

RGP 3207-6207HS
SPIRITUALITY AND SUFFERING
Cross-listed to the Theology Department
January-April 2010

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#206—office hours: Wednesday 10-12
or by appointment

Thursday, 2pm-4pm
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Description This course is a critical exploration of religious responses to suffering, with special attention given to the Judeo-Christian traditions. Focal issues will include the relation of love and spiritual transformation to suffering, the role of religious models or exemplars of suffering, and religious experience and problems of theodicy.

Objectives Students will be able to articulate, analyse, and critically evaluate significant themes in Hebrew, Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist responses to suffering, as these develop in various general historical phases. This includes the comprehension and appreciation of concepts and practices associated with suffering and theodicy. For specific details, see the various class handouts, “Possible Discussion Questions”, distributed for many of the readings.

Required Books (available at Crux Bookstore, Wycliffe College)

- Stephen Mitchell, tr., *The Book of Job*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1992 (1987).
- Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (any edition).
- Charles Guignon, ed., *Dostoevsky: The Grand Inquisitor with related chapters from The Brothers Karamazov*, Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993.
- Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, Everett R. Kalin, tr., Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.
- Pope John Paul II, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, Boston: St. Paul's Books and Media, 1984.

Required Book for Advanced Degree Students

Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam Books, 1960 (or any other edition. I did not ask Crux to order copies of this book).

Reserve Reading Some required reading selections, listed on the course syllabus (p. 5), will be available on Reserve in the Regis College Library and some readings will be distributed as handouts in class. See the Reserve Reading list on p. 6 of this course outline.

Grading: A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. Following the final examination, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+ = 100-90	B = 76-73
A = 89-85	B- = 72-70
A- = 84-80	FZ = 69-0
B+ = 79-77	

Graded Assignments

For Basic Degree Students:

- 40% **Critical Reflection Paper #1:** Jewish responses to suffering. The paper should be about 1700 words (6-7 typed pages or so). It is due on **Thursday, February 11**. See possible questions listed below on p. 6.
- 55% **Critical Reflection Paper #2:** Christian responses to suffering. The essay should be about 2100 words (8-9 typed pages or so). It is due on **Thursday, April 1**. See possible questions listed below on p. 6.
- 5% **Class Participation:** attendance, evidence that you are keeping up with the readings, class discussion.

For Advanced Degree Students:

- 35% **Critical Reflection Paper #1:** Jewish responses to suffering. The paper should be about 1850 words (7-8 typed pages or so). It is due on **Thursday, February 11**. See questions listed for B.D. students on p. 7 below.
- 55% **Critical Reflection Paper #2.** Christian responses to suffering. Drawing from relevant source materials, critically and creatively explore a theme(s) or issue(s) pertaining to Christian responses to suffering. This theme or issue needs to be developed in discussion with me. The essay should be about 3300 words (13-14 typed pages or so). It is due on **Thursday, April 1**.
- 10% **Class Participation:** attendance, evidence that you are keeping up with the readings, class discussion, and participation in two **AD Seminars** (see details below).

Advanced Degree Seminars

- 1) The first A.D. Seminar will be scheduled the week of **Feb. 8-12** (1.5 hours):
 - i) Students are required to read carefully Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam (or any other edition) and to come prepared to discuss ideas from it and related ideas developed

in class lecture and discussion.

ii) Also, students are required to develop two comments/questions appropriate for class discussion, which relate to ideas or issues in this book. These comments/questions are to be written and copies circulated to all seminar participants.

- 2) The Second A.D. Seminar will be scheduled the week of **March 15-19** (1 hour). Students will each present brief details (5-10 minutes each) of the proposed topic of their major critical reflection paper.

Format and Marking Criteria for Assignments

- 1) Note the date deadlines. A 10% reduction of the grade will be applied to late papers each week or part week it is late.
- 2) All essays should show significant thought and effort. They should be well-developed and polished.
- 3) Format: essays must be **double spaced**, have a **title page**, **page numbers**, appropriate **margin spacing**, **footnotes**, and a **bibliography**. Neglect of appropriate notation will result in a significant reduction of your grade, possibly even an “F”. Papers are usually more legible if typed, but hand-written essays are acceptable if they are legible and **double spaced**.
- 4) Academic Honesty: Documentation for footnotes is necessary, when quoting writers or referring to secondary sources. Be sure to note All material which you quote directly, as well as any judgments, arguments, and data that you draw from other sources.

Plagiarism will result in a grade of “F” for the course, and the notification of the Dean of your College.

- i In order to deter plagiarism, I might require an oral defence of essays. Failure to attend the defense will result in an “F” on the essay.
- ii Failure to document properly the sources of your research will involve a significant reduction in your grade, possibly even an “F”. This includes the failure to cite the appropriate books or page numbers of books from which you have quoted.
- iii If the essay makes any major use of work done in another course, submit the work along with the essay. If there is not a significant amount of new work, the grade may be reduced. See me if you have any questions on this.

Marking Criteria

- 1) **Clarity** of the essay, in grammatical detail and expression, and in the overall structure. Be sure your paper is drawn together coherently; a strong introduction stating what you will do and how you will do it, and conclusion summarizing what you have done, are essential in this regard.
- 2) **Substance** of the essay, whether it is significant or superficial, rigorous or sloppy.

- You must take an appropriate objective and scholarly approach, and show some significant understanding of the material and relevant research issues.
- 3) **Accuracy** of the essay, where it involves an exposition or explanation of information from books or lecture notes.
 - 4) **Scope** of the essay: that is, be sure to develop the significant relevant issues and implications that arise from the problems, issues or themes of the material in question.
 - 5) **Conciseness** of the essay, in contrast with being wordy or overly elaborate or needlessly repetitive.
 - 6) **Originality** of the essay: the analysis should show some critical reflection on the theme or question, whether it is your own or a synthesis of ideas connected to another course-reading or of ideas developed in class discussion. You must show some critical and creative development on your part.

Tentative Syllabus Some additional Readings might be given as the course progresses.

- Jan. 7 Introduction, key definitions, issues; suffering in the Hebrew tradition.
- Jan. 14 Hebrew/Jewish responses to suffering. John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, pp. 5-24 (**R.R.**); Mitchell (tr.) *The Book of Job* (including Mitchell's introduction).
- Jan. 21 Jewish responses to suffering. Mitchell (tr.) *The Book of Job* (continued); Bowker, *Problems*, pp. 24-41 (**R.R.**).
- Jan. 28 Jewish responses to suffering. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.
- Feb. 4 Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (continued); M. Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, Chapter 2, pp. 18-32.
- Friday, Feb. 5 Christian responses to suffering: New Testament; Bowker, (Make up class For April 1) *Problems*, pp. 42-90 (**R.R.**); Larry Dossey, "The Return of Prayer", (**R.R.**).
- Feb. 11 Christian responses to suffering: New Testament (continued). Medieval developments; Bowker, *Problems*, pp. 91-98 (**R.R.**); Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, Chapter 5, pp. 80-101 (**R.R.**).
- *B.D./A.D. Critical Reflection Paper #1 due. AD Seminar #1 during this week.**
- Feb. 18 Reading Week, no class.
- Feb. 25 Christian responses to suffering: Enlightenment developments. Charles Guignon, ed., *Dostoevsky: The Grand Inquisitor with related chapters from The Brothers Karamazov* (including Guignon's introduction).
- March 4 Enlightenment developments. Guignon (continued). (**R.R.**)

March 11 Contemporary issues. M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, pp. 36-84 (R.R.).

AD Seminar #2

March 18 Contemporary issues. Soelle, *Suffering*, pp. 9-59; 151-178. Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction" (from Eric O. Springsted, ed., *Simone Weil*), pp. 41-71 (R.R.).

March 25 Contemporary issues. Soelle and Weil (continued). Pope John Paul II, "On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering"; M. Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, Chapter 3, pp. 34-59 (R.R.).

April 1 Class cancelled Holy Thursday. Friday Feb. 5, make-up class.

***B.D./A.D. Critical Reflection Paper #2 due on April 1.**

Books on Reserve Reading in Regis College Library

- John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- William Cenkner (ed.), *Evil and the Response of World Religion*, Paragon House, 1997.
- Larry Dossey, "The Return of Prayer", *Alternative Therapies*, vol. 3, no. 6 (November 1997) pp. 10-17, 113-120.
- Barbara Fiand, *Prayer and the Quest for healing: Our Personal Transformation*, New York: Crossroads, 1999.
- John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1977.
- Peter van Inwagen, *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004.
- L. Ann Jervis, *At the Heart of the Gospel: Suffering in the Earliest Christian Message* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.
- Roland Murphy, *A Short Reading of Job*, Paulist Press, 1999.
- M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983.
- Thomas Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*, New York: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Richard W. Roukema, *Counselling the Soul in Distress*, 2nd ed., New York: Haaworth Pastoral Press, 2003.
- Hans Schwartz, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective*, Fortress, 1995.
- Tom Shroder, *The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.
- Michael Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics' God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation*, New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

- John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.
- Simone Weil, *Simone Weil*, Eric O. Springsted, (tr.), Orbis, 1998.

Possible Questions for B.D./A.D Critical Reflection Paper #1: Jewish responses to suffering:

1. Critically and creatively explore what you take to be major issue(s) or theme(s) raised in Stephen Mitchell's introductory essay on *Job*, in light of relevant material from class lectures, discussion or other readings.

OR

2. In Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl writes: "In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen". In light of key aspects of Frankl's view of "logotherapy", critically and creatively explore the various features of this process, especially as it is developed on pp. 60-75 (or pp. 47-60 in some editions). Do you agree with his claims? How might people take issue with them? What might be their limitations?

Possible Questions for B.D. Critical Reflection Paper #2: Christian responses to suffering:

1. Critically and creatively explore what you take to be the major issue(s) or theme(s) raised by Charles Guignon in his introductory essay of *Dostoevsky*. Draw in your development on class lectures, discussion, or other readings, especially Dorothee Soelle's book, *Suffering*.

OR

2. Drawing on appropriate course material, especially on relevant aspects of Dorothee Soelle's book, *Suffering*, evaluate in a creative and critical way the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of "Book VI The Russian Monk" as a response to Ivan's rebellion against religion in *Dostoevsky*.

OR

3. Provide a critical review of Dorothee Soelle's book, *Suffering*. Briefly outline the structure of the book. Then focus in your creative development especially on what you take to be the most interesting thrusts or features or sections of the book. In your discussion, draw on various ideas developed in class that you think relevant to your review. You might draw on other secondary material you find helpful, but this is not necessary.

OR

4. Provide a critical review of M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie*, with special focus on key ideas developed in chapter 2, "Toward a Psychology of Evil". Contextualise this chapter in terms of other significant sections of the book, relating it to appropriate ideas or issues raised in class lecture and discussion.

OR

5. Choose a theme or issue of your own, one that was developed in class lectures or discussion. This theme or issue needs to be approved by me.