

## The Theology of Suffering MS3XS3/MS5XS5/MSGXS6

### Fall Term 2019

Instructor: Phil C. Zylla, DTh

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Tuesdays

2:00-3:50 p.m.

Degree Specializations: Pastoral Studies, Spiritual Care and Counseling, Christian Thought and History, Christian Worldview

### Course Description:

Gustavo Gutierrez asks, "Are suffering human beings able to enter into an authentic relationship with God and find a correct way of speaking about God?" This is the core question of this course. We will give attention to both the spirituality for a theology of suffering and to the methods for framing a theology of suffering. Participants will be invited to consider ways in which their own view of suffering is being shaped. This course will examine various theological approaches to suffering including those of noted theologians: Dorothy Soelle, Jurgen Moltmann, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Rubem Alves. Nicolas Wolterstorff suggests that "the valley of suffering is the vale of soul-making." The course will examine the structure of suffering and offer critical reflection on the implications of caring for the afflicted. The social and political root causes of suffering will be assessed with the aim of taking practical steps to alleviate these causes.

### Course Objectives:

#### Knowing

- \*To explore a biblical framework for a theology suffering.
- \*To reflect on the theological writings of those who have 'dared their suspicions' about God and suffering.
- \*To formulate a working theology of suffering.

#### Being

- \*To listen for words that resonate with our own experience of suffering. "Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer." - Simone Weil
- \*To begin to discern ways that we can meaningfully speak about the goodness of God in a broken and suffering world.
- \*To be more compassionate.

#### Doing

- \*To articulate our own developing insights about the integration of suffering and a vital relationship with God.
- \*To be led into solidarity with those who suffer.
- \*To develop actions to address the root causes of suffering

### Required Course Textbooks:

Gutierrez, Gustavo *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Moltmann, Jürgen *The Crucified God*. Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1993.

Soelle, Dorothee *Suffering*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Zylla, Phil C. *The Roots of Sorrow: A Pastoral Theology of Suffering*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012.

**Recommended Books:**

Alves, Rubem *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet*. Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1990.

Rankka, Kristine M. *Women and the Value of Suffering: An Aw(e)ful Rowing Toward God*. Collegville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

Swinton, John *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

<b>September 10</b>	<b>Course Introduction – Common Explanations Components of a Theology of Suffering</b>
<b>September 17</b>	<b>Unspeakable Suffering The Subtle Persistence of Hope</b>
<b>September 24</b>	<b>Dorothee Soelle: Suffering and Solidarity</b>
<b>October 1</b>	<b>Jürgen Moltmann: God’s Suffering From Loneliness to Community</b>
<b>October 8</b>	<b>Suffering Expedition</b>
<b>October 15</b>	<b>no class Hybrid Intensive Week <u>Due Date:</u> <i>On Job</i> - Gustavo Gutierrez and <i>The Book of Job</i></b>
<b>October 22</b>	<b>From Mutism to Lament Chapel: “Lamentations” Due Date: Lament Poem Due</b>
<b>October 29</b>	<b>Gustavo Gutierrez: Suffering and Liberation Theology of the Book of Job</b>
<b>November 5</b>	<b>The Suffering of the Innocent Rubem Alves: Expressing Suffering <u>Due Date:</u> -MDiv/MTS Textbook Review: Soelle <u>or</u> Moltmann text  -MA, PhD: Advanced Course Annotated Bibliography Due</b>
<b>November 12</b>	<b>Ministry of Hope to the Afflicted From Indifference to Compassion</b>
<b>November 19</b>	<b>Guest Lecture - Critical Experiences of Suffering Literature Review Group Discussions</b>

**Due Date:****-MDiv, MTS - Specialization Literature Review****-MA, DPT, PhD - Advanced Essay Due**

- November 26**            **Advanced Student Presentations**  
**Due Date: MA/DPT/PhD Presentations**
- December 3**            **Spirituality and Suffering**  
**Due Date: MDiv, MTS Specialization Essay Due**
- December 10**           **FEAST OF HOPE**  
**Due Date: Final Poem Due**

**SUFFERING EXPEDITION – October 8, 2019**

For these two hours, we will participate in a journey to observe the contours of suffering and hope all around us. You are invited to look for the ***glimpses of hope and the signs of suffering*** in your encounters with the people and situations you encounter. Remember, “Absolute, unmixed attention is prayer”- Simone Weil. You are invited to heighten your moral vision - to look with the intention of solidarity. Journal observations, insights, and ideas that capture your encounter with suffering. Use this reflection as the basis of your lament poem for chapel on October 22, 2019.

**FEAST OF HOPE**

“Words, which are good to be eaten”. Alves’ vision that words and food have the same mother, hunger, leads us to conclude the course with a feast:

1. Prepare the Table: - through the term we will each envision our contribution to the preparation of our table for the feast of hope. Feasts are extravagant - dishes, tablecloths, candles, and many other smells/sights/sounds will enhance our table.
2. Prepare the Words: - each participant will be invited to share a poem on the theme of hope in suffering. Additionally some may want to bring prayer, a song, a drawing, etc. to enhance the meal. The poem will be written for presentation in the final class at the *Feast of Hope*. Please PROVIDE A LEGIBLE WRITTEN COPY TO THE INSTRUCTOR. Due: December 10, 2019
3. Prepare the Food: - what’s a feast without food? Each class session we will build our vision for a memorable meal. Be creative! Together we’ll feast on the words and the food.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS****1. BOOK REVIEWS**

Write a 5-page response to ***On Job [Gutierrez] and*** the biblical text ***Book of Job*** paying particular attention to the resonance that you experience with Gutierrez and the text of Job. What words do you connect with? Why? What are the expressions that help you to articulate what you are feeling about God? Can you say how your own theology of suffering is being shaped in dialogue

with these writers? Do not rehearse the content of the book but interact with the ideas that inform your own theology of suffering.

**Book Review # 1: On Job [Gutierrez] and The Book of Job**

**Due: October 15, 2019      15 marks**

Write a 5-page response to either: **Soelle, *Suffering*, or Moltmann, *Crucified God***. Try to contextualize the issues that this theologian raises for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What are some of the key theological turns in this volume? How do these issues continue to inform a theology of suffering? What are the major theological themes that this book addresses? What has changed since this volume was written? What is emerging for you as the key issues for a theology of suffering from interacting with this volume?

**Book Review # 2: Soelle, or Moltmann**

**Due: November 5, 2019      15 marks**

**2. COURSE PARTICIPATION**

The course design is collegial and interactive. Participants are invited to engage in meaningful discussions, to interact in the various opportunities of the course, and to complete all reading and written assignments through the week. The course participation will be graded in the presentation of two poems: one in the chapel period on October 25, 2016 and the other in the *Feast of Hope* on December 13, 2016.

**Lament Poem # 1**

**Due: October 22, 2019**

**5 marks**

**Feast of Hope Poem # 2**

**Due: December 10, 2019**

**5 marks**

**n.b. Please provide a copy of the poem at the time of the exercise in class for submission to the instructor.**

**3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

From the course bibliography select an additional 400 pages of reading (both books and specialized journal articles) to engage the theology of suffering. You will be invited to share in your precept group from your annotated notes of these selected reading. Prepare written annotated notes on your reading from the perspective of your degree specialization and come to class prepared to share your findings with other course participants. Degree Specializations: Pastoral Studies, Spiritual Care and Counseling, Christian Thought and History, Christian Worldview should be reflected in the selection of books and articles. Elements of the annotated literature review should include:

- a. Title
- b. Reference information
- c. One sentence description of the author
- d. A defining quotation from the book
- e. Key codes: phrases, words, concepts that are core to the volume
- f. Two paragraph reflection on the reading from the perspective of your specialization

**Due Date: November 19, 2019**

**20 marks**

**4. SPECIALIZATION ESSAY**

It is important that we begin to express our suspicions about God's presence/absence in our struggle for understanding of suffering as we live in a broken world. You are invited to write a 15-page essay that BOTH reflects your area of specialization AND summarizes your own reflections on the theology of suffering. Criterion used to assign grades for the essays are:

**\*interaction with primary textbooks:** How well do you dialogue with the theologians?

**\*theological reflection:** Are you taking care to attend to the truth?

**\*creativity and writing style:** Do you allow the words to have their own will?

**\*specialization:** What are the core insights gained for your specialization?

**\*personal integration** : Can you speak meaningfully about God in the face of suffering?

**Essay Due: December 3, 2019 40 marks**

### **MS5XS5/6XS6 Advanced Degree Course Requirements**

**DPT:** Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.

#### **Course Participation**

The course design is collegial and interactive. Participants are invited to engage in meaningful discussions, to interact in the various opportunities of the course, and to complete all reading and written assignments through the week. The course participation will be graded in the presentation of two poems: one in the chapel period on October 25, 2016 and the other in the *Feast of Hope* on December 13, 2016.

**Lament Poem # 1 Due: October 22, 2019 5 marks**

**Feast of Hope Poem # 2 Due: December 10, 2019 5 marks**

#### **Advanced Course Annotated Bibliography:**

In addition to a careful reading of the core textbooks, advanced students in the MA/DPT/PhD program will read an additional 10 key volumes from the selected bibliography and write an annotated summary (2 pages double spaced) for each volume read. The selection of volumes must be approved the professor by September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 as a specialized reading list.

**Due Date: November 5, 2019 25 marks**

#### **Advanced Essay:**

MA, DPT, PhD students will write a 40-page research paper on a theme approved by Dr. Zylla related to the theology of suffering. The paper should critically engage the literature of the theology of suffering from the perspective of the student's research interest. In addition to the course readings the essay should be supported by peer-reviewed journal articles relevant to the core argument. DPT students must demonstrate engagement with practice-led research.

**Due Date: November 19, 2019 40 marks**

#### **Advanced Lecture:**

The paper will be the subject of a presentation to the class at the end of the course. MA, DPT, and PhD students in the course will present a 50 min. presentation with appropriate handouts/powerpoint on their research topic at a class session.

**Due Date: November 26, 2019 25 marks**

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“Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?” Lamentations 2:13

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A. Textbook Purchase

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College’s book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one’s academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty.

Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>

C. Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

D. Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/> Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Disclaimer

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

**Contacting the Instructor:**

Dr. Phil C. Zylla

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**Selected Bibliography**

Alves, Rubem A. *A Theology of Human Hope*. St. Meinrad, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1969.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet*. London/Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1990

Billman, Kathleen D. and Daniel L. Migliore. *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope*.

Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1999.

Boersma, Hans *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*.

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004.

Brown, Sally A. and Patrick D. Miller, eds. *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Brueggemann, Walter *The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power and Weakness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Clarke, Anthony *A Cry in the Darkness: The Forsakenness of Jesus in Scripture, Theology and Experience*. Macon, Georgia: Regent's Park College with Smyth and Helwys, 2002.

Claypool, John R. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. New Orleans, Louisiana: Insight Press, 1995.

Depoortere, Kristiaan *A Different God: A Christian View of Suffering*. Louvain: Peeters Press/W.B. Eerdmans, 1994.

Fiddes, Paul *The Creative Suffering of God*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

- Floysvik, Ingvar *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997.
- Ford, S. Dennis *Sins of Omission: A Primer on Moral Indifference*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Geddes, Jennifer L., ed. *Evil After Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Girard, René *Job: The Victim of his People*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo *A Theology of Liberation, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. New York: Orbis Books, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Hauwerwas, Stanley *Cross-Shattered Christ*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990.
- Hummel, Leonard M. *Clothed in Nothingness: Consolation for Suffering*. Minneapolis: Augsburg/ Fortress Press, 2003.
- Janzen, J. Gerald *At the Scent of Water: The Ground of Hope in the Book of Job*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2009.
- Jenkins, Michael *In the House of the Lord: Inhabiting the Psalms of Lament*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998.
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- Kreeft, Peter *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1986.
- Long, William R. and Glandion W. Carney *A Hard-Fought Hope: Journeying with Job Through Mystery*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2004.
- Manning, Brennan *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffins Path to God*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000.
- McManus, Kathleen Anne *Unbroken Communion: The Place and Meaning of Suffering in The Theology of Edward Schillebeexckx*. New York/Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003.
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Nouwen, Henri *Adam: God's Beloved*. New York: Orbis Books, 2005

\_\_\_\_\_. *Can You Drink the Cup?* Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996.

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Nouwen, Henri J.M., Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1983.

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Thiel, John E. *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering: A Theological Reflection*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

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Wiesel, Elie *Night*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. by Marion Wiesel, New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

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