to apply those rules, theories and methodologies to the problems or projects that we will confront in our work. Perhaps, for these reasons and my admittedly education and work experience bias, I thought that Dr. Geisler would, in the first part of his book, describe the various theories or options, the "Ethical Options" for approaching the Ethical Issues which Christians constantly confront in our broken and complicated world, and that he would identify the proper Ethical Methodology or Option to be properly used by Christians in approaching these Issues, and that he would then demonstrate by examples in the next Section of his book, the manner in which the Preferred Ethical Option, if you will, should be applied or utilized in confronting some of the most pressing Ethical Issues which Christians confront.

I take no issue, none, with the excellent way in which (and the clearly stated and understandable way in which) Dr. Geisler, in the First Section of his book, which is Entitled "Ethical Options", describes All of and Each of the Options of Philosophical or Ethical Thought which have been derived, and used, over centuries of ethical debate and consideration in approaching the profound Ethical Dilemmas which human beings are constantly required to confront. This first Section is a masterpiece of clarity. It deals with a complex, difficult to describe subject matter in ways which are absolutely clear and easy to read, and then

go back and review. He describes each Ethical Option Theory. He identifies its originators and proponents. He identifies its strengths and its weakness, and then he arrives at an excellent conclusion as to why the Option or Theory of "Graded Absolutism" is the theory most suitable for use by Evangelical Christians. He then, finally, describes the Ethical Option or Theory known as "Graded Absolutism", and describes it, and identifies the reasons why he and Evangelical Scholars, Leaders and Theologians accept it as being the Ethical Option Methodology or Theory which should be used by Christians in confronting those Ethical Dilemmas where two of God's Commands or Rules or Wisdom seem to conflict with each other. For example, an Absolute Truth or Command is "Do Not Lie." Another Absolute Truth or Command requires the preservation of, the respect for, and the protection and value of human life. Is it, therefore, proper and not sinful for a Christian to lie, when that lie is necessary for the protection of human life? An Absolute Truth is that Murder is always wrong? Does a soldier who kills in war violate this Truth and is he or she guilty of a terrible sin? God wills that we obey the governing authorities. Is rebellion against a tyrannical government, therefore, a sin? Candidly, using my simplistic, linear thinking methodologies, I expected that Dr. Geisler, in the Second Part of his book which is Entitled Ethical Issues, to, somehow, as to each of the Issues he works with therein say something like: " See, this is How We Apply Graded Absolutism to this Issue". He might well have done that, but my simplistic mind has been unable, as to most of these Issues dealt with in the Second Section of his book, been unable to fathom or identify the manner in which he has applied the Ethical Option of Graded Absolutism (or truly any Ethical Option other than what I might refer to as "God's Revealed Truth Or Will, as Revealed by General/Natural Revelation or Special Revelation" (with Dr. Geisler making the argument for his selection of such Revealed Truth or Will)) to the particular Issue or Dilemma being dealt with.

I have absolutely no issue with the excellent, abundantly clear, easily understandable manner in which Dr. Geisler, in the Second Section of his book which is Entitled "Ethical Issues", identifies and describes each of the selected Ethical Issues (e.g. Abortion, War, Civil Disobedience), and then approaches that Issue and then provides for that Issue his analysis or argument for God's Revealed Truth or Will (whether through Natural/General Revelation/Natural Law or Special Revelation) and his conclusion as to the proper Christian approach to that Issue. While I or you, Dear Reader, might disagree, in whole or in part, with Dr. Geisler's determined Godly Revealed Truth or Will, or its application to the Issue at hand, or his conclusion as to how Christians must approach the Ethical Issue at hand, I find, and you will find that his identification and description of each Ethical Issue, and his scholarly, detailed approach to that Issue are clear and extremely helpful.

So, what am I, a linear thinking, probably poorly educated Reviewer trying to say here. Each Section of this book (i.e. the first Section, Ethical Options and the second Section, Ethical Issues) by itself, on a stand-alone basis, is clear, understandable, and very well done. I have been helped in my "Ethical Thinking" if you will, by each Section. I just don't see how the two Sections work together. Therefore, in one respect, I find this book to be very educational and helpful, but in another respect, I find it to be somewhat puzzling in its manner of presentation as described above.

My puzzlement notwithstanding, I can and do recommend this book for any Christian Pastor or Leader who is required to help other Christians deal with the Ethical Dilemmas which every Christian will confront in our broken, complex, increasingly complex and hard to understand world.

### **WHAT IS THE AUTHOR DOING WITH WHAT THE AUTHOR IS SAYING**

Our Author, Dr. Geisler, is a professor, an academic. He writes this book as such. He wants his readers to be aware of each of the Systems or Options, what he refers to as "Ethical Options", which has been originated and used, over decades of human thought, for approaching Ethical Dilemmas or Issues. He states that "Ethics deals with what is right and what is wrong". Christian Ethics (i.e., what is right for a Christians and what is wrong for Christians) is a "form of divine-command", a God revealed Will or

Command which constitutes a moral imperative as to what is right and what is wrong. God wills certain “moral imperatives” because they arise from his unchanging character, the moral attributes of his unchanging character. Since God’s character does not change, moral obligations flowing from that character are imperative and do not change. Our Author asserts that “Christian Ethics is based on God’s commands, the Revelation of which is both general (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:12-15) and Special (2:18; 3:2). God has revealed himself both in nature (Ps. 19:1-6) and in Scripture (19:7-14).” Christians are required to make moral decisions on the basis of God’s Revealed Truth and Will. Moral Rightness is prescriptive. Our Author asserts that “Since moral rightness is prescribed by a moral God, it is prescriptive....not descriptive...(and)...from a Christian point of view, a purely descriptive Ethic is no Ethic at all.” Describing human behavior is an exercise in sociology, not ethics, but prescribing human behavior is the province of morality.

There are basic Two General Categories of Ethical or Moral Reasoning, one being *Deontological*, or “Duty Oriented” (which is the Christian point of view) and the other being *teleological* (end-centered), or sort of “any means to a good or proper end is ok”. Christian Ethics is obviously deontological. We are “duty required” to obey God’s Revealed Will and Truth. We cannot use a purely “utilitarian system”, where “the end justifies the means.”

Dr. Geisler describes Six Major Ethical Views or Ethical Systems, each of which is designated by its answer to the question: “Are there any objective ethical laws?” That is “...are there any moral laws not purely subjective, but actually binding on humans in general?” These systems fall into these categories:

*Antinomianism: There are no moral laws,*

*Situationism: There is one, and only one Absolute Moral Law, the Law of Love,*

*Generalism: There are some General Laws, but no Absolute Ones,*

*Unqualified Absolutism: There are many Absolute Laws that never conflict with each other,*

*Conflicting Absolutism: There are many Absolute Laws or norms that sometimes conflict with each other, and we are obligated to do the “lesser evil”, and will be forgiven our sin for not following the other Law or Norm;*

*Graded Absolutism: There are many Absolute Laws, which sometimes conflict with each other, and we are responsible for following the higher law, and will be sinful if we do not do so.*

In separate chapters of Section 1 of his book, “Ethical Options”, Dr. Geisler identifies and describes each of these Six Ethical or Moral Systems. He identifies its origins. He describes how it is used. He describes its strength and weaknesses. He sets forth the conclusion as to why the particular System is either suitable for use by Christians or not suitable for use by Christians. He then concludes that the Sixth Optional System, *Graded Absolutism*, is the preferred, the selected Moral or Ethical System for Evangelical Christians.

I leave it to you, Dear Reader, to do your own reading of Section 1, “Ethical Options”, of Dr. Geisler’s book. This is an excellent Section, which is written like a higher-level college or graduate text book. You will leave this Section with a clear understanding of each of the Six Ethical Systems or Options, and with a clear understanding as to why *Graded Absolutism* ( i.e. If there are two applicable Absolute Moral Laws which could apply to a given situation, but they conflict, one with the other, then you are Morally obligated to follow the higher law, and there is no sin for violating the lower or lesser law and it is a sin to not follow the higher law). For example, while Not Telling A Lie, or Not Stating the Truth is an Absolute Moral Law which arises from God’s unchanging Moral Character, telling a lie or concealing the truth, or not stating the truth is appropriate if doing so will save a human life.

So, we leave the first Section of Dr. Geisler's book, "Ethical Options", knowing that Graded Absolutism is the preferred Option or System. We then enter Section 2 of that book, in which Dr. Geisler attacks 11 Ethical Issues or Dilemmas which confront humans today:

Abortion,  
Infanticide and Euthanasia,  
Biomedical Issues, including IVF, perhaps Human Cloning, etc.,  
Capital Punishment,  
War,  
Civil Disobedience, including Revolution,  
Sexual Issues, including Sex outside of Marriage,  
Homosexuality,  
Marriage and Divorce,  
Ecology (including Climate, Conservation, Use of Natural Resources),  
Animal Rights.

I am not going to begin to try to describe Dr. Geisler's descriptions, arguments, conclusions about the applicable Moral Laws/Absolute Laws/Godly Revealed Commands and Will, and Dr. Geisler's final conclusions about an appropriate Christian Moral/Ethical decision or action as to each of these separate eleven selected current day Moral Issues which are confronted by Christians and the Church, today. I leave it to you, Dear Reader, if you are dealing with any of these Issues (e.g. how should your congregation approach or deal with an issue of Abortion or Homosexuality) to read and carefully study Dr. Geisler's well written, well documented and well thought out Chapter which deals with that Issue. You might agree with him or disagree with him. Candidly, I find myself in a status of some disagreement with, or at least questions about his conclusion as to several of these issues. That said, I find that, if I do have some disagreement with him, then I need to use the same scholarly, Biblical, God's revelation approach to the Issue as he has done. I need to be very mindful of the fact that "Good Results Do Not Justify the Means", and that "God's Moral Law will oftentimes conflict with what our Society or Culture might think is 'good'". I need to be mindful that a "Utilitarian Approach" to an ethical problem (i.e. that we should try to achieve a good, loving result or outcome, whatever the means of doing so might be) is not a suitable Christian approach to any Ethical Issue. Hopefully, following an applying God's Absolute Law, Rule or Will will produce an outcome that is perceived as being "good", but the result is not the goal to be applied in dealing with a Christian Ethical Issue. Nevertheless, I still find myself falling into the trap of what might be called "Gradualism", where "some deviation from God's Absolute Law might be ok in our broken, post-fall world, if the results will be good or loving." That said, if I am going to disagree with Dr. Geisler, then my disagreement had better have a sound Biblical or God Revealed basis. Dr. Geisler has caused me to reexamine my Ethical thought processes, and he will likely do the same for you, Dear Reader.

### **HOW TO READ THIS BOOK**

This is a tough question. As your Reviewer, I read the book cover-to-cover, but I frankly admit that there is a good deal that I read which I do not recall. In my view, this book is a reference book. It is not a read from beginning to end book. That said, this book should be on the shelf of every Evangelical Christian Pastor and Church Leader. I don't think that the Christian, who I would refer to as the "Ordinary, Day to Day Christian", one of the people sitting in the congregation for your Sunday services, is going to want to read or will benefit from this book. It is not a book for popular consumption. This is a book for Pastors and Leaders. That said, I don't think that a Pastor or Leader needs to sit down and read this book, cover-

to-cover, although it would likely benefit them if they did so. I think that they should fully familiarize themselves with the Table of Contents, and should fully read Chapter 1, "All the Options", in which the general Ethical Systems are described, and the Six Basic Options are generally described. If it were me, I would probably then skip to, and would skim the chapters on Unqualified Absolutism and Conflicting Absolutism, and would then carefully read the chapter on Graded Absolutism. I would leave the Chapters of Section 2 of the Book, "Ethical Issues", for future consultation if one of those eleven issues presents itself in some fashion.

**SHOULD THIS BOOK BE RETAINED IN THE TEI LIBRARY OR CAN IT BE USED IN A TEI/ECLI CLASS**

This book should absolutely be held in the TEI Library. It is a great reference book. It can have great usage benefits for Pastors and Leaders, and for any Student who wants to study the issues of Christian Ethics, or of how to approach those issues, or who wants to have knowledge of the various Ethical Systems which are available. So, in my view at least, this book is a reference book. However, unless some TEI/ECLI class is dealing, specifically, with the matter of Christian Ethics, or, for some reason, has an issue with Christian Ethics or with one of the eleven Ethical Issues dealt with in the Second Section of this book, I don't see how it can be used in a TEI/ECLI Class.

With Apologies to Dr. Geisler, and Thanks to you Dear Reader, I am:

Dan Simon