

Canadian Mennonite University
The Problem of Evil in a Biblical Perspective
BTS-5286M-1 (3 Credits)
Course Syllabus
Draft

Winter 2019
January 7– April 5, 2019
Reading Week: February 19-22, 2019
Wednesday, 2:30-5:15 PM
Office: North Campus B-323
Voluntary Withdrawal Date: March 16, 2019

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Jewish Holocaust had a most determining influence on the development of the 20th century. The slaughter of six million Jews during World War II brought back with a vengeance the depth, the intensity, and the shattering reality of evil to a generation of politicians, philosophers, and theologians who had almost managed to convince themselves that moral evil was essentially the result of inadequate education and unfavorable socio-economic conditions. The discovery of the horror of the extermination camps at the end of the Second World War forced generations of thinkers to reexamine previously-held assumptions about the fundamental character of human nature and the belief in the intrinsic goodness of God. The Holocaust is a vivid reminder of one of the greatest mysteries and critical issues of human existence: the presence of evil in the world and the nature and extent of human freewill. It has been said that any philosophical or theological system which cannot stand in the face of the Holocaust, cannot be valid.

In this course, we will examine the problem of evil from two perspectives. In the first half, we will survey some of the major responses offered in various religious and philosophical traditions. In the second half, we will reflect on the issue through an investigation of the biblical data, more particularly the Genesis creation account. In addition, students will be given the opportunity to critically assess their own approach and to articulate a personal response.

II. OBJECTIVES

- A. Students will gain a basic understanding of the reasons that led to World War II and, more particularly, the factors that eventually resulted in the widespread persecution of the Jews.
- B. Students will familiarize themselves with the theological discipline that addresses the presence of gratuitous pain in human existence (theodicy).
- C. Students student will become familiar with the major religious and philosophical responses to the problem of evil.
- D. Students will be in a position to identify the major ways in which the Christian tradition has addressed the issues of evil and human freewill.
- E. Students will be able to identify the various perspectives offered by the biblical tradition on the issues of moral evil and human freewill.
- F. Students will be able to articulate their own theological response to the problem of evil and human freewill. Their conclusions will take into account and integrate insights gained from their study of various philosophical and religious perspectives, the Christian tradition, and a study of selected biblical texts, particularly the Genesis creation account.

III. TEXTBOOKS

Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Dutton Adult, 2013.

ISBN-13: 978-0525952459

Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1976 (151 pp.)

_____. *The Problem of Pain*. Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1940 (145 pp.)

Yancey, Philip. *Where is God when it Hurts?* Rev. Ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990 (1977) (187 pp.)

Other readings (all available on the student portal):

Boyd, Gregory A. *God at War*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1997.

Read pp. 9-72 (Required)

Peterson, Michael L. "Introduction." In *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*.

Read pp.1-19 (Required).

Plantinga, Alvin. "When Faith and Reason Clash." *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991):8-33.

(Required)

_____. "On Rejecting the Theory of Common Ancestry." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 44 (1992):258-263. **(Required)**

Optional Readings:

Boyd, Gregory A. *Satan and the Problem of Evil*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2001 (456 pp.).

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1943, 1946, 1978 (optional).

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God. Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988 (optional).

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Reading

Students are expected to read carefully the assigned textbooks for this course and to prepare responses for:

*Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*

*Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

For Keller, the book review will be 3-4 pages in length (double space; 800-1100 words) and contain the following information:

- Summary of the thesis
- Critique, personal reaction (agreements, disagreements, strengths and weaknesses)
- Relevance, usefulness

For Lewis' *A Grief Observed*, a 2-3-page personal reflection will suffice (pass/fail)

With respect to Yancey, only a statement of completion is required. Students should nevertheless be in a position to discuss the book on the due date.

Due Dates (See Course Schedule):

Yancey, <i>Where is God when it Hurts?</i> :	(Statement of completion)
Lewis, <i>A Grief Observed</i> :	(personal reflection)
Keller, <i>Walking with God</i> :	(formal report)

Supplemental Reading

*Peterson, pp. 1-19:	(Statement of completion)
*Boyd, <i>God at War</i> , pp. 9-72:	(Statement of completion)
*Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash":	(Statement of completion)
*Plantinga, "On Rejecting the Theory...":	(Statement of completion)

2. Research Paper

Students are required to write one research paper 12-14 pages (ca. 4000 words--Times New Roman-12; double space) in length and explore a relevant issue from a biblical perspective. The research paper must show evidence of serious research and be appropriately referenced.

Specific instructions will be provided in class. Students need to secure their proposal for approval.

Due dates:

1. Research proposal (topic, general outline, preliminary bibliography): TBD
2. Final paper: TBD

3. Oral Presentation

Students will be invited to present the results of their research in the context of a short class presentation (10-15 minutes). The presentation should include a statement of purpose, major conclusions, and include some areas of discussion for further research. In addition to the time allotted for the presentation, students should allow some time for a brief period of discussion. Students are invited to prepare a short handout that will summarize the information they will present.

4. The Problem of Pain Reflection Papers

Since significant segments of each class will be allocated for discussion, students are required to prepare a one-page reflection (250 words) paper on **seven** of the 10 chapters found in Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*. The purpose of these reflection papers is to prepare the students for each presentation and to facilitate discussion. The professor will collect them at the end of each class. These papers should contain the followings elements:

- a. A one or two-sentence thesis statement.
- b. Evaluation, relevance, further questions, etc.

Due dates will be provided in class (see Course Schedule).

5. Schindler's List Reflection Paper

Students will be required to write a short reaction paper (1-2 pages; 250-600 words) on *Schindler's List*. This short paper will be the basis of class discussion. Due date will be provided in class.

Due Date: January 21, 2015

6. Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class and participate actively in class discussions. If a student is unable to attend, he/she should advise the professor before the class.

V. COURSE OUTLINE

- A. Introduction
- B. The Second World War and Nazism
- C. The Jewish Holocaust
 - 1. Schindler's list
 - 2. Discussion
- D. Typology of Responses to the Presence of Evil in the World
- E. What is Evil? A Tentative Definition
- F. A Biblical Theodicy: A Survey of Genesis 1-3
- G. The Problem of Pain and Pastoral Care
- H. Synthesis and Conclusions

VI. COURSE GRADING

A. Attendance and Participation:	8
B. Keller Book Review:	10
C. Yancey SOC:	5
D. Lewis Reflection (<i>A Grief Observed</i>):	5
E. Other Readings	5
F. Research Paper:	40
G. Reflection Papers (Problem of Pain):	20
H. Reflection Paper (<i>Schindler's List</i>):	5
I. Oral Presentation:	2
Total:	100

VII. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a comprehensive bibliography on the problem of evil, students should consult Barry Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on The Problem of Evil*. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1993. The 1998 edition is also available (The Philosophy Documentation Center).

VIII. HANDING IN ESSAYS

Unless otherwise instructed, students will submit written assignments by e-mail. Students are responsible for ensuring that assignments have in fact been received by the professor. If the student does not receive confirmation of receipt within 24 hours, the communication is deemed to have failed. The student must then take the initiative to contact the professor to confirm receipt of the submission. In case of disagreement in regards to an electronic submission, the professor's electronic reply will constitute the only proof of submission. Without such proof, the assignment will be deemed not to have been submitted and will be assigned a grade of 0 or F.

IX. MISCELLANEOUS

*All grades submitted by CMU's instructors are provisional until they have been vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

*Please consult the *CMU Academic Calendar, Section II: Academic Policies* for further information about extensions and incompletes, multiple submissions of the same work, attendance policies, examination rescheduling, academic misconduct, appeals, and other academic matters. (Available at

http://www.cmu.ca/docs/academic/CMU_Academic_Calendar_SecII.pdf)

*Late papers will be accepted up to five (5) week days after the due date provided the student submits a written note at least 2 days before the day the paper is due. The written note will include a formal request and a statement explaining why the delay is necessary. An extension will be granted only for clearly serious reasons: illness, family crisis. In this case, a late paper will not be penalized but the professor reserves the right not to annotate said paper. Only a grade will appear. Longer extensions will be approved only for medical reasons or by permission from the registrar's office. Papers submitted beyond the 5-day grace period without adequate justification will be penalized by 5% per day past the deadline.

*CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. The University will seek ways to develop and provide services that support students with disabilities. The Accessibility Services office coordinates with the Academic Office to provide academic accommodations to eligible students. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at sloeppky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300 x.340.