

PTPC 75423/85423
Special Topics in Pastoral Theology:
Theological Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Theodicy, Evil and Suffering
(3 semester hours)

Instructor: Eunil David Cho

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Term: Fall 2021

Prerequisites: None

Format: TBA

Description of Content:

“Our world is ripped apart by a constant stream of pain, suffering, and struggle; evil and suffering are real, awful, frightening, and confusing. The question, ‘Why does God allow such things to happen?’ appears to be a natural response to our tragic experiences in the world, so much so that we rarely doubt the legitimacy of the question.”

John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*

Why would an all-loving, all-powerful God allow this to happen? Why is there suffering in this world? Why does evil exist? As pastoral and spiritual caregivers, we often struggle to answer these perplexing questions for ourselves as well as others. Ministers, chaplains, and counselors attempt to explain evil so people can hold onto the possibility of God in the midst of pain and suffering. The course provides a wide range of philosophical, theological, and scientific resources for students to think about critically how we can justify and sustain the idea that God is still good, loving, and just in the face of the reality of the world’s pain.

Students will begin by reading Kate Bowler’s story to examine her personal encounter with a widely accepted, yet problematic explanation of suffering in the wake of a life-threatening illness. Bowler’s illness narrative will help us to assess the strength and limitations of traditional approaches to theodicy in critical conversation with more contemporary responses to human suffering. In the end, students will explore how to construct a pastoral response to the reality of evil and suffering that is practically theological, contextually located, and culturally responsive in pastoral practices.

Class Procedures:

A seminar-style course largely driven by student-led discussion, occasional lectures by the instructor, weekly discussion posts, and student presentation.

Requirements:

1. Attendance and informed participation in the class sessions
2. A brief reading response paper to facilitate a small group discussion (twice during the semester)
3. Personal Theodicy Reflection Paper (5 pages): each student will write a reflection paper that articulates personal view on theodicy, evil, and suffering
4. Interview Analysis Paper (8-10 pages): each student will conduct an interview with a person and analyze his/her/their view of suffering and evil in conversation with the assigned readings
5. Vocational Integrative Project: the final project provides students with an opportunity to integrate the readings and discussions to design a project that reflects students' particular vocations

Require Texts:

- Bowler, Kate. *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*. Random House, 2019. (ISBN-10: 0399592083; ISBN-13: 978-0399592089; \$ 10.39).
- Long, Thomas. *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011. (ISBN-10: 0802865143; ISBN-13: 978-0802865144; \$ 15.70).
- Scott, Mark. *Pathways in Theodicy: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil*. Fortress Press, 2015. (ISBN-10: 1451464703; ISBN-13: 978-1451464702; \$ 44.00).
- Swinton, John. *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007. (ISBN-10: 080282997X ISBN-13: 978-0802829979; \$ 18.93).

Various journal articles and book chapters made available online.

Recommended Texts (we will be reading chapters from these texts):

- Farley, Wendy. *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*. Westminster John Knox, 1991.
- Townes, Emilie., ed. *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*. Orbis Books, 1993.

Grading Procedures:

1. Attendance and Informed Participation (10%)
2. In-Class Writing Exercise (5%)
3. Reading Response and Discussion Leadership (20%)
4. Personal Theodicy Reflection Paper (15%)
5. Interview Analysis Paper (25%)
6. Vocational Integrative Project (25%)