

ST. PETER'S SEMINARY / KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
at *The University of Western Ontario*
Winter 2024

Selected Topics in Systematic Theology 5219B
Theology of Suffering
Friday 9:30-12:20, Room 143

John Dool, x272, jdool@uwo.ca
Andrea Di Giovanni, x267, adigiov2@uwo.ca
Angela Townend, x214, atownend@uwo.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An interdisciplinary exploration of the phenomenon of human suffering and theological responses to it. Themes include biblical approaches to suffering, God's relationship and response to suffering, and the call to encounter and engage with suffering in Christian life and ministry.

ASSESSMENT

Reflection Essay/exercise – 15% 3-4 pages, **due January 26**

Integrative Take-home Examination – 50%

Participation: Participation in discussion – 35%

COURSE TEXTS

Readings will be available through OWL

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

Week 1 (Jan. 12): Introduction: course syllabus; preliminary definitions; the universal experience of suffering; different approaches to suffering; suffering as a problem and a mystery.

Week 2 (Jan. 19): Suffering: A Personal Lens of Theodicy

Description: Students will engage in an exploration of their own perspectives and theological understanding of suffering as drawn from personal, religious, professional, and academic knowledge, experiences, and insights. They will also consider the importance of understanding and being receptive to those paradigms of suffering held by others including how this search for meaning impacts attitudes and beliefs, faith formation and ability to cope.

Readings

Required:

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_69501068

Barrett, D. A. (1999). Suffering and the Process of Transformation. *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 53(4), 461–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234099905300408>

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_71012940

Tam, Ekman P. C. 2001. “Wounding, Doubting, and Trusting in Suffering.” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 55 (2): 159–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234090105500205>.

Optional:

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_journals_1643367941

Scrutton, Anastasia Philippa. 2015. “Suffering as Potentially Transformative: A Philosophical and Pastoral Consideration Drawing on Henri Nouwen’s Experience of Depression.” *Pastoral Psychology* 64 (1): 99–109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0589-6>

Week 3 (Jan. 26): Suffering in the Old Testament

The Old Testament exhibits varied approaches to suffering. In this class we will explore one of the most influential concepts of suffering, namely retributive suffering. That is, suffering that is a consequence after there has been some breach in relationship with God. Some good questions to carry in mind will be: Is God responsible for the suffering? What is prayer for?

- Deuteronomy 28
- Psalms 38, 55, 88 and 137
- Job 1-7, 20, 38-42
- Daniel Harrington, SJ. "Old Testament Approaches to Suffering," in *Suffering and the Christian Life*, edited by Richard W. Miller. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 3-18.
- Derek J. Suderman, "The Cost of Losing Lament for the Community of Faith: On Brueggemann, Ecclesiology, and the Social Audience of Prayer." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6.2 (2012): 201-218.

Week 4 (Feb. 2): Suffering in the New Testament, Part I: Jesus Responding to Suffering

- Jesus' ministry is characterized by both his healings and his teachings. In this class we will explore representative passages from the gospels of Jesus confronting the suffering of the people both through his actions as a healer and through his lessons. Our focus is on Jesus in his own historical context. How do these pericopes carry forward themes and theologies of the Old Testament? How do they differ? What are some important implications of Jesus' two-pronged approach (teaching and healing) to alleviating suffering?
- Mark 5
- Matt 5:1-12; 38-48
- Walter Wink, "Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way," *Review and Expositor* 89:2 (1992): 197-214.
- Candida Moss, "The Man with the Flow of Power: Porous Bodies in Mark 5:25-34," *JBL* 129/3 (2010): 507-519.

Week 5 (Feb. 9): God and Suffering I: Can God Suffer? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Traditionally God has been understood to transcend the experience of suffering. Some contemporary theologians question whether this view compromises God's love for suffering humanity and propose that God suffers with us; others argue for the validity and necessity of the traditional view.

- Jurgen Moltmann, "The Passion of Christ and the Pain of God", in *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 30-49.
- Paul Gavrilyuk, "God's Impassible Suffering in the Flesh: The Promise of Paradoxical Christology", *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, 127-49.
- Michael Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love", *Theological Studies*, v.52, (1991), 330-344.

Week 6 (Feb. 16): God and Suffering II: Theodicy and the Question of Evil

Is belief in a God who is both all good and all powerful coherent in a world of suffering? Theodicy is the name given to attempts to reconcile rationally these seemingly contradictory realities. Can belief in such a God be rationally justified?

- Gerard J. Hughes, "The Problem of Evil", in *Is God to Blame*, Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2002, 13-25.
- Herbert McCabe, "Evil", in *God Matters*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991, 25-38.
- Kilby, Karen. "Evil and the Limits of Theology." *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology*. London: T&T CLARK, 2020. 67–84. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 5 Dec. 2022.

Reading Week

Weeks 7 & 8 – March 1 and March 8

Ministry to the Suffering: Where Theology and Psychology Meet (Part I and II)

Description: Students will discuss and reflect upon some of the central schools of thought, theories and working models that address suffering to adopt a universal framework that embraces both biblical wisdom and the relevant behavioral sciences. This will include an evaluation of such areas as positive psychology, trauma informed treatment models, personal agency and suffering, cognitive behavioral models, narrative, interpersonal and mindfulness therapies, neuropsychology, contemporary theories of grief, acceptance and commitment therapy, as well as their integration with a sound theology of suffering.

This class will also highlight several common examples of suffering - acute. vs. chronic sorrow, vicarious burden, complicated grief, trauma/intergenerational trauma, chronic pain, addiction, mental health illness, unexpected loss, spiritual suffering, poverty, homelessness, caregiver burden - to illustrate the development of a therapeutic framework that promotes a complementary and a mutually enriching relationship between the two disciplines.

Readings

Required:

Week 7 – March 1

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_doaj_primary_oai_doaj_org_article_4da1acda4fcc4d85a0dd2b37d378402c

Jessica Coblentz. (2020). What Can Theology Offer Psychology? Some Considerations in the Context of Depression. *Journal of Moral Theology*, 9(1).

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_1315135501

Willoughby, M. (2012). Suffering: etiology and treatment. *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 66(3–4), 5–5.

Optional:

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_72183643
Byrne, Patricia Huff. 2002. “‘Give Sorrow Words’: Lament—Contemporary Need for Job’s Old Time Religion.” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56 (3): 255–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230500205600306>.

Required:

Week 8 – March 8

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_journals_1955515910
Zylla, Phil C. 2017. “Aspects of Men’s Sorrow: Reflection on Phenomenological Writings About Grief.” *Pastoral Psychology* 66 (6): 837–54. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0768-y>.
- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_scopus_primary_607982927
Harper, A. R., & Pargament, K. I. (2015). Trauma, Religion, and Spirituality: Pathways to Healing. In *Traumatic Stress and Long-Term Recovery* (pp. 349–367). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18866-9_19

Week 9 – March 15

Ministry to the Suffering: Practice Tools for Spiritual Care

Description: Students will discuss and practice some of the key dynamics, challenges, and interventions for a relational model of ministering to those who are suffering. This overview will include understanding such concepts as validation, use of self, accompaniment, therapeutic

alliance, self-determination, vulnerability, contemplative prayer and silence, compassion vs. empathy, divine encounters, paradox of “knowing/not knowing”, empathic challenging, laments, iconography, journalling, forgiveness, and regrets.

Readings

Required:

- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_858284163

Guenther, Margaret B. 2011. “Healing: The Power of Presence. A Reflection.” *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 41 (3): 650–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2010.11.008>.
- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/t54l2v/cdi_scopus_primary_618316351

Zylla, P. C. (2017). Inhabiting compassion: a pastoral theological paradigm. *Hervormde Theologische Studies*, 73(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4644>
- https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/g6dnbh/cdi_proquest_journals_2132125453

Dickie, J. F. (2019). Lament as a Contributor to the Healing of Trauma: An Application of Poetry in the Form of Biblical Lament. *Pastoral Psychology*, 68(2), 145–156.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0851-z>

Week 10 (Mar. 22): Suffering in the New Testament, Part II: Jesus as a Sufferer

Jesus’ own suffering, was, as Paul puts it, a “stumbling block” for belief in Jesus as the Messiah. This week we will explore how the New Testament writers grapple with and discover new meaning in Jesus’ suffering. The biblical passages present us with some ways in which Jesus suffered *during* his ministry, as well as in his passion. *Take a moment while you are reading, to note down all the many ways Jesus suffers.* The accompanying essays help us to think through some expectations of Jesus’ social role in his historical context.

- Mark 3:20-35
- Matt 4:1-11
- Mark 6:1-5
- Mark 8
- Mark 14-15

- Michal Beth Dinkler, “Suffering, Misunderstanding, and Suffering Misunderstanding: The Markan Misunderstanding Motif as a Form of Jesus’ Suffering.” *JSOT* 38 (2016): 316-338.
- Colleen Conway, “Was Jesus a Manly Man? On Reading Masculinity in the New Testament,” *Word and World* 36 (2016): 15-23.

March 29: Good Friday

Week 11 (April 5): The Death and Resurrection of Jesus and Atonement Theology

Since Anselm, Christians have often interpreted Jesus’ death in terms of an atoning sacrifice. Different versions of this theology have emerged. Is this approach well grounded in the biblical texts? What other presuppositions are brought into this theology? What are the implications for understanding suffering – Jesus’ suffering and the suffering of others? This session will explore these questions and some contemporary critiques and reinterpretations of atonement.

- Romans 1-8
- Mark Dever, “Nothing But the Blood,” in *Christianity Today* May 2006, 28-33.
- S. Mark Heim, “Christ Crucified”, *Christian Century*, March 7 2001, 12-17.
- Charles Hefling, “Why the Cross?”, *Christian Century*, March 2013, 24-27.

UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Students are responsible for knowing the University’s academic policies and regulations and any particularities of their own course of study. Ignorance of these policies is not an excuse for any violation thereof. The following policies are particularly important to note:

Accommodations for Tests/Examinations: Students with disabilities work with Accessibility Services which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Students are responsible for seeking accommodation with appropriate documentation, prior to writing tests/examinations, if they are of the view that their performance may be affected by extenuating circumstances. **All students requiring academic accommodations for tests and examinations must use the services offered through King’s University College.**

How to Request Academic Accommodation – King’s Students:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/courses-enrolment/exams-and-tests/medical-accommodation/>

UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

<https://www.eng.uwo.ca/files/undergraduate/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

Scholastic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see [https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html](https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality%20Reports%20-%20TurnItIn.html). Please note that Turnitin analysis now also includes AI detection.

St. Peter's Seminary is committed to fostering a culture of professionalism, honesty, and academic integrity, and all members of our community—faculty, staff, and students—have a role to play in promoting an ethical learning environment. Furthermore, through the work they submit for academic evaluation, students develop important habits of critical thinking, independent inquiry, and creativity. Thus, it is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor.

Within this course, use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools [such as Chat GPT] is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation.

Copyright re: Course Material: Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty Members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a Faculty Member. Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member is interested in posting a student's answers or papers on the course web site he/she should ask for the student's written permission. (Commercial use of Course material - <http://umd.edu/legal/commercial.html>)

Scholarly Citation: According to the policy adopted by the faculty of St. Peter's Seminary, all citations, references and bibliographies in written assignments are to follow the formatting prescribed in the Chicago/Turabian Manual of Style. Footnotes are to be used, rather than author-date references in the body of the text. Please review and consult the summary provided by

Kenrick-Glennon Seminary at <https://www.kenrick.edu/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-Academic-Papers-and-Citations.pdf> for further information.

Submission of Assignments: It is the responsibility of the student to organize his or her work so that the assignments are completed on time. A penalty of 10% of the value of the assignment will be deducted for each day it is overdue without permission.

Students who are unable to hand in assignments or take examinations for legitimate reasons must consult with the instructor. If the reason is medical, students may be required to provide a note from a doctor. Ordinarily, all assignments and exams will be made up at a later date. In certain circumstances, the final grading scheme may be re-weighted if the missed assignment is of a low weight.

Selection and Registration of Courses: Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all prerequisite course(s) have been successfully completed, and that they are aware of any anti-requisite course(s) that they have taken.

Classroom Conduct: Students are expected to conduct themselves with respect for everyone and with professionalism in all classroom activities. Laptops and other electronic devices may be used for classroom academic activities only. The use of such devices must always be in accord with the common good of the whole learning community as specified by the instructor. The instructor may choose at any time to limit their use for instructional purposes or because of the disruptive use of such devices.

You are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations.

Support Services:

Information about Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development (formerly Services for Students with Disabilities) at King's is available at <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

For emotional/mental health assistance see: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

The website for Academic Services at King's University College is <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-support/>

Students who are in emotional/mental health distress should refer to Mental Health@Western: <https://uwo.ca/health/services/students/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

University Students Council provides many valuable support services for students (including the health insurance plan) <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

These services are not meant to replace those offered at the Seminary but may be beneficial to our students after consultation with the appropriate instructors, administrators, and formators.

University Students Council provides many valuable support services for students (including the health insurance plan) <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

These services are not meant to replace those offered at the Seminary but may be beneficial to our students after consultation with the appropriate instructors, administrators, and formators.