

Issues in Contemporary Theology: Destiny of the Unevangelized THEO6305
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

***Defend* Conference**

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Seminary Mission Statement

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Course Description

The course introduces students to contemporary theological issues related to the destiny of the unevangelized. Issues addressed include the nature of truth, the nature of humanity and creation, the intelligibility and coherence of the Christian Gospel as explicated in the Bible, the various ways in which other world religions understand the goal of human existence, as well as representative solutions offered by a selection of Christian theologians concerning the destiny of the unevangelized. The thrust of the course will focus upon lecture attendance at the *Defend* Apologetics Conference, personal reading, research, and writing.

Core Value and Key Competency

The primary core values of the Seminary addressed in this course are Doctrinal Integrity and Mission Focus. The primary key competency in ministry addressed is Christian Theological Heritage. The core value for the 2016-2017 academic year is Characteristic Excellence.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate familiarity with issues related to the construction of a theology of religions as it relates to soteriology by: (1) attending lectures at the *Defend* Apologetics Conference, (2) reading broadly on pertinent issues, and (3) completing the writing assignments in the syllabus.
2. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the theological methods employed by various theologians by including a methodological critique in his/her reports on assigned readings of relevant sources and methods.
3. Students will demonstrate familiarity with significant personalities advocating or opposing representative positions such as pluralism, inclusivism, particularism, universalism, and/or postmortem salvation by: (1) writing a research paper summarizing and critiquing the

position advocated by a contemporary scholar; and (2) writing formal responses to a paper by another student in the course.

4. Students will provide the professor with a written report from the March 25, 2017 Greer-Heard Forum featuring Ben Witherington III and Amy-Jill Levine on “Christians, Jews, and Jesus.”

Methodology

The course will utilize reading assignments, written book reviews, *Defend* breakout session summaries, a research paper, and a written report from the March 25, 2017 Greer-Heard Forum. The primary methodology will be lecture attendance, supplemented by individual research and writing, guided by the professor.

Course Requirements

The course will utilize reading assignments, a reading report, a research paper, and a personal perspective paper.

Lecture Attendance. Students are required to attend all plenary sessions as well as one breakout presentation for each breakout session, and listen to audio recordings of all breakout sessions they did not physically attend.

Book Reviews. Each student is required to review **3 books** from the *Required Texts* or *Suggested Texts* list. (Students are required to read the required texts. They may write their reviews on the required texts.) The reviews should include: (1) some biographical data concerning the author; (2) an identification of the major elements of content; (3) an assessment of the author's aim or purpose and of the degree of its fulfillment; and (4) a critical evaluation of the book. The reviews should be 5-7 double-spaced pages and follow Turabian form. **The book reviews are due 8 weeks after the last day of the *Defend* Apologetics Conference (Friday, March 3, 2017).**

Research Paper. Students will write a 3,500-4,000 word (not including notes or bibliography) research paper on an approved theme in relation to the destiny of the unevangelized.

Basic guidelines regarding the research paper are as follows:

- **Exhaustive:** Research should be exhaustive. The bibliography should contain *at least* 12 non-online sources.
- **Biblical:** The researcher should demonstrate the use of biblical texts and hermeneutical skill in his or her evaluation of the issue.
- **Organization:** The organization and structure of the paper should grow out of the research and should be the best possible means for explicating the topic.
- **Implications:** The researcher should be able to demonstrate the “so what” of their research topic as far as it pertains to evangelical faith, practice, and evangelism.
- **Form and style:** Careful attention should be given to all matters of subdivisions, paragraphing, quoted matter, footnotes, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, spelling, sentence structure, word usage, bibliography, etc. Papers should be double-spaced, in

Turabian format, in Times New Roman 12 pt font, and should contain a bibliography and a title page (NOBTS approved).

- **Critical evaluation:** Critical evaluation—not just superficial treatment of the sources—and accurate exposition of the topic should characterize your paper. It goes without saying that “critical evaluation” requires the use of proper logic.

Topics for your papers are listed in the section *Possible Research Topics*. **Due 12 weeks after the last day of the *Defend Apologetics Conference* (Friday, March 31, 2017).**

Here is a rough guide to paper grades.

A Paper: Demonstrates a *superior* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, and presents very good, clear, and thoughtful arguments, with very few, if any, significant grammatical and/or form and style problems.

B Paper: Demonstrates a *good* grasp of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, presents an argument that exhibits good reasoning, with minimal significant grammatical and/or form and style problems.

C Paper: Demonstrates an adequate though perhaps limited understanding of ideas, arguments, or theories it discusses, mixed with a significant number of incorrect claims, presents weak arguments, contains significant grammatical or structural problems.

D Paper: Demonstrates significant misunderstandings of factual matters, uses poor logic or fallacious reasoning (if any) to argue points (e.g., merely makes a series of unconnected assertions), fails significantly with respect to technical specifications.

F Paper: Failure to submit a paper, a paper that commits plagiarism, or a paper that presents no argumentation.

Reading Summaries. Students will write one-page, single-spaced summaries of 12 different breakout sessions from the *Defend* Conference. Summaries may be submitted via Blackboard. **Due 15 weeks after the last day of the *Defend Apologetics Conference* (Friday, April 21, 2017).**

Greer-Heard Report. Each student will write a *4-5 page written report* on the March 25, 2017 Greer-Heard Forum featuring Ben Witherington III and Amy-Jill Levine on “Christians, Jews, and Jesus.” **Due 16 weeks after the last day of the *Defend Apologetics Conference* (Friday, April 28, 2017).**

Grading

Grades will be assigned according to the NOBTS grading scale.

Evaluation

Book Report #1	10%
Book Report #2	10%
Book Report #3	10%
Research Paper	35%
Reading Summaries	20%
Greer-Heard Report	15%
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	100%

Required Texts

- Knitter, Paul. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985.
- Miles, Todd L. *A God of Many Understandings?* Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, 2010.
- Stewart, Robert B. *Can Only One Religion Be True? Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

Suggested Texts

- Chung, Sung Wook. *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- D'Costa, Gavin. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.
- Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: MacMillan Press, 1989.
- Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Pinnock, Clark. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Quinn, Philip L. and Kevin Meeker, eds. *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Tennent, Timothy C. *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.
- Tiessen, Terrance L. *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Yong, Amos. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Advice for Book Reviews (from Ken Keathley)

The book reviews should be styled after the reviews found in scholarly journals. Each review should contain the following elements. Page numbers refer to double-spaced typed pages. The total length of a review should be 5-7 pages.

- (1) *Bibliographic entry.* At the beginning of the review, you should specifically identify the book being reviewed. The most efficient way to do this is by including a bibliographic entry for the book.
- (2) *Biographical sketch.* You should include a brief, not more than 1/2 page, biographical sketch of the author. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the author's competence or incompetence for writing the book. You should include information about where he was educated, where he teaches, what other books he has written, and anything else about him, which is relevant to a critical judgment of the book. Sometimes church affiliation is relevant because it can be an indicator of possible bias on the part of an author. Our library has a number of sources of biographical information about authors. Biographical information is just like any other kind of information. If you get it from a source, including the book jacket, you must identify it by a parenthetical notation. If you quote from the material, put quotation marks around it.
- (3) *Summary.* This section should be relatively brief, 2 or 3 pages and should concentrate on describing the contents of the book. A frequent problem with book reviews is that students make the summary much too long, making the review seem like a friend's account of a movie he went to the night before. Do not try to include all the details. Concentrate on giving a clear indication of the principal concerns of the book and the major conclusions of the author. Use specific details only to illustrate your general comments. **Caution:** *What I am asking for is a summary of the book and the author's conclusions, not a précis of the subject matter the book contains.* For example, if you review Lightner's *The Death Christ Died*, you are not just reviewing a certain theology of the atonement, but a book about that particular viewpoint. The focus of the summary should be the book itself and the author's conclusions. It is not necessary to write "Wells says," or "Erickson argues," or some similar phrase in every sentence, but your summary should indicate throughout that what you are reviewing is a book and an author's conclusions. **Beware of the trap of treating an author's arguments as facts.** One of the reasons for doing book reviews is to sharpen critical skills.
- (4) *Critical Evaluation.* The critique is by far the most important part of the review. It should be at least half the length of the entire review. Just as students often make the summary too long, they make the evaluation too short. Sometimes they are not only short, but very shallow: "This is a good book. It was easy to read . . ." Your evaluation should reflect some *serious* thought about the strengths and weaknesses of the book, what the book did or didn't do for you, and whether or not what it did was what it intended to do. Students often complain that they cannot evaluate a book because they do not know as much about the subject as the author. Although that is true, all students can describe their reactions to a book, and can assess its value for them. The contents of the evaluation will, of course, vary

with the book being reviewed, but often some or all of the following areas should be treated:

- (a) **Purpose.** Attempt to assess the degree to which the author fulfilled his purpose. Sometimes this assessment may also involve describing some apparent purpose that is different from the stated purpose.
 - (b) **Value.** Saying a book is “good,” or “bad,” is very vague. Try to be specific about what the book’s value is. Not all good books are good for the same reasons, or for the same purpose. Precision about its value will help potential readers of the book make an intelligent decision about whether it would be worth their time to read it.
 - (c) **Strengths and weaknesses.** Strengths and weaknesses are, of course, relevant factors in assessing value. Sometimes, however, there are particular elements, which should be highlighted.
 - (d) **Bias.** Every book is written from a particular perspective. That perspective is the author’s “bias.” When that bias leads to a distortion of facts, a slanted approach to an issue, or an unwillingness to deal with some relevant aspects, the book is said to be “biased.” When reading a book always be aware of the powerful influence of perspective, and make some assessment of the author’s bias. (**Note:** *Remember that readers also have a bias and can be misled by that perspective into making biased judgments of a book.*)
 - (e) **Audience.** Not all books are intended for the same audience. Some are more popular than others; some are intended only for serious scholars. Delineating the audience that might profit from reading the book is a valuable service a reviewer can perform.
 - (f) **Extrapolations.** Often a book will stimulate new ideas or cause a reader to make connections that he had not thought of before. A discussion of such connections and ideas, even though they may be somewhat tangential, is in order in a critical evaluation. Be careful though, and do not go too far afield. The fact that a book is bound in a red cover does not warrant a discussion of the dangers of totalitarian communism or the virtues of Anselm’s views of the atonement.
 - (g) **Miscellaneous.** Do not be limited by this brief list in deciding what to include in your evaluation. There are other items that might be included. Use your imagination and creativity.
- (5) *General Remarks:*
- (a) **Other Reviews.** It is permissible, sometimes even advisable, to consult other reviews of a book. The seminary library has several periodicals that contain reviews of books in theology. Feel free to consult them. If you get an idea from them that you use in your evaluation, *be sure to credit the source*. More than likely your professor has read that review, also, and will detect plagiarism! This should be done in a parenthetical note. Too much dependence on other reviews is not good; it robs you of the opportunity of evaluating the book using your own resources.
 - (b) **Examples.** If you need to see what a good book review looks like, read some of the ones in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* or the *Evangelical Quarterly*. Remember, however, that often these reviews are much shorter than yours will be. Also, not all of them are equally good.

- (c) **Style.** Reviews should be written in clear, grammatical English prose. I had much rather read a well written five-page review than a verbose and obtuse seven-page review.

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