The Problem of Evil & Suffering

THTH 8303 Pro Doc Seminar • Spring 2014
May 26-28, 2014 • New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

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“But as for me, afflicted and in pain—
may your salvation, God, protect me.”

Psalm 69:29 (NIV)

Seminary Mission Statement

Our mission is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Core Value and Key Competency

The primary core value of the Seminary addressed in this course is Doctrinal Integrity. The primary key competency in ministry addressed is Christian Theological Heritage. The core value for the 2013-14 academic year is [appointed by the President].

Course Description

This course exposes students to classical and contemporary treatments of the so-called problem of evil and explores their significance for the Christian worldview and ministry in the local church. Issues addressed include the nature of evil and suffering, the cause of evil, the intelligibility and coherence of the Christian concept of God in light of evil, solutions offered by various world religions to the problem of evil, and an assortment of philosophical and apologetic responses to the problem at hand.

Statement on Biblical Authority

In order to develop competent ministry leaders for the twenty-first century church and academy, students in this course will be exposed to important works in theology and philosophy from a wide array of worldviews, including the influential works of many prominent non-Christian and non-evangelical philosophers and theologians. Students are expected to become familiar with and demonstrate advanced, biblically guided critical engagement with the works of these thinkers.

The course instructor operates under the assumption that the Bible is the inspired, totally true and trustworthy Word of God which is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for
training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Baptist Faith and Message (2000) provides the confessional framework in which the instructor leads the course.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Students will read broadly on God and the problem of evil as understood and studied in philosophy of religion.
2. Students will become familiar with issues related to evil and the Christian concept of God.
3. Students will explore the practical significance of this topic for pastoral ministry, apologetics, and evangelism.
4. Students will apply what they learn to specific ministry tasks and reflect on the value of this kind of study for everyday ministry.
5. Students will train individuals in their ministry context how to address concerns related to the problem of pain and suffering.

**Teaching Methodology**

Students will approach issues related to the problem of evil through assigned readings in philosophy and apologetics, seminar lectures, group discussion, class presentations, and the completion of a ministry project related to the course content.

**Course Texts (Required)**


**Ministry Book Review Texts (Assigned after Registration)**


**Course Schedule and Assignments**

**Pre-seminar Assignments (Due May 26, 2014)**

1. Each student will read Michael L. Peterson’s *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* and write one-page (double-spaced) summaries of each chapter. *Students are encouraged to read this text FIRST because it will be beneficial to the reading of primary sources in the Adamses’ book.*

2. Each student will read and provide brief, two paragraph-long summaries of every article in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams’s *The Problem of Evil*. These summaries should include the thesis and main argument of each article.

3. Each student will read D. A. Carson’s *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* and produce ten talking points and/or discussion questions for the seminar meeting. Students will need to bring two (2) copies of these talking points and discussion questions to class: one for the professor and one for the student.

4. Each student will read and review a book from a pre-approved list of texts that relate the problem of pain/suffering/evil/grief to practical ministry. The review should include (1) a bibliography entry, (2) a brief biographical data about the author(s) (e.g., his or her position, degrees, research interests, and books), (3) an assessment of the main purpose and/or thesis of the book, (4) a concise summary of the book’s contents, (5) a thorough critical analysis of the book, and (6) a conclusion with a recommendation or dismissal. The reviews should be between 4-6 single-spaced pages and should conform to Turabian style. Because book reviews are primarily about one source, use parenthetical citations for the primary text and footnotes only for external sources.

**In-seminar Assignments**

1. Students will develop and deliver presentations based on the ministry text they reviewed. They will (1) summarize the argument of the book, (2) address points of practical concern for ministry in the local church, and (3) relate the content of the book to Christian apologetic and evangelistic ministry. The professor will e-mail a schedule to students prior to the seminar meeting.

2. Students are expected to participate in classroom discussion and to read all required materials prior to class attendance.
Post-seminar Assignments

1. Each student will write a 7-10 page personal reflection paper summarizing his or her views on the problem of evil and suffering. Due June 14, 2014.

2. Each student will prepare and preach/teach an apologetic sermon manuscript/ Bible-study manuscript (5-6 pages) related to the problem of evil, suffering, and grief. Students will also include a brief written reflection describing their experience and the reception of and response to their message. Due June 21, 2014.

3. Each student will have an evangelistic encounter with a non-believer struggling with questions related to evil and suffering and write a 2-3 page reflection of their experience. Due July 5, 2014.

Course Evaluation

Attendance and Participation 5%
God and Evil Chapter Summaries 5%
The Problem of Evil Article Summaries 5%
How Long ‘O Lord? Talking Points/Discussion Questions 10%
Ministry Book Review 20%
In-class Presentation 15%
Personal Reflection Paper 10%
Sermon Manuscript and Reflection 20%
Evangelistic Encounter Reflection 10%

Additional Bibliography


