

Christian Understandings of Evil

January Term 2015

0:00-11:30

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Office hours by appointment

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A. Course Description

This course provides a framework for analyzing and critiquing statements about evil made within Christianity and within contemporary culture more generally. We will begin by establishing some of the basic logical, doctrinal, and experiential constraints that shape Christian understandings of evil. We will examine how several different Christian thinkers understand evil in relation to the power of God.

B. Requirements

1. Read assigned texts. Close reading of primary sources is central to this course.
2. Attend and actively participate in seminar.
3. Each student will briefly summarize one of the readings for the class and offer 3-4 carefully considered, thought-provoking questions. This entails examining the argument and communicating the necessary steps effectively. This is a seminar presentation
4. Write two short papers, 5 pages in length. This assignment entails questioning the strengths and drawbacks of a particular author's approach to evil. Specific guidelines will be handed out in class.
5. Present final paper/project topic, with thesis statement and description of format.
6. Final paper or project. This entails constructing an argument regarding evil in a Christian framework, in conversation with one or more authors from the course. Specific guidelines will be handed out in class. You may choose to write an 8-10 page paper or to do a different, substantial project drawing on other genres of communication.

Papers and projects are due in my inbox or under my office door by 5PM on the due date. Students with serious medical problems or major family emergencies may contact me BEFORE a paper is due to discuss extensions. Late papers (without extension granted) will be marked down one third of a grade (for example, A- to B+) every 24 hours for three days. Without an extension granted, papers turned in more than 72 hours after the due date will not be accepted.

C. Grading

Grades will be determined in the following manner: class participation and attendance (20%), seminar presentation (15%), first paper (15%), second paper (15%), final paper/project resources and thesis (10%), and final paper or project (25%).

D. Books

1. Annie Dillard, *For the Time Being* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1999).
2. Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).
3. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
4. Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

The following texts are available on CAMS.

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 259-354.
2. Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 183-340, 833-849, 920-987.
3. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3.3 (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1960), 289-368.
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4.1 (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1960), 3-154.
5. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Selected Sermons of Schleiermacher*, trans. Mary F. Wilson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls), 38-51, 212-233, 355-371.

E. Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. read substantial primary sources on the topic
2. examine the arguments and the logical, doctrinal, and experiential constraints of Christian accounts of evil
3. analyze various approaches, compare and discuss these in class
4. question the pros and cons of these approaches to evil in differing contexts
5. construct their own arguments regarding evil and the power of God.

These specific outcomes are designed to contribute to LPTS SLO 3, 4, 8, 15, and 16.

F. Schedule

January 5 Introduction

January 6 Dillard, *For the Time Being*.

January 7 Davis, *Encountering Evil*, 1-20, 38-52, 73-89.

January 12 Davis, *Encountering Evil*, 108-125, 145-161. **First paper due.**

January 13 Calvin, *Institutes*, 183-340.

January 14 Calvin, *Institutes*, 833-849, 920-987

January 15 Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 259-354, selected sermons

January 16 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.3, 289-368

January 20 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.1, 3-154 **Second paper due.**

January 21 Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 1-78

January 22 Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 79-165

January 23 Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 1-55, 155-208 **Final project thesis due.**

January 26 **Present final projects, turn in final papers.** Concluding discussion.

G. Policy Statements

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. See for more information, see:

<http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. 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. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For more information, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (kmapes@lpts.edu) during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Six or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.