

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PHI 631/THE 628 Apologetics

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May 10-14, 2010
417-268-1077

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the catalogue: A course designed to equip the student to defend the Christian faith against important contemporary assaults and to build a positive Christian world and life view. Appeal is made not only to the varieties of rational arguments but also to the special contributions of the Pentecostal message.

From your professor: The post-Christian/post-modern world presents new challenges and opportunities to the art and science of apologetics. Empirical and Rational arguments are still important, but other factors such as community, spirituality, aesthetics and issues of evil and war all demand a fresh articulation of the “faith once delivered to all the saints.” We will present a polyvalent approach and positively demonstrate why intelligent Pentecostal Christianity meets the cries of those searching for God.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this course, the student will have demonstrated in classroom or online discussions, examinations, and papers

1. An understanding of the biblical material that relates to apologetics.
2. A familiarity with the various approaches to apologetics and their theological and philosophical bases, including knowledge of some of the key figures in the field of apologetics, both from the history of the church and from the present.
3. A focus on the relationship between apologetics and personal/local church evangelism
4. An appreciation for the relationship between faith and reason and an ability to formulate an approach to this relationship that will serve in ministry.
5. An ability to struggle with a defense of some of the major theological positions of Christianity and some of the major difficulties to the faith raised by those who object to Christianity.
6. An understanding of the crucial nature of the claim to exclusivity made by Christendom and some of the ways in which that claim can be defended.
7. An appreciation and understanding of the supernatural and “suprarational” facets of apologetics
8. Capability of relating this knowledge to the post-Christian and post-Modern West as well as the Majority World cultures

TEXTBOOKS

Beckwith, Craig and Moreland, eds., *To Everyone an Answer: A case for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. 30-8308-2735-8

Guinness, Os. *Unspeakable: Facing up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror*. Harper San Francisco: 2005. # 0-06-058636-2

Hill, Jonathan. *What has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How It Shaped the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2005. # 0-8308-3328-5

N.T. Wright. *Simply Christian*. Harper San Francisco. 2006. # 10-0-06-050715-2

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE

Part 1: Biblical and Historical Foundations for Apologetics

Part 2: Building the Case: Defending the Faith (Beckwith, pp. 1-198)

Part 3: Building the Case: Confronting Postmodernism and World Religions (Beckwith, 199-380)

Part 4: Confronting Evil: Theodicy and the real barriers to faith

Part 5: The Impact of Christianity (Hill)

METHODOLOGY

The methods of instruction will be the lecture (live or taped), guided discussion (in person or by email), and selected voluntary small group interactions among fellow-students with assigned texts and issues that arise in the course of the class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

PRE-SESSION (before May 10)

Read the books by Wright (*Simply Christian*) and Guinness (*Unspeakable*) and write 4-5 page reflective essays on the following:

- Focus on two of N.T. Wright's "echoes" or pointers to God's Reality. Develop your own apologetic using his ideas as a starting point. For example, how does the cry for justice reveal a conscience and therefore moral responsibility? You may also include any critique of one or two of Wright's ideas or statements.
- Comment on four (4) insights you gleaned from Guinness' book and how they will help you in your evangelism and equipping work.

IN SESSION: During the Week in Class

- Actively participate in all class discussions and be ready to debate, reflect and write on key ideas you are learning. The student is expected to attend all class sessions. Absences should be for extreme circumstances only. The limits established by the Seminary will be observed. (“Barring a serious medical emergency, credit cannot be granted for courses in which a student has been absent beyond the equivalent of more than 2 weeks” – *Catalog*, 74). In an Intensive Course such as this, more than one day absent is cause for serious concern. For Distance Students, any delay in learning or submitting assignments must be communicated to the professor as soon as possible. It is important to have all work in before the end of the term.
- Due on Friday, May 14: What are three (3) ways we can build bridges with people possessing a postmodern (or “post-postmodern”) mentality? What do they need to hear and see to consider the claims of Christ?

POST-SESSION

1. Due July 1: From your reading of Beckwith, what are the three strongest arguments for God’s existence as an Infinite-Personal God? What objections have you heard to these and other arguments and how do you defend your thinking?
2. Due August 1: There will be a Research Paper due before the end of the term. This will be a 10-15 page paper using at least six (6) sources other than the class texts. Based on Hill’s book and other sources, the student will choose to right on at least two major positive contributions of Christianity to the world and how these can be used apologetically. For example, everywhere that there is some semblance of political freedom in the world, we see the impact of Biblical Christianity. The paper should conform to A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, current edition, by Kate L. Turabian, using footnotes for resource documentation. The paper will be graded on content, composition, and style and will be due on the date announced in class.
3. Late work is subject to grade penalties commensurate with lateness. As long as all essays are turned in by the final class day and the exam is completed, no penalties will be assigned.

COURSE GRADING

The grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Essays:	50 points each = 200 points (2/3 of grade)
Paper	100 points (1/3 of grade)
Total	300 points

The grade of I (Incomplete) may be granted only for extenuating circumstances upon the written request of the student. Except in the case of severe extenuating circumstances the granting of the I grade will mean that the course grade, assigned when the work is completed, will be reduced by one letter.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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OTHER NOTES

I look forward to a great time together and expect to see growth in all of us as we wrestle with the serious issues and the rich biblical materials that will guide us.

At the graduate level we are a fraternity of scholars, so lively interaction is always expected. We do not need to agree on every issue and I expect that all our thinking will be sharpened.

Outlines for Lecture Material

Part 1: Biblical and Historical Foundations for Apologetics

As we begin...

Personal Introductions:

Class overview:

The Faithful Life Quadrant (FLQ)™

Our Strategic Aim:

Apologetics: Initial Thoughts

Defining our terms:

Apologetics:

Evangelism:

Levels of discourse

Going deeper: the art and science of apologetics (Guinness, Sire and Zacharias have all contributed to these principles)

The various types of apologetics

The values of apologetics

The calling to apologetics

Some surprises

A Scriptural survey of apologetics – and its corollary of evangelism

Genesis – the Book of Beginnings

Exodus: Liberation

The Torah – covenant Fidelity

Joshua through Esther – a narrative of promise

The Wisdom Literature: Reflections of experience

The Prophets thunder: Evidence and Ethics and Ethos

The Gospels: Reliable and Revolutionary (Great Commands and Great Commissions)

Acts – apologetic preaching and teaching

Epistolary perspectives: Indicative and Imperative

Revelation – the apologetic of the martyrs

Church History and Apologetics

NT Era – “to the Jews...and the Greeks...”

Under the Cross: 2nd and 3rd century approaches: Justin vs. Tertullian

The specter of Augustine

Medieval outreach – the relationship of faith and reason

Aquinas: Two Summas

Toward and beyond the Reformation

Modernity – Cartesian “I” and the new epistemology

Enlightenments and the need to defend the faith

From modern to post-modern to post-post-modern!

“Our world makes a world of difference” – understanding world-views

The key components – conscious and unconscious

The three “families of faith”

The syncretistic challenge – a brief discourse on “The Secret”

“Remind me again, why are we doing all of this – defending the faith?”

N.T. Wright’s new work – the *Mere Christianity* of the 21st century:

The 4 Echoes:

Justice

Spirituality

Love/Relationships

Beauty/Truth

Looking at the Story of God and his people

God and Israel

Jesus and the Kingdom

The Holy Spirit and the Church

Living the Christian Life

Word and Spirit

Story and Task

Transformation

The Trinity and Apologetics – Rich resources for reflection

Part 2: Building the Case: Defending the Faith

Step One: Do we understand our own history and theology well?

The differences that make a difference

The Trinitarian shape of history and theology

Step Two – we are inviting people on a journey

Practical realities – where are people on this road?

A way of thinking

Ordering our thinking

Integrating Biblical motifs

Issues and Answers:

Epistemology – how do we know what we know?

Faith and Reason revisited

Pointers to God

Cosmological arguments

Design and Designer

Where does the “ought to” come from? Morality

Anselm Lives! The ontological argument (or, why do we keep thinking about God if there is no God?)

Jesus the Christ – history and faith

The person of Jesus

Miracles – a modern, not post-modern problem!

The Resurrection: everything flows from this! (I Corinthians 15)

OK – so what are people really talking about...and what do they really believe?

Atheists and agnostics – holding on to naturalism
Extreme environmentalism and the neo-pagan challenges

New Age: crafting our own reality (Genesis 3 to Camus)

Speaking to the parallel “universes” that exist:

Pre-modern: Majority World proclamation and demonstration

Moderns – empirical and rational ideas

Post-modern (yes, I know this is outdated and oversimplified!)

Neo-medieval (emerging): rebuilding the foundations (Isaiah 61)

Part 3: Building the Case: Confronting Postmodernism and the World Religions

East and West keep meeting: the 20th century and globalization

If Jesus is THE way – the challenge of pluralism and Christian claims

What we must NOT say

Going East – Pantheistic Monism and the Impersonal End

Hinduism

Buddhism

Local religion

The modern marketplace

The “American” Religion: Mormonism

An entrepreneur

An epic

An ethos

Our encounter

The “western” wasteland: the EU and the need to re-evangelize the post-Christian world

Back to the Desert: Encountering Islam

The challenges

The beliefs

The history

The present conflicts – who is the “they” we are fighting?

The spiritual battle

The common ground

OK – back to this “postmodern” issues

Objectivity and truth

Ethnicity and the sociology of knowledge

(Re) evangelizing the Church

Practical issues closer to home

Evolution and ethics – the nature of humankind and the cosmos

Morality and Social law – what are the limits?

Redefining the familiar – gender, sex, family, identity

Selah – how do we actually equip believers?

Part 4: Confronting Evil: Theodicy and the Barriers to Faith

Some resources – C.S. Lewis; A. Plantinga, R. Nash, Guinness, N.T. Wright

Framing the problem(s): “If...then...”

Framing the problem – 21st century context

The “new” problems of evil

Nihilism

It is more complex than we think

Living with mystery – practicing love and justice

The connection of natural and moral evil

Being part of the solution

Jesus and the Kingdom

Declaration and demonstration

Crucifixion and Resurrection

An incendiary community transforming a reconciled world

Principalities and powers – from D-Day to V-Day

Ultimate and penultimate victory

A deeper look at Guinness’ work, *Unspeakable*

Evil is not an abstraction or an illusion

The challenges to all

Four facts

Seven questions

Where does evil come from?

What is so right about a world so wrong?
Are we worse or just modern?

Do the differences make a difference (A: YES!)

Is there something we can do?

Why can't I know what I need to know?

Is there any good in all this bad?

The heart of matter – personal experience moves us away from or toward a strong belief
in God

Part 5: The Impact of Christianity

This is not a formal proof, but a cumulative argument, with this thought at the core – is the world better off or not because of Jesus and Christianity?

A key distinction (from J. Ellul): there is a difference between Christ and Christendom, between the revelation and the religion, the incarnation and the institutional issues!

Watch our for “The Big 3”

An observation or two in 2010: Where does freedom exist?

Repentance is not repudiation!

The impact of Christianity:

Learning and literacy

Real Science

Faith and Art

Music

Literature

Creation and miracles coexist

Education for all – however slowly!

Transformation of human awareness

Reason and Revelation

Ethics and Eschatology

Evangelism and Justice

Another window on the Word and the world