

Big Question Course: Evil
Spring 2025
Thursdays, 9:00-11:50
Schlegel 122
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A. Course Description

How can we hold together the reality of evil in the world and faith in God? How do we address evil? This course asks big questions about sin, suffering, and evil. We will explore these questions in biblical, theological, ethical, and liturgical frames.

B. Objectives

M.Div.

SLO 3: Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs.

SLO 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice.

MFT

SLO 3: Graduating students will be able to think ethically and make appropriate clinical ethical decisions.

MAR

SLO3: demonstrate an understanding of multiple theological perspectives, historical and contemporary

SLO4: demonstrate the ability to think theologically, strategically, imaginatively, and contextually about ethical issues

QEP

Students can describe strategies, grounded in their practice, for working toward racial justice appropriate to their particular vocational settings. Students can demonstrate competence with this SLO in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Defining and using key terms in ways informed by an understanding of systemic racism.
2. Identifying racism in its many manifestations (structural, personal, communal, etc.)
3. Critical reflection on the history and current contexts regarding race, racism, and antiracism

4. Critical reflection on racist and antiracist practices and theologies
5. Developing and implementing antiracist policies, practices, and theologies

Assignments within the course are designed to foster and assess these outcomes.

C. Requirements

1. Read assigned texts. Close reading of primary sources is central to this course. It is painfully obvious when a student has not prepared for class.
2. Attend and actively participate in seminar.
3. There are four written assignments, outlined at later in the syllabus.

Papers and projects are due via Canvas 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.

D. Grading

Grades will be determined in the following manner: class participation and attendance (10%), weekly assignments (10%), first paper (20%), second paper (20%), third paper (20%), fourth paper (20%).

E. Books

1. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
2. Ellen F. Davis, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).
3. Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
4. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror (Overtures in Biblical Theology)* (Fortress Press, 1984).

All other texts will be made available online and on reserve in the library.

E. Schedule

February 6 Introduction

Section one: Bible

February 13 Judges 11 and 19, Matthew 27, Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 1-8, 65-118.

February 20 Ellen Davis, *Getting Involved with God, Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 14-29, 121-146.

February 24 First paper due.

Section Two: Theology

February 27 Calvin, *Institutes*, 183-340.

March 6 Calvin, *Institutes*, 833-849, 920-987

March 13 Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 259-354, selected sermons.

March 17-21---Research and Study

March 24 Second paper due. (SLOs MDiv 3, MAR 3)

March 27 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.3, 289-312, 349-368;

April 3 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4.1, 3-154

April 10 Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 1-55, 155-208.

Section Three: Ethics

April 17 Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*.

April 21 Third paper due. (SLOs MDiv 3 & 4, MAR 3 & 4, MFT 3. Students could also submit papers that would address the QEP SLO.)

April 24 Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "African American Spirituals: Confronting and Exorcising Evil through Song," *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. emilie m. townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993),150-171. Essays on pastoral theology and evil.

Section Four: Liturgy

May 1 Marilyn McCord Adams, "Biting and Chomping Our Salvation! Eucharistic Presence, Radically Understood," in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology*, ed. by Dana Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 69-94. "Risen dead, borrowed life!" *Wrestling for Blessing* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd and Church Publishing Incorporated 2005) "Eucharistic Drama, Rehearsing for a Revolution," *Theatrical Theology*, eds. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 203-223.

May 8 Final Discussion, Fourth paper due (SLOS MDiv 3 & 4, MAR 3 & 4, MFT 3. Students could also submit papers that would address the QEP SLO.)

F. 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. For more information see: <http://lpts.libguides.com/content.php?pid=469569&sid=4083885> 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.

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 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.

Paper One:

The first paper should be 4-5 pages, double spaced. Please select a passage in the Bible that has NOT been covered in our class or readings that you interpret as connected to evil. Drawing explicitly on the methodology of Tribble or Davis, please offer your own reflection on this text. The goal for this paper is self-reflective engagement with a biblical text.

Paper Two:

This 4-5 page paper should summarize both Calvin and Schleiermacher on evil. Make sure you identify what evil is for each author and how God is related to evil. Clarity and accuracy are the goals.

Third paper:

Select Barth, McCord Adams, or Townes to be the subject of your paper. In 4-5 pages, clearly summarize the main points of their positions on evil. Identify what you perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen author's approach. The goals are clarity, accuracy, and critical reflection.

Fourth paper:

Drawing upon Kirk-Duggan or McCord Adams—in content or methodology--please submit six pages that are one of the following:

1. A sermon that addresses evil in some way.
2. A liturgy that addresses a particular evil suffered by or in a specific community. Make sure to describe the community and evil.
3. A reflection on how understandings of evil show up in therapeutic settings. This is intentionally broad so that it could include the therapist, the client, the client's community, and/or a particular therapeutic approach.
4. MAR students may choose a traditional paper offering a constructive argument regarding evil and theology.

The goal for this assignment is to begin to think critically and creatively about how the materials of this course might influence your own work going forward.