



Dealing with Doubt PHIL6321

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Theological and Historical Division

Professor: Dr. Gary Habermas

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January 4-8, 2021

January 4, 6:00-9:00 p.m. CST

January 5-7, 1:00-4:00 p.m. CST

January 8, 8:00-11:00 a.m. CST

Hardin Student Center 277

SEMINARY MISSION STATEMENT

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College prepare servants to walk with Christ, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate seminar pursues a practical application of apologetics to the assorted varieties of religious uncertainty. Emphasis is placed on understanding the nature of doubt and lessening its effect on suffering individuals. (Important Note: Our goal is concerned with pastoral, biblical, and/or peer interaction with doubters, hence it does not presuppose or presume any psychiatric, psychological, or counseling advice or data being distributed, which is an entirely different field.)

RATIONALE

Arguably, no troublesome issue in the Christian life is more common than religious doubt, since perhaps all believers ask tough faith questions from time to time. It is reportedly the cause of widespread pain, unrest, and lack of peace, as well as keeping Christians from being more effective. Sometimes sufferers report a loss of faith being due to such issues. Hence, it is a good target for the application of apologetic and pastoral tools.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through this course, the student should be able to:

- Identify and interact with the general subject of religious doubt, including key definitions, numerous examples, faulty views, and three major species. This information will be assumed in the completion of all written assignments outlined below.
- Investigate in an introductory manner a theoretical characteristic of this topic, as developed from recent insights in philosophy of religion, pastoral theology, or exegetical research, and demonstrated primarily in written research essay #1 (VII, B, below).
- Gain an initial understanding of how to pastorally and/or peer-advise (as opposed to counseling) by interacting with a doubting individual, including identifying the species of doubt, providing direction concerning how to grow personally past a particular painful issue, as signified by both class role-playing and by essay #2 (VII, C, below).

Develop a potential theoretical strategy for dealing with more advanced volitional doubters that challenges their lack of motivation, as indicated in essay #3 (VII, D, below).

TEXTBOOKS

REQUIRED READING:

Habermas, Gary. *Dealing with Doubt*. Chicago: Moody, 1990. Out of print, available free on website, www.garyhabermas.com)

———. *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 1998. (Out of print, available free on website, www.garyhabermas.com)

Guinness, Os. *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of a Doubt*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1996.

Moser, Paul. *Why Isn't God More Obvious?* RZIM Critical Questions. Atlanta: Ravi Zacharias Ministries, 2000.

Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Paul Moser, Editors. *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Clark, Kelly James. *When Faith is Not Enough*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Greig, Pete. *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer*. Raleigh, NC: Regal, 2001.

Guest, John. *In Search of Certainty: Answers to Doubt When Values Are Eroding and Unbelief is Fashionable*. Raleigh, NC: Regal, 1983.

Habermas, Gary. *Why is God Ignoring Me?: What to Do When It Feels Like He's Giving You the Silent Treatment*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010.

McGrath, Alister. *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006.

Moreland, J.P. and Klaus Issler. *In Search of a Confident Faith: Overcoming Barriers to Trusting in God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008.

Moser, Paul. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Parker, Gary E. *The Gift of Doubt: From Crisis to Authentic Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

Sproul, R.C. Editor, *Doubt and Assurance: Looking for Certainty When the Heart Doubts*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Out Loud*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.

———. *Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can We Expect to Find?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.

White, James Emery. *Embracing the Mysterious God: Loving the God We Don't Understand*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003.

PRE-CLASS READING ASSIGNMENTS

Prepare for class by reading and assimilating the content of at least the two required volumes by Habermas, *Dealing with Doubt* and *The Thomas Factor*. Concentrate chiefly on the latter work, which comes the closest to the projected class format and discussions. Be prepared not only for class discussions regarding the content of these texts, but as much as possible for role-playing in class. Pay particular attention to Chapters 6-10 of *The Thomas Factor* and Chapter 4 of *Dealing with Doubt*.

Time permitting, an additional area of emphasis would be to read and digest Os Guinness' volume, *God in the Dark*. Concentrate especially on his demarcation of the families of doubt.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

In this course, class participation and reading (see below) contribute to the "Class Participation" portion of the grade. Emphasis will be placed primarily on the quality of interaction (rather than its quantity) during the designated times of role playing.

Research Essay #1 should develop and apply a single response or responses to advanced volitional doubters who need to be motivated, but strive to do so in a way that differs significantly from the primary approaches used in class. Grading is based chiefly on the creativity of your applications and the likelihood of success. *Strict maximum* length for paper #1: 5-7 pages (double-spaced). **Due February 12, 2021**

Research essay #2 is designed to indicate the student's understanding and competence in directing a hurting person (either a real or "invented" individual) through a particular aspect of their emotional doubt. Be creative and develop an approach that is aimed chiefly at solving a particular *practical* problem, such as the assurance of salvation, the silence of God, the fear of death, or "what if" questions about the truth of key areas of the Christian belief. Attempt to present some creative insights and break new ground. Spend the majority of your essay composing a strong response in an area of emotional uncertainty. Grading is based on the ability to properly assess what is going on with the individual as well as providing the best responses to the issues. Note: While you can certainly use Scripture throughout in your approach/answer, do not actually exegete particular texts, but concentrate on pinpointing and addressing the emotional elements. *Strict maximum* length for paper #2: 10 pages (double-spaced). **Due March 12, 2021**

Research essay #3 consists of investigating a key theoretical component of the treatment of *emotional doubt*, as grounded in cognitive or cognitive behavioral methods, the ABC method or similar approaches, relations to distraught emotional states, or crucial theoretical aspects of the philosophical problem of the silence of God. *All three essays* should be written in Times New Roman 12, double-spaced, with normal margins, including endnotes or footnotes (with the latter in font 10). Use the notes to document your research as well as develop additional explanations or cognate ideas. When the actual research source was not used directly, always include the work where the reference was mentioned, though keep these secondary references to a minimum. The finished

products must be scholarly and signify original thinking, aiming for a final result that is publishable. Maintain consistency throughout this essay, especially in the references. Avoid summarizing any class notes or discussions, unless documented. Strive to avoid the use of any but the most indispensable Internet sources, and only then when they were written by recognized authors or authorities. Grading is to be based chiefly on the quality of the research, the overall response to your topic, and the originality of the insights. *Strict maximum* length for paper #3: 15 pages (double-spaced). **Due May 7, 2021**

Reading Record: A statement is required that records the total amount of reading pages that were completed specifically for this class, including the additional recommended reading. Include the author, title, publisher, and total pages for each text. You may also count pages used for your research essays and the total should be at least 2000 pages. Be sure to provide the final total page count. Insure that the material is directly relevant to the course topic and as close to graduate-level reading as possible. All the required reading under part VI is included here, as well. This is also a part of the “Class Participation” grade. **Due May 7, 2021**

The professor reserves the right to change any of the course items, including the content, procedures, and/or grading, depending on the class direction and circumstances.

COURSE GRADING AND POLICIES

The final grade is made up as follows:

Research Essay #1	20%
Research Essay #2	30%
Research Essay #3	35%
<u>Oral participation, attendance, & reading . . .</u>	<u>15%</u>
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale: NOBTS scale

No late work is accepted without the penalty of five (5) points per day, including separate weekend days and holidays. The penalty begins from the due date unless the professor has granted prior permission.

All required class assignments must be completed satisfactorily in order for the student to pass the course.

ATTENDANCE POLICY. Class attendance is required at each session unless prior permission has been given. Attendance is part of the 15% oral participation, attendance, and reading portion of the final grade.

NOLA2U LIVE

If you are taking this course as a NOLA2U Live student, please note the following attendance policies:

1. The course on the New Orleans campus will be connected synchronously via Web conferencing with Internet students. These courses will require weekly attendance at the stated class meeting times.
2. Students are only allowed to miss the amount of class time specified in the NOBTS attendance policy as stated in the graduate catalog. (See page 184 in the graduate catalog: <https://www.nobts.edu/resources/pdf/academics/GraduateCatalog.pdf>).

Technical Assistance

For assistance regarding technology, consult ITC (504-816-8180) or the following websites:

1. Selfserve@nobts.edu - Email for technical questions/support requests with the Selfserve.nobts.edu site (Access to online registration, financial account, online transcript, etc.)
2. BlackboardHelpDesk@nobts.edu - Email for technical questions/support requests with the NOBTS Blackboard Learning Management System NOBTS.Blackboard.com.
3. ITCSupport@nobts.edu - Email for general technical questions/support requests.
4. www.NOBTS.edu/itc/ - General NOBTS technical help information is provided on this website.

[Other items may be included, such as: expectations for reading assignments, policy on late assignments, academic honesty, classroom demeanor, extra credit]

Help for Writing Papers at “The Write Stuff”

NOBTS maintains a Writing Center designed to improve English writing at the graduate level. Students can receive writing guides, tips, and valuable information to help in becoming a better writer.

Plagiarism on Written Assignments

NOBTS has a no tolerance policy for plagiarism. Plagiarism in certain cases may result in expulsion from the seminary. See the NOBTS Student Handbook for definition, penalties, and policies associated with plagiarism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clark, Kelly James. *When Faith is Not Enough*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Greig, Pete. *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer*. Raleigh, NC: Regal, 2001.
- Guinness, Os. *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of a Doubt*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1996.
- Guest, John. *In Search of Certainty: Answers to Doubt When Values Are Eroding and Unbelief is Fashionable*. Raleigh, NC: Regal, 1983.
- Habermas, Gary. *Dealing with Doubt*. Chicago: Moody, 1990. Out of print, available freely on website, www.garyhabermas.com)
- . *The Thomas Factor: Using Your Doubts to Draw Closer to God*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 1998. (Out of print, available freely on website, www.garyhabermas.com)
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- Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Paul Moser, Editors. *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- McGrath, Alister. *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006.
- Moreland, J.P. and Klaus Issler. *In Search of a Confident Faith: Overcoming Barriers to Trusting in God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Moser, Paul. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
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