

The Theology of Suffering MS3XS3/MS5XS5/MS6XS6**Winter Term 2024**

Instructor: Phil C. Zylla, DTh

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Monday

11:00 a.m.-12:50 p.m.

Degree Specializations: CS/CC/CW/PSFormat: in person + livestream**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/theological 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 counter 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

January 8	Course Introduction – Common Explanations Components of a Theology of Suffering
January 15	Unspeakable Suffering The Subtle Persistence of Hope
January 22	Dorothee Soelle: Suffering and Solidarity
January 29	Jürgen Moltmann: God’s Suffering From Loneliness to Community
February 5	Suffering Expedition
February 12	From Mutism to Lament Chapel: “Lamentations” <u>Due Date:</u> <i>Review: On Job</i> - Gustavo Gutierrez and <i>The Book of Job Due</i> Lament Poem Due
February 19	MDC Reading Week - no class
February 26	Gustavo Gutierrez: Suffering and Liberation Theology of the Book of Job
March 4	The Suffering of the Innocent Rubem Alves: Expressing Suffering <u>Due Date:</u> MDiv/MTS Textbook Review: Soelle <u>or</u> Moltmann text MA, DPT, PhD: Advanced Course Annotated Bibliography Due
March 11	Ministry of Hope to the Afflicted From Indifference to Compassion
March 18	Spirituality and Suffering Literature Review Group Discussions <u>Due Date:</u> MDiv, MTS - Specialization Literature Review MA, DPT, PhD - Advanced Essay Due

March 25 **Advanced Student Presentations**
Due Date: MA/DPT/PhD Presentations

April 1 ***Feast of Hope***
Due Date: MDiv, MTS Specialization Essay Due
All: Final Poem Due

SUFFERING EXPEDITION – February 5, 2024

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 February 12, 2024.

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: April 1, 2024
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: February 12, 2024 **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 21st 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: March 4, 2024 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 Feb. 12/24 and the other in the *Feast of Hope* on April 1/24.

Lament Poem # 1

Due: February 12, 2024

5 marks

Feast of Hope Poem # 2

Due: April 1, 2024

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: CS, CC, CW, PS 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: March 18, 2024

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: April 1, 2024 40 marks

MS5XS5/6XS6 Advanced Degree Course Requirements

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 Feb 12/24 and the other in the *Feast of Hope* on April 1/24.

<u>Lament Poem # 1</u>	<u>Due: February 12, 2024</u>	5 marks
<u>Feast of Hope Poem # 2</u>	<u>Due: April 1, 2024</u>	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 as a specialized reading list.

Due Date: March 4, 2024 **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: March 18, 2024 **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 35 min. presentation with appropriate handouts/powerpoint on their research topic at a class session.

Due Date: March 25, 2024 **25 marks**

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

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false

information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

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, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

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

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- Brown, Sally A. and Patrick D. Miller, eds. *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
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- 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.
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- Depoortere, Kristiaan *A Different God: A Christian View of Suffering*. Louvain: Peeters Press/W.B. Eerdmans, 1994.
- Fiddes, Paul *The Creative Suffering of God*. 2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Floysvik, Ingvar *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997.
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- Fretheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
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