



Theology of Suffering & Hope THS 570 OL

The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructor: Gloria J. Woodland, D.Min
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Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: none
Course Term: March 1 – May 1, 2027

Course Instruction

This course is an asynchronous online course offering. There are no in-person requirements. You are required to watch or listen to the course videos and instructional content that is posted in the Populi classroom.

Course Description

Suffering in Christian theology is often described as a universal human experience that, when processed with Christian belief, becomes a source of hope, meaning, and spiritual growth. In this course students will explore how faith, adversity and divine promise intersect. Recognizing that suffering is the reality of a fallen world and the expectant hope found in Christ, lessons will focus on encountering God in adverse times. Key dimensions of a theological framework using the theology of the cross, redemptive transformation and living in the hope filled tension of 'now and not yet', will be examined so that students can consider and shape their theological view of suffering and hope.

Course Objectives

This course's theme and content are consistent with, and taught through the lens of, the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Know the theological approaches to suffering presented by various theologians.

- Discern ways to speak meaningfully about hope and the goodness of God in a broken and suffering world.
- Articulate a developing position about the integration of suffering with a personal relationship with God.
- Explore a biblical framework for a theology of suffering and hope that will become a ministry of a pastoral theology of suffering.

The most effective learning occurs as you carefully process information through higher-order thinking skills. Your performance and evaluation in this course will be based on demonstrating your engagement and learning, not simply repeating basic facts. In all that you do in this class, you should use higher-order thinking skills, as described below:

- Comprehension: demonstrates the ability to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas,
- Application: demonstrates the ability to use learned material in new situations,
- Analysis: demonstrates the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationships between the parts.
- Synthesis: demonstrates the ability to put together the separate ideas to form a new whole, to establish new relationships, and
- Evaluation: demonstrates the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria.

Required Texts

- Patterson, Aimee. *Suffering Well and Suffering With: Reclaiming Marks of Christian Identity*. Cascade Books: Eugene Oregon, 2023.
- Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Westminster John Knox Press; Louisville, Kentucky, 2010.
- Zylla, Phil C. *The Roots of Sorrow: A Pastoral Theology of Suffering*. Baylor University Press: Waco Texas, 2012.

Recommended- not required.

- Swinton, John. *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problems of Evil*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007.
Chapter 5, Why Me, Lord ... Why Me? The practice of lament as resistance and deliverance will be required reading for an assignment. This chapter will be included on the course site for all students to access. You may wish to purchase the book to add to your library; however, it is not required.

Schedule of Assignments

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% of Grade	Cumulative %
1 March 1-6	March 3 March 6	Reading: Patterson, chapters 1,2,3 & 4 (62 pgs.) Forum Post Wednesday with response by Saturday	3 2	5
2 March 8 - 13	Mar. 13	Zylla pages 67 to 130 for assignment - Components of a Mature Theology of Suffering	10	15
3 March 15 - 20	Mar. 20	Watch and Respond to Savannah Guthrie – “I still believe”	10	25
4 March 22 - 27	Mar. 27	Reading: John Swinton, chapter 5 – Why me, Lord Assignment – Writing a Psalm of Lament	20	45
5 March 29 – April 3	Mar. 31 April 3	Reading: Patterson, chapters 5,6,7 & 8 (61 pgs.) Rambo: Chapter 2 and 5 Forum Post – Wednesday with response – Saturday	3 2	50
6 April 5 - 10	April 10	Experiential Awareness Assignment - “Signs of Suffering - Glimpses of Hope”	10	60
7 April 12 - 17	April 14 April 17	Forum Post – Wednesday with response – Saturday	3 2	65
8 April 19 - 24	April 21 April 24	Forum Post – Wednesday with response – Saturday	3 2	70
9 April 26 – May 1	April 28	Final Paper:	30	100
9		Course Evaluation	100	100

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment 1: Learning Community Forums

This course has four regular online discussion forums where you can interact with others in the class about key questions, or course readings, and lecture material. These forums are opportunities for you to share thoughts and experiences and gain insights from others in the class. They are an integral part of our class together.

Please ensure you do the prescribed reading and watch the instructional videos (or access the instructional content in other ways) for each forum week to participate meaningfully in the forum discussions.

Each forum week starts on Monday and ends on Saturday. Students are expected to contribute to the forum discussions by posting one substantive contribution per question and two conversational posts per forum week. Within each forum, your substantive posts – personal response to the question is due by Wednesday. Your conversational contribution or responses to another student is due by Saturday. One Point/percent (1%) will be deducted for late posts, both substantial and conversational.

By substantive responses, I mean responses that show a deep processing of relevant ideas (200-400 words). This is a tremendous opportunity to build on one another's knowledge, insights, and experience, and our collaboration will deepen and broaden our learning. We may also respectfully challenge one another, but we must build a supportive subculture that encourages and, if necessary, ministers pastorally to one another. Substantive contributions are worth 3 percent for each week. With four required forums that will have a total value of 12%.

By conversational contributions, I mean simply joining the flow of discussion with shorter responses (e.g. questions, affirmations, quick thoughts about what someone has said). I'd encourage you to ask good coaching questions or share experiences that invite others in the class to think more deeply or differently. Your weekly conversational contributions are worth a weekly total of 2 percent. With 4 weeks of forums your conversation with others has a total value of 8%

The total value of the four forums is 20% (3+2 = 5% each x 4 forums = 20%)

A one percent (1%) deduction will be made for each day your posts are overdue.

Forum discussions are a best practice in online learning and are meant to replace classroom discussions with your peers. They are opportunities to consider a topic more deeply and synthesize ideas, perspectives and experiences as a class.

Assignment 1: Forum Questions

Total value 20%

Please be sure your initial substantive post is done by Wednesday, giving time for all the class to read and post at least two conversational responses to others by Saturday. There will be a 1% deduction for each day your posts are late.

Week One:

Post your substantive response to question 3 on page 38 of Patterson's text, *Suffering Well and Suffering With*. "Do you agree that we live in an anesthetic society? Why or why not? Are there moral differences between, on the one hand, attempting to treat and ease a person's pain and, on the other, attempting to eradicate pain altogether? If so, what are they?"

Week Five:

At the conclusion of the recording, you were asked to "Consider those you will encounter in ministry. Your clients, congregants and community members. You have knowledge of the suffering experienced; will you recognize their Holy Saturday and remain in it with them as a witness to their suffering and as a witness to both the Theology of the Cross and the Theology of Hope? Can your ministry be a Theology of Remaining?" After giving appropriate consideration to the questions, post a substantial response that shares your positioning in ministry.

Week Seven:

Using this week's forum, engage in discussion on the presentation of Emmanuel – God with us, as the God who is with us in suffering and adversity by responding to the following. Reflecting on the suffering you see and the glimpses of hope to be found, and in awareness that not all your journey with will be Christian. How will you present the God who is with us and the divine promise?

Week Eight:

Could you see benefit in offering a Service of Lament in your ministry in response to a communal time of suffering. Why or Why Not?

Assignment 2: Components of a Mature Theology of Suffering

10%

For ministry perspective you can focus on your current or future field of ministry.

Based on your assigned reading in the Zylla text: *Roots of Sorrow*. Please write a paper that is a maximum of four pages. In your paper you are to outline concisely the components of a mature theology of suffering. Then respond to the following questions: 1) How do you understand the components of a mature theology of suffering in light of your ministry context? 2) How is the mystery of the eternal God who suffers with us revealed as hope in your ministry?

Assignment 3: "I Still Believe" Watch and Respond to the recording of Savanah Guthrie. 10%

After you have watched the online service and listened to the words of suffering and hope you are to write a maximum of three pages in response to the following questions. Be sure to explain how, why and where in each of your answers and include supportive references.

- Can you hear the consequence of living in a fallen world?
- Do you notice the presence of God in her suffering?
- Is there purposeful growth in perseverance and deeper reliance on God?
- Do you hear the expression of ultimate hope?

Assignment 4: Writing a Psalm of Lament

20%

Based on your reading of the Swinton text, *Raging With Compassion*, Chapter 5 – Why me, Lord... Why Me? Follow the instructions for writing lament given on page 128. This is to be a personal lament that relates to your life or ministry.

There is no need to submit any explanation or reference material. Submit to the instructor your lament which will be reviewed and kept confidential.

Assignment 5: Experiential Awareness: Glimpses of Hope and the Signs of Suffering 10%

When we walk in places of suffering, when we journey with others in adversity can we see the experience of the other? Can we see God? Can we see signs of hope? This week, you have a unique assignment. It's kind of a vision test.

You are to take a journey to observe the contours of suffering and hope around you. I would like you to go to a place where you can observe life and suffering. I want you to spend a minimum of one hour in silent observation. Look to see adversity and look to see hope and God. This is a time to increase your moral and pastoral vision. Look with the eyes of one who comes in solidarity, in the theology of remaining love. What do you see? What are the signs of suffering and where are the glimpses of hope?

You may sit in the shopping mall, the food court. You may sit in a hospital lobby. You might sit in an impoverished area of town, a university campus, or sit near the disenfranchised, sit near a food bank, a refugee center, or even near your own place of ministry. What do you see? Suffering, Hope, God.

After you have deeply viewed and observed the reality, I would like you to write a poem or a prayer that is a reflection of what you saw. You only need to write one page. What did you see? In the adversity did you see hope? Did you see God?

Assignment 6: Final Paper – Your Theology of Suffering & Hope

Please write a maximum of 15 pages, that clearly articulates your theology of suffering and hope. (12 pages minimum) Through interaction with the course texts, perspectives of various theologians and other resources, as well as your own theological reflection; express your understanding of the theological approaches to suffering, and ways to meaningfully present hope in a broken world. Articulate your developing position on the integration of suffering and relationship with God. Provide a biblical framework that supports your theology of suffering and hope, while demonstrating a pastoral theology.

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important to us, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Populi classroom in Week 8. Please see the “Evaluation” tab on the left-hand side of the classroom in weeks 8 and 9.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skillful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Academic Notes & Policies

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and are expected to adhere to the principles of sound academic scholarship at MB Seminary. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's words, ideas, or work as one's own without proper acknowledgement, whether intentional or unintentional. This includes copying text without citation, closely paraphrasing a source without attribution, submitting work written by another person (including use of AI tools, per the policy above), and resubmitting one's own previously submitted work without the instructor's permission. Students are expected to cite all sources in Turabian format as outlined below. Suspected plagiarism will be addressed and may result in a reduced or failing grade on the assignment, a failing grade in the course, or further disciplinary action, depending on the severity and circumstances of the violation.

Artificial Intelligence

Students may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot) to assist with research for assignments in this course, provided that any assistance or content provided or created by the AI tools is appropriately identified as a source and fully cited. This includes citing the exact prompts used. Citation is not needed for simple proofreading; however, AI tools may only be used to support your work, not to produce it. **AI may not be used to rewrite, augment, transform, translate, paraphrase, or increase the fluency of your original work in any way.**

Failure to clearly indicate and reference AI-generated material, or the use of AI paraphrasing tools that alter the syntax, clarity, or originality of your work, will be considered a violation of academic integrity and will be reported as academic misconduct.

Students should consult their instructor if they have any questions about using generative AI tools.

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. This is the standard for theological education. Please consult the following manual for instructions:

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students may appeal a grade to the course instructor by submitting written reasons within one week of receiving the grade. Formal course grade appeals go directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Academic Dean (briancooper@mbseminary.ca), or, in the case of Dr. Cooper's courses, to Dr. T. Anderson,

Academic Director (tanderson@mbseminary.ca). The result may be a higher, lower, or unchanged grade. This decision is final, and no further appeal is available.

Populi Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MB Seminary will receive a username and password to the Seminary's Learning Management System, Populi. If you have difficulty with your password or login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Church Relations and Ministry Implementation (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergencies, every effort will be made to communicate any class cancellations to your church host and contact. Please also refer to your course's classroom page in Populi.

Equity of Access

Students with a learning disability are responsible for informing the seminary and requesting accommodation before the course begins, so that necessary arrangements can be made to support their learning. Accommodation requests will be taken seriously, and every effort will be made to implement them. However, blanket extensions to due dates or other deadlines are not an appropriate request and will not be granted, and accommodations cannot be arranged retroactively once a course is underway.

For further information, please contact Dr. Brian Cooper, Academic Dean (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) or Dr. T. Anderson, Academic Director (tanderson@mbseminary.ca) for assistance.