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PH 650 Tragedy, Suffering, and Christian Faith

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TRAGEDY, SUFFERING, AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

PH 650

SPRING 2000

Professor Chuck Gutenson
Office AD 408

I. Introduction

Without a doubt, the most frequent challenge to Christian faith is the so-called problem of evil. The initial force of the problem is captured by the atheist's claim that there is some contradiction in the following set of propositions:

1. God is wholly good.
2. God is omnipotent.
3. God is omniscient.
4. Evil exists.

An early Greek philosopher, upon observing these propositions, asked "Is God not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he unwilling? Then he is not good/loving. Does he not know what to do? Then he is not omniscient. If he is all these things, then whence evil?" Of all the atheistic challenges advanced, this is one you will certainly face whatever your ministry focus.

Our task this semester will be to consider various forms of the problem of evil, such as the existential problem of evil and the theoretical problem of evil. And, of course, we will consider a variety of responses that have been advanced by philosophers and theologians within the Christian tradition.

II. Course Objectives

In the course of this semester, the following objectives will be accomplished.

1. You will be able to present, in basic outline, each of the forms of the problem of evil.
2. You will be able to give at least one of the fundamental Christian responses to each of these.
3. You will be able to articulate the difference between theodicy and defense and give examples of each.
4. You will be able to give the basic arguments for both the Augustinian Theodicy and the Irenaean Theodicy.
5. You will be able to provide a Wesleyan perspective on the problem of evil.
6. You will be able to distinguish the pastoral problem of evil from other forms of

the problem and you will be able to articulate the appropriate response.

7. By the end of the course, you will have developed an initial, reflective response to the problem of evil.

III. Course Requirements

As a seminar course, I intend to maximize in-class discussion and minimize Amere lecture.@ Consequently, it is extremely important that each of you prepare for each class period by reading reflectively all assigned reading materials. In addition to reading reflectively, I ask that each of you prepare two or three questions or comments from the material that you have read. Bring these with you to class and be prepared to raise the issues during discussion.

As we will be covering a good deal of information during the course of the semester, class attendance is of utmost importance. If you must miss class for a legitimate reason, please be sure to advise me in advance if possible. Further, I would like to have a written record of an absence which you believe legitimate reasons warranting your being excused. E-mail notes are not only acceptable, they are preferred. **More than three unexcused absences may result in grade reduction.**

The texts required for this class are as follows:

The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings by Mike Peterson

Hell: The Logic of Damnation by Jerry Walls

Lament for a Son by Nicholas Wolterstorff

Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God by Marilyn McCord Adams

A couple of articles which will be on reserve.

V. Evaluation Methods

Following are the assignments for this class and their relative weights in determining the final grade for the course. **Please note that assignments not turned in on the due date will be subject to grade reduction, unless prior approval is obtained.** (See Appendix A on AGrading Procedures@ for more detail on how the final grade will be determined.)

Each student will complete two 12-15 page papers on relevant subjects. The student will select a paper topic, and submit it for approval. Each of these papers will count for one-half of the final grade. Deadlines will be agreed upon during the first week of class.

VI. Reading Assignments

See attached.