

Louisville Seminary  
Spring 2023  
Professor Susan R. Garrett

**NT 4013:**  
***Evil, Suffering, and Death***  
***in the New Testament***

**Mondays, 1:30–4:00 p.m.**

***Course Description:***

In this course we will seek to identify some of the ways that evil, suffering, and death were experienced and explained by New Testament authors and their contemporaries. We will also consider how ancient views of these phenomena are both similar to and different from modern views, and how we can apply this knowledge in order to minister more effectively to sufferers.

***Intended Major Learning Outcomes:***

*Upon completion of the course, each student should be able to:*

1. Use NT ideas about principalities and powers to analyze and critique the institutions, ideologies, and icons that govern our daily lives—and to envision paths for their renewal or reformation.
2. Discuss biblical teachings about trials of faith in ways that reflect both an awareness of the teachings' original cultural contexts and the pastoral or therapeutic needs of twenty-first century people.
3. Write and speak biblically and pastorally on death and afterlife, demonstrating awareness of how views on these topics changed during the biblical era and have continued to change up to the present.

***Correlation with Program SLOs:***

*The course is consistent with the following program-level SLOs:*

**MDiv SLO #1:** Students will gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the ability to use critical skills and educated imagination to interpret it in contemporary social and cultural contexts.

**MAR SLO #1:** Students will be able to interpret Scripture critically and imaginatively.

**MFT SLO #5:** Graduating students will be able to use a theologically informed and clinically appropriate framework to integrate religious and spiritual factors into the practice of Marriage and Family Therapy.

**Format:** Sessions will include lecturing by the professor, discussion of assigned readings, and structured discussions and activities of various kinds.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Consistent **attendance** is required; any absences must be reported to the teacher in advance and be for good reason. Reading should be done in advance of the session for which a work is assigned. Attendance and preparation will count for **20% of the final grade**.
2. **A comprehensive notebook**, including notes on readings and other reflections on the course content. The aim is to create for yourself a resource that you will be able to use in lifelong work of ministry (whatever shape it takes). The assignment will count for **40% of your final grade**, and is **due at 11:59 p.m. on May 1**. See Canvas for more details.
3. **Two short (individually authored) essays** are required. Each of these will count for 10% of the final grade, for a total of **20% of the final grade**.
  - a. Essay #1, "Analyzing a Principality," is **due at 11:59 p.m. on March 5**. See Canvas for instructions.
  - b. Essay #2, "Ministering to Sufferers," is **due at 11:59 p.m. on April 9**. See Canvas for instructions.
4. A **final project** of the student's own choosing, related to some topic addressed in the course, will be **due on May 10, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.** and will count for **20% of the final grade**. The project could be an exegetical study, a sermon, a lesson plan for a 2 or 3-week Sunday School class, an annotated bibliography of books or articles on a pertinent topic, an analysis of MFT theories pertinent to clients' experiences of suffering, or something else. See Canvas for more details.

**Course Readings:**

Several books have been recommended for purchase. A number of articles and shorter readings are available on Canvas or on the Internet (links in syllabus and on website). A few items will be distributed ahead of time or in class.

Books Recommended for Purchase:

- Garrett, Susan R. *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. ISBN: 0300140959.
- McAlpine, Thomas H. *Facing the Powers: What Are the Options?* Wipf & Stock, 2003. ISBN: 159244282X.
- Stringfellow, William. *Instead of Death*. New and expanded edition. Wipf & Stock, 2004. ISBN: 1592448739

## Schedule:

### PART 1: IMAGINING EVIL

#### February 6: Orientation to the course

- *Preparation:*
  - Read through the syllabus.
  - Read [Carol A. Newsom, "Three \(Rather Different\) Ways of Imagining Good and Evil."](#) Make notes on the major features of each of the three biblical models for understanding evil that Newsom discusses.
  - Write a paragraph describing how evil is conceptualized in a well-known novel, movie, video game, or other fictional or semi-fictional offering. How is evil described, recognized by other characters, and combated? Bring a digital copy to class.

### PART 2: THE WORLD OF APOCALYPTIC

#### February 13: The apocalyptic worldview

- *Preparation:*
  - Read [Sidnie White Crawford, "Apocalyptic,"](#) in *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*. Make notes on antecedents of *apocalypse* as a literary genre; the definition and key features of *apocalyptic eschatology*; and key features of an *apocalyptic worldview*.
  - Read [M. Eugene Boring, Revelation, pp. 51-59](#) (on Canvas).
  - Read Daniel 7 carefully, and skim chaps. 8-12, along with the introduction to Daniel and notes for Daniel 7 **in a good study Bible**.
  - Read Revelation 12-13 carefully, along with the introduction to Revelation and notes for Revelation 12-13 **in a good study Bible**.
- *Discussion:* What are the options for making sense of our apocalyptic heritage today? What *should* we keep, and what do we think may have outlived its usefulness?

#### February 20: Fallen (or Falling) Angels

- *Preparation:*
  - Read [Genesis 6:1-4; Revelation 12; 1 Enoch 6-11](#)
  - Read Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel*, chap. 3 ("Falling Angels: Desiring Divinity, Wanting the World")
  - Watch one or more of the following movies: *Wings of Desire*, *City of Angels*, *Michael*. (You will need to rent these to view online, at a cost of \$2.99 or \$3.99 apiece; alternately, I have placed my personal copies of DVDs on overnight

reserve in the library.)

- *Discussion:* How did the movie(s) you watched reflect current ideas about human fallenness or human frailty and suffering (or other themes pertinent to this course)?

## February 27: Satan and the Powers

- *Preparation:*
  - Read Job [1:1–2:13](#); Zech [3:1-6](#); 2 Sam [24:1-14](#) and parallel account in 1 Chron [24:1-13](#); Wis [2:21-24](#); [The Life of Adam and Eve \(= Apocalypse of Moses\) 15-30](#)
  - Read and take notes on Luke [4:1-13](#) and [22:53](#) [What does Jesus mean by his assertion “This is your hour...”?]; 1 Cor [2:6-8](#) [who are “the rulers of this age?”]; 1 Cor [15:24-28](#); Rom [8:38-39](#); Rom [13:1-7](#); Eph [1:20-23](#); Eph [6:10-17](#); Heb [2:14](#); Revelation [13:1-18](#)
  - Read Susan R. Garrett, [“Jesus Christ, Exorcist.”](#)
  - Read Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel*, chap. 4 (“Satan and the Powers”)
- *Discussion:* Can Christians who believe in Satan share a sense of common purpose in Christ with *those* who do *not* believe? How can members of the opposing groups converse authentically with each other?

## March 6: Analyzing the powers that be

- *Preparation:*
  - Read and take notes on Thomas H. McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: What Are the Options?* (Monrovia, Calif.: MARC, 1991), Introduction + chaps. 1, 2, and 4
  - Study the handout by Bill Wylie-Kellerman, [“Thinking Biblically and Theologically about a Particular Power: An Inventory of Provoking Questions.”](#) Using the handout, write essay #1, “Analyzing a Principality,” not to exceed 4 double-spaced pages. See Canvas for instructions, and to upload your assignment (due 11:59 p.m. on May 5.)
- *Discussion:* Students will summarize their essays in class and we will discuss them.

## March 13: NO CLASS ([Research and Study Week](#))

## March 20: Death as a Power

- *Preparation:*
  - Read Rom 5:12-21 [in a good study Bible](#)
  - Read the Wikipedia article on William Stringfellow, along with his book, *Instead of Death*.
  - Read [Copeland, \*Knowing Christ Crucified\*](#), pp. 127-47 (on Canvas).

- *Discussion:*
  - How does Stringfellow see Death (the power) manifesting itself in human experience, and how does he think that through Christ humans can be victorious over Death? What is the meaning of the book's title? How might thinking of death/Death as a power that is more than "just" the end of biological life lead you to reshape your theological and pastoral thinking?
  - How does M. Shawn Copeland's article "Knowing Christ Crucified" encourage us to think about death in the context of the Gospel? Do you find her article to be complementary to Stringfellow's perspective, or in tension with it?

## PART 3: TRIALS OF FAITH

### March 27: Biblical Traditions about Testing

- *Preparation:*
  - Read the following biblical texts. (Note that we will not have time to go through them all in class, so you should do so ahead of time, taking good notes!)
    - **OT:** [Job 1-2](#)
    - **Gospels:** Mark [1:12-13](#); Mark [8:11-13, 31-33](#); Mark [10:2](#); Mark [12:15](#); Mark [14:32-42](#) (together with [Heb 5:7-10](#)); Luke [4:1-13](#)
    - **Paul:** Rom [5:3-4](#); 1 Cor [7:5](#); 1 Cor [11:28-32](#) (in context); 2 Cor [12:7-10](#)
    - **Epistles:** Heb [2:14-18](#); Heb [4:16](#); Heb [5:7-10](#); Heb [12:5-11](#); James [1:2-8](#); James [4:7](#)
    - **Revelation:** Rev [3:10](#)
  - Read *Testament of Job* (available [here](#)). FYI, this fascinating document was likely written at about the same time as the New Testament, possibly in Egypt.
- *Discussion:*
  - Regarding the biblical passages: who is the tempter/tester in each passage? Does the writer of that passage regard the testing/tempting as a good thing, or as something utterly contrary to God's purposes?
  - Regarding *Testament of Job*: What are notable features of Satan in this portrayal? How does Job's alleged foreknowledge of all the bad things about to happen to him affect your assessment of his perseverance? How does *Testament of Job* contribute to our understanding of ancient views of testing and temptation?
  - Regarding the concept of "testing/temptation" and ministry: Is it pastors' and therapists' responsibility to prepare their parishioners or clients to face suffering and affliction? How might they do so?

### April 3: Biblical Understandings of Affliction

- *Preparation:*

- Read and take notes on [Susan R. Garrett, “Paul’s Thorn and Cultural Models of Affliction”](#) (on Canvas). Focus especially on pp. 82-96, which include explanation of “cultural models” and sketches three biblical models of affliction. (*Note: Most of the Greek in the essay is translated, but the word Παιδεία is not; it is transliterated paideia and means “chastisement” or “affliction.”*) Skim the following passages from biblical and other ancient texts, which illustrate the “chastisement-model” and “Job-model” of affliction:
  - *On suffering as “chastisement” or “discipline.”* Deut [8:2-5, 16](#); Prov [3:11-12](#); 2 Macc [6:12-17](#); Sir [also known as Ecclesiasticus] [1:26-27](#) (note that, throughout Sirach, the Greek *paideia* is translated sometimes as “instruction” or “learning” and sometimes as “discipline”); Sir [2:1-11](#); Sir [4:11-19](#); Sir [6:18-31](#); Sir [18:13-14](#); Sir [30:1-2](#); Wis [3:1-6](#); Hebrews (especially [2:10-18](#); [5:7-10](#); [12:1-13](#)); [Seneca, Epistle 13](#); [Epictetus, Discourses 1.29](#)
  - *On the “Job-model” for understanding suffering.* Luke [4:1-13](#); 1 Pet [5:6-11](#); Rev [12:1-12](#) (especially v. 10); [Testament of Job](#); [4 Maccabees](#). (Re the gist and progression of 4 Maccabees, see [this introduction](#); note that chaps. 11-16 [accounts of the martyrdoms of the last three brothers, and the author’s praise for their mother] are especially relevant for “the Job-model”).
- *Discussion:* Do the “cultural models of affliction” described in the article still operate among Christians today? Are there other models of affliction that you see at work in our culture? What are the strengths and inherent problems with each of these models?

#### April 10: Encounters with Suffering

- *Preparation:*
  - Read *No Ordinary Angel*, chapter 5 (“Guardian Angels”). How do ideas about guardian angels reflect a human desire for assurance of divine presence in hard situations? Are there aspects of such beliefs that you find problematic? Helpful?
  - Write essay #2, “Ministering to Sufferers,” not to exceed 4 double-spaced pages. See Canvas for instructions, and to upload your assignment (due 11:59 p.m. on April 9).
- *Discussion:* We will discuss the concept of “guardian angels” and its continuing relevance (or irrelevance) for Christians today. We will also discuss your submissions on ministering to sufferers (be prepared to highlight and discuss key points from your essay).

## PART 4: DEATH AND AFTERLIFE

#### April 17:

- *Preparation:* Read Garrett, “The Meaning of Life after Death,” [part 1](#), [part 2](#), and [part 3](#) (on Canvas)

- *Discussion:* What do you see as the most urgent questions pertaining to death that pastors and therapists are asked to address? How can the biblical material inform your answers to these questions? How does the biblical material *complicate* your answers to these questions? We will also discuss two case studies, which will be distributed in class.

#### April 24: “Toxic Positivity” and “the Denial of Death”

- *Preparation:*
  - Read about the Kate Bowler’s work decrying the cult of “toxic positivity” [here](#) and [here](#). Also, listen to [this episode of her podcast “Everything Happens.”](#)
- *Discussion:* In class we will watch the documentary *Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality*. Questions for our discussion: What are the negative consequences of denying death? Is doing so ever healthy and appropriate? What compelling reasons are there to acknowledge the presence of suffering, the imminence of physical death, and the omnipresence of “the power of Death?” How is the tendency to engage in denial of death related to what Bowler calls “toxic positivity?”

#### May 1: Talking about the Afterlife

- *Preparation:*
  - Read Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel*, chap. 6 (“Angels and Death”)
  - Read selections from [James Moorhead, \*World without End: American Mainstream Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925\*](#) (on changing views of death, heaven, and hell in American society [on Canvas]).
  - Read “Spiritualism,” online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritualism>
  - Read Gideon Lichfield, [“The Science of Near-Death Experiences”](#) (from *The Atlantic*, April 2015 issue)
  - Find and read three or four accounts of near-death experiences on the web (making note of URLs). What (if any) common traits do you notice?
- *Discussion:*
  - How should pastors and therapists respond to the following? Our culture’s obsession with zombies and vampire; popular claims of NDEs; the glorification of violence and death in movies and video games; other pertinent cultural phenomena?
  - What do you see as the most important takeaways from the course?

## APPENDIX 1 – COURSE POLICIES

### 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. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site on "Inclusive and Expansive Language" (see [here](#)).

### **Academic Honesty**

All work turned in to the instructor 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 the Seminary policy, 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 before the term begins, and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments.

### **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*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

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

### **Attendance Policy**

Perfect or near-perfect attendance is expected. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class prior to the session. Whether excused or unexcused, absence will affect the "attendance and participation" component of the student's grade, and more than two absences may result in a low or failing grade in the course.



### **Policy on Late Papers and Exams, and on Incompletes**

Out of fairness to other students, papers turned in after the time and date specified in the syllabus will receive a grade penalty. Schedule of penalties: 1 minute to 24 hours late = 1 letter-grade deduction; 24 to 48 hours late = 2 letter-grade deduction. Papers more than 48 hours late will not be accepted. Grades of incomplete for the course will be permitted only in extreme circumstances, and must be arranged by the date specified by the registrar's office.

## **APPENDIX 2 – BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **BOOKS**

Garrett, Susan R. *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus*. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. **Required textbook; on reserve at circulation desk at E. M. White Library.**

McAlpine, Thomas H. *Facing the Powers*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003. **Required textbook; on reserve at circulation desk at E. M. White Library.**

Stringfellow, William. *Instead of Death*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004. **Required textbook; on reserve at circulation desk at E. M. White Library.**

Shen, Patrick. *Flight From Death - The Quest for Immortality*. DVD. Go-Kart Records, 2005. **DVD will be shown in class.**

### **CANVAS E-RESERVE**

Boring, M. Eugene. *Revelation*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 51-59. **ON CANVAS.**

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018. Pp. 127-47. **ON CANVAS.**

Crawford, Sidnie White. "Apocalyptic." In Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, eds. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 72-73. **ON CANVAS.**

Garrett, Susan R. "The Meaning of Life after Death." Parts 1-3. From ThePresbyterianLeader.com. **ON CANVAS.**

Garrett, Susan R. "Paul's Thorn and Cultural Models of Affliction." In White, L. Michael, and O. Larry Yarbrough, eds. *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne a. Meeks*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. Pp. 82-99. **ON CANVAS.**

Moorhead, James H. *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999. Pp. 48-76. **ON CANVAS**.

Newsom, Carol A. "Three (Rather Different) Ways of Imagining Good and Evil." Unpublished manuscript, used with author's permission. **ON CANVAS**.

Wylie-Kellerman, Bill. "Thinking Biblically and Theologically about a Particular Power: An Inventory of Provoking Questions." Unpublished manuscript. **ON CANVAS**.