

D. MIN. SEMINAR III
The Minister as Theological Interpreter
SYLLABUS
January 9 – 13, 2012

General Description

This seminar will engage students in theological reflection on their practice of ministry, with a particular focus on ministry in relation to suffering. Attention will be paid both to the practice of theological reflection in ministry and also to a range of theologies which have engaged the wide-ranging questions raised by suffering in God's good creation.

As with any important topic, the questions posed by suffering are both complex in themselves and intertwined with other central affirmations of Christian faith – touching on creation, theological anthropology, Christology and ethics, to name only some. Ministry with the suffering requires both the ability to respond from one's own theological perspective and also to appreciate the resources and challenges offered by other positions, which may be informing those with whom one is in ministry.

By the end of the seminar, students will demonstrate comprehensive and critical reflection on their personal vocational narratives and will identify significant concerns worthy of addressing from the stories from their context in ministry.

In preparation for Seminar III:

I. Students are to continue to reflect on their pastoral identity and the context in which they practice. This involves further thinking about the readings and reflections from Seminars I and II.

II. Students are to advance their planning toward their Learning Project.

A. In consultation with the instructors, choose and read a major work of a recognized theologian, contemporary or historical, with whom you want to be in dialogue to help you think theologically about your narrative of concern for your project.

B. Prepare a draft, approximately 10 pages long, of a Learning Project Prospectus.

See the "Guide to the Doctor of Ministry Learning Project" document for specific description of what your project is about, the types of methods possible, and how to organize the project. Also see the "Learning Project Outline" for a brief outline of the prospectus. Another resource for choosing a topic and organizing it for research is Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 7th Edition, Part I, Chapters 1-14.

The basic tasks in the paper for this seminar are to 1) identify a narrative of concern in your context, 2) identify a way of studying and addressing that narrative concern—“methods and strategy for a study,” and 3) imagine how you might evaluate the outcomes of such a study.

Concentrate especially on how you will approach the sections calling for biblical and theological reflection – this is the place where the dialogue with your chosen theologian ought clearly to be reflected.

III. Students are to deepen their practices of theological reflection around issues of suffering.

A. By completing the assigned reading, as described below.

While a unified paper on these readings is not assigned, it is highly recommended that you keep a theological reading journal as you read them. Entries can be brief and informal, but you will find it helpful to keep a record “in real time” of your resonances, dissonances and other responses to each perspective, so that you can continue to build your own positions. You will want to bring this to the seminar!

A journal will also help you to focus on the aspects of suffering which are most engaging for you in your ministry context. As you read and write, you will become more aware of the questions which you are most determined to pursue in the seminar.

B. By completing three tasks designed to help you, as theological interpreter, bring together your work of ministry and the theological wisdom you are encountering:

1. Present briefly a situation which has posed for you, in sharpest form, the questions which suffering poses for faith.

This vignette should ordinarily come from your work as a minister; if you want to draw on a personal or societal experience, please consult with the instructors in advance.

Then, drawing on your “best practices” of theological interpretation and on the readings for this seminar – engage in theological reflection! Show how you draw upon theological insights to inform your response, and let us see something of how these perspectives cohere with other positions which inform your work as a theological interpreter.

This paper should be brief – aim for about 5 - 7 pages. As you write, think also about the seminar presentation for which this is preparation: write to open up questions, not shut them down, and to reflect your areas of unresolved struggle as well as of clear theological affirmation.

2. Select a biblical text which speaks to you most powerfully about the questions of suffering.

This may be a passage which provides you with central grounding, or one which continues to unsettle you. Then wrestle with that passage – as a “theological interpreter” who is also a biblical interpreter. Again, let us see – not only in your text itself but also beneath the text and between the lines, subject to your expansion orally – that you are now bringing the seminar readings to bear on your interpretations.

This paper also should also be brief – about 5 pages. You may want to use the form of a sermon, but you may use a more formal academic style as well.

3. Prepare to share with the Seminar another form of faithful encounter with suffering. This could be through music, photography or painting, dance, drama, poetry, or other form. Be prepared to speak about the theological reflection behind your creation – and of course look for the coherence between this mode of your theological interpretation and your first two projects.

IV. Prepare for leading a brief time of opening worship and devotion on one of our days.

For Monday January 9, leadership will be arranged in advance; for the other days, a sign-up sheet for leadership, in teams of 3, will be circulated. This schedule means that the actual planning can be done on campus, but it might be helpful to bring resources to propose.

Due Dates for of writing assignments:

Wednesday, 4 January: The draft of the Prospectus is distributed to both instructors and peers.

Thursday, 5 January: Instructors receive at least the assignments described in B.1 and B.2, with at least a description of what will be completed for B.3.

Readings:

The readings are chosen to prompt your thinking on a wide range of questions which arise from engagement with suffering. Some will be more lively for you than others, and you will not – could not – agree with all that you read: use the discomforts and quarrels as well as the agreements and inspirations to help deepen your own positions. You are dealing with the questions of God, of human life and all creation, and the resources of Christian biblical and theological resources – expect to find yourself searching at times for your bearings.

Books

Robert Kinast, *If Only You Recognized God's Gift: John's Gospel As an Illustration of Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993).

This is an invitation to the tasks of theological reflection; you might want to read it first.

Emilie M. Townes, ed., *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

This classic collection of essays offers many entry points into a variety of issues discussed in African – American theology. Follow your questions, but be sure to read chapters 5, 8, 9, 12, 13.

Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

As with Townes, this is a diverse collection, and you probably will not read all the essays. But browse thoroughly, following authors and issues which interest you and connect with questions from other readings. In any case, read more than half of the chapters: at least three from Part I, noting the common features but also specific social locations and perspectives; at least 8, 9, and 12 or 13 in Part II, and at least 14, 17 and 18 in Part III.

W. H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God*, revised edition (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007).

In this short and accessible book, an English theologian who skipped professorships to remain in congregational ministry argues that God is indeed all-powerful but that God's only power is the power of love.

Articles and chapters, available on CAMS:

Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2007), 142-155 and 219-221.

Together with Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's essay in Emily Townes' volume, this chapter focuses attention on roles of worship –as it can both reflect and also resist perspectives with strong cultural currency.

Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World*, second edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 41-55 and 145-6.

A final work from a senior figure in Reformed theology, this essay both accepts some of the criticism of the Calvinist tradition articulated by other readings and proposes a reconstructed understanding which finds enduring strength in this tradition.

John F. Haught, *God after Darwin* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 105-120 and 202-204.

This process theologian looks at the implications of evolutionary understandings for views of suffering – with a positive view of the resources of Christian faith.

Susan L. Nelson, "Facing Evil: Evil's Many Faces, Five Paradigms for Understanding Evil," *Interpretation* 57.4 (October 2003), 398 – 413.

This essay might well be read early in your preparation: its overview of paradigms provides one way of organizing the diversity of views in Christian reflection, without arguing for the need to select one.

Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African – American Religious Thought* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 1-20.

Read in conjunction with the essays in Emilie Townes's book, this essay provides a helpful grounding of theodicy within the context of African – American experience.

And one more book or other resource, of your own choosing:

There are undoubtedly resources which have shaped your theological outlook concerning suffering. These may be a book read in seminary, a narrative of personal suffering, or even a movie, a novel or a hymn. Choose one, and look again at it in light of your preparation for this seminar: this will give you a measure of how your thinking might be changing – or staying the same. Come prepared to describe briefly what you discover.

Finally, recommendations for enjoyable edification:

At the urging of Johanna Bos and Rollin Tarter, lively books on grammar and writing style are encouraged. Here are some suggestions, all widely available in multiple editions and formats:

Karen Elizabeth Gordon, *The Well-Tempered Sentence* and *The Transitive Vampire*.

Constance Hale, *Sin and Syntax*.

Patricia T. O'Connor, *Woe is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English*.

William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*.

Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*.

LPTS academic policies:

Classroom climate

A D.Min. seminar offers the possibility for what most ministers find difficult to find in their working lives: relationships with a group of peers in ministry with whom they can speak honestly, give and receive both affirmation and challenge, and take risks in seeking new perspectives. Thus it is important that members of the group have common commitments to honor confidential speech, to attend to their own respectful speaking and listening, and to treasure the time shared with the group by being as fully present as possible.

Laptop computers are to be used in class by agreement only, and in any case not for unrelated purposes such as email. Except in cases of emergency, mobile phones are to be turned off.

Inclusive language

In speech and in written assignments, it is the policy of LPTS to avoid divisive terms that reinforce stereotypes or are pejorative. We do not use language that leaves out part of the population, perpetuates stereotyping, or diminishes importance. We do not use male pronouns (such as "men") to refer to a group that includes females as well. The Academic Support Center can provide resources and help.

See http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

Academic Honesty

All seminar work is expected to be the work of the student in whose name it is submitted. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grades and other penalties.

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