

ASSOCIATED CANADIAN THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

CAP 560: Challenges to Christianity

(Online Version)

Spring 2012**Professor: Paul Chamberlain, Ph.D.****3 semester hours****Time: Spring semester 2012****E-mail address: paul.chamberlain@twu.ca**

Paul Chamberlain has taught at Trinity Western University since 1990. During part of that time He has also been involved with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. His primary areas of teaching are Christian Apologetics, Ethics, Philosophy of Religion and Political Philosophy. He is the author of four books and a number of articles on social and apologetic issues. He currently serves as professor of Apologetics and Ethics at ACTS and is Director of the Institute for Christian Apologetics at ACTS.

Course Description

Apologetics is an academic discipline whose purpose is to make a case for the truth of Christian faith (positive apologetics) and also to defend Christian faith against charges of falsehood or inconsistency (negative apologetics). In this course we will turn our attention to negative apologetics. Our purpose will be to understand the most common obstacles to Christian faith raised both by its critics and also by sincere seekers, and to develop effective responses to them. Although we will pay some attention to historical objections our primary focus will be contemporary challenges. Objections considered will include postmodern understandings of truth, reality, and textual interpretation and their implications for Christian truth, the exclusivity of Christianity, the problem of hell, the plight of the unevangelized and its implications for the justice of God, the problem of evil and suffering, the supposed atrocities of God in the Old Testament, alleged biblical contradictions, the problem of miracles, and the charge that Christianity is sexist.

Special note: This is the online version of this course and, as such, there will be neither class sessions nor regular meeting times. All work will be done through email or through the TWU MyCourses website. Specifically, the **essay** will be emailed to the professor's email address (above), and the **course presentation**, described below, will be posted on the MyCourses website according to the directions stated below. In addition, there will be other online interaction as described below. It is hoped that this online format will provide a rich opportunity for reflection and thought which can then go into the interaction with both the professor and fellow students.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to:

1. Enable students to examine and test the truth and coherence of Christian faith,
2. Provide students with a deep understanding of the most difficult obstacles to faith raised by believers and nonbelievers alike in our world,
3. Demonstrate the necessity of finding and communicating responses to these obstacles to the faith of others,
4. Help students develop such responses,
5. Encourage and strengthen the faith of Christian students through this process,
6. Aid students in the task of communicating Christian faith with others.

Required Texts

Chamberlain, Paul. *Why People Don't Believe: Confronting Seven Challenges to Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. 1st Mariner Books ed. Boston: Mariner Books, 2008.

Enroth, Ronald. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Kreeft, Peter. *Between Heaven & Hell: A dialog Somewhere Beyond Death*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982.

Murray, Michael J. & Plantinga, Alvin. *Reason For The Hope Within*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

Recommended for further reading:

Beckwith, Francis J., William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds. *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 2004.

Bush, L. Russ. *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics: A.D. 100-1800*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Academie, 1983.

Clark, David K. *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. Third ed. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

Edgar, William. *Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.

- Evans, C. Stephen. *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002.
- Kreeft, Peter. *The Best Things in Life: A Twentieth-Century Socrates Looks at Power, Pleasure, Truth, and the Good Life*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1984.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Socrates Meets Jesus*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1996.
- Lewis, C. S. *Miracles*. New York: Macmillan, 1947.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan, 1940.
- Moreland, J. P. *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987.
- Moreland, J.P. and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003.
- Pascal, Blaise. *Pensees*. Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer. Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1966.
- Stackhouse, John G., Jr. *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Forum Posts & Reading Schedule

- Jan 12 – Conversing with atheists and agnostics, Kreeft, *Heaven and Hell* 1-56
Student presentation (p. 22-35) _____
- Jan 19 – Conversing with atheists and agnostics, part II, *Murray* 116-134
Student presentation (p.116-134) _____
- Jan 26 – The Uniqueness of Jesus and Christianity, Kreeft, *Heaven and Hell* 57-115
Student presentation (p. 86-103) _____
- Feb 2 – Religion and Violence, Dawkins *God Delusion* (ch. 1-5)
Student presentation (p. 119-134) _____
- Feb 9 – Religion and Violence, Dawkins, *God Delusion* (ch. 6-10)
Student presentation (p. 279-298) _____
- Feb 16 – Religion and Violence, Chamberlain *Why People Don't Believe* (ch. 1-4)
Student presentation (ch. 2) _____
- Feb 23 – Religion and Violence, Chamberlain *Why People Don't Believe* (ch. 5-9)
Student presentation (ch. 6&7) _____

---ACTS Reading week: no postings for the week of March 1---

Mar 8 – Evil, Suffering & the God of the Old Testament, *Murray* 76-115
Student presentation (p. 76-93)_____

Mar 15 -- Hell and the plight of the unevangelized, *Murray* 287-317
Student presentation (p. 287-303)_____

Mar 22 -- Jesus, God, and Miracles, *Murray* 345-373
Student presentation (p. 345-362) _____

Mar 29 – Understanding New Religious Movements: *Enroth* 9-25
Student presentation_____

Apr 5 -- Evaluating New Religious Movements: *Enroth* 184-196
Student presentation_____

Course Assignments

Research Essay

This essay will be a dialogue between two fictional characters. Using this dialogue format you will respond to one major challenge to Christian faith of your choice. It is hoped that the objection you choose will be one that is important to you and which you sense a need to be better prepared for. One character in the dialogue will represent and argue convincingly for the objection you wish to address. His job is to make the strongest case possible for this objection. The other character will represent your position and will respond to this challenge with the best responses available to you.

The following elements must be included somewhere in your dialogue:

1. A clear statement of the objection being raised against Christian faith. The dialogue format provides a ready method for clarifying the objection,
2. Definitions of key terms and concepts for your issue,
3. A precise thesis statement setting out early on what you plan to demonstrate or prove through the dialogue,
4. The best reasons you know for the objection,
5. Main steps in your argument as you respond to the objection.

Please be advised that your research for the essay must include interaction with Christian sources as well as nonchristian ones which are unsympathetic to your personal perspective. This will provide first-hand knowledge of opposing perspectives and the rational given for them. It will also be indispensable in refining your own views and arguments. In your research into unsympathetic perspectives, be sure to include Internet sources along with other more traditional ways of research. The web sites of skeptic's societies, atheistic associations, humanist groups, etc., are especially helpful in this regard. These should be documented appropriately.

Essay will be emailed to the professor (paul.chamberlain@twu.ca) no later than midnight on the due date.

Essay length: 16-20 pages (4,000 – 5,000 words)

Value: 40%

Due Date: March 29, 2012

Seminar Presentations

These are not intended to be prepared or even begun before the first day of the course. On the first day of the class students will sign up for two seminar presentations. Each student will look at the presentation schedule in this syllabus and post the date and section (s)he would like to present. Your presentation will cover the reading assigned for the date which you sign up for. For instance, a student who chooses January 26 would present the Kreeft text, *Between Heaven and Hell*, pages 86-103. However, the entire class will be responsible to read pages 57-115. If a student would like to do a section, but it has already been spoken for, that student will need to choose another section. This is very much a “the-early-bird-gets-the-worm” process.

Each seminar presentation will consist of:

- A basic summary of the author’s most important ideas,
- Your assessment of, and response, to them. For example, highlight points of agreement and disagreement with the author, draw out assumptions you find the author making, and give apologetic responses to them. Then respond to questions from your colleagues and professor.

Your presentation should be 1200-1500 words in length with approximately 2/3 summary and 1/3 assessment.

How do the presentations work?

Your presentation will be due on the date you sign up for, and on that day you will post it to the MyCourses forum no later than midnight. For instance, if a student decides to review the Kreeft text, *Between Heaven and Hell*, pages 86-103, the paper needs to be posted no later than midnight on January 26 as the presentation schedule says. This means that each Thursday, a new student presentation will be posted. If there are “leftover” presentations after students have signed up for theirs, the professor will post a separate question for those ones for students to reply to.

Once the presentation for the week is posted, all other class members will then begin posting their own responses. Each student is required to post at least one response of 75-100 words minimum to each actual presentation and at least three more posts to the responses by other class members each week. The responses to other students’ responses may be shorter, approximately 40-60 words. The student who posted the presentation for the week will be responsible to reply to **all** of the postings **which are in direct response to his/her presentation**, and is free to reply to some of the other postings as well.

It is important for each student to have their presentation posted on time because fellow students will then have the next 5 days to post comments and questions to the forum, which the presenter will be responsible to respond to before the next class. However, the presenter does not have to wait until 5 days have passed to begin responding. Responses are opportunities for you to state your agreement/disagreement with specific points made by other students and add your own perspective to the discussion. They will be evaluated based on the insight and understanding of the material they reflect as well as the clarity of thought and communication they demonstrate.

Value of each main presentation posted: 20%

Total cumulative value of all student response postings: 20%

Grading Scale

A +	4.30	97 %
A	4.00	94 - 96%
A -	3.70	90 - 93%
B +	3.30	85 - 89%
B	3.00	80 - 84%
B -	2.70	75 - 79%
C +	2.30	70 - 74%
C	2.00	65 - 69%
C -	1.70	60 - 64%
F	.00	0 – 59%

Supplement: Important Academic Notes from ACTS

Web Support – Student Portal <https://students.twu.ca>

All students at TWU have a TWUPass username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application or can be managed through the computing services help desk or the link on the student portal. Your student email account is also available through this student portal and is vital for communication about grades, account statements, lost passwords, sign-up instructions, etc. If you do not know your account or password, there is a link at the login area called “I forgot my password.” When you click on that link, you will be walked through the process of retrieving your account information.

Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to the following radio stations CKNW (980 AM), CKWX (1130 AM), STAR FM (107.1 FM), PRAISE (106.5 FM) and KARI (550 AM). As well, an announcement will be placed on the University’s campus closure notification message box (604.513.2147) and on the front page of the University’s website (<http://www.twu.ca> – also see <http://www.twu.ca/conditions> for more details).

An initial announcement regarding the status of the campus and cancellation of classes is made at 6:00 AM and covers all classes beginning before 1:00PM. A second announcement is made at 11:00AM that covers all classes which begin between 1:00PM and 5:00PM. A third announcement is made at 3:00PM and covers those classes which begin after 5:00PM.

Paper Formatting

Students need to adhere to Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format except for in counselling courses, for which APA format is used and for CanIL courses.

Students are strongly encouraged to use RefWorks (available through the library home page www.twu.ca/library) as their bibliographical manager and as a tool for formatting bibliographies. They will need to be aware of the need to “clean up” most bibliographies generated by this program. Students are encouraged to view the documents on the following websites for format samples:

http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html or

www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/. Note that in RefWorks the available formatting styles are those of Turabian (Notes), 7th edition, and APA – American Psychological Association, 6th edition.

For Turabian, note that there are two formats – Notes (or Bibliography Style) and Reference List (a short format citation style). ACTS uses the Notes (Bibliography) format, not Reference List.

Counselling students are expected to purchase the APA Publications Manual. More information found at the following website. <http://www.apastyle.org/pubmanual.html>.

For free online programs that will enable you to create properly formatted bibliography citations, go to <http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/> ("Chicago stands for "Turabian") or

<http://www.sourceaid.com/citationbuilder/>

CANIL students can locate this on the CANIL intranet, under the “student” side. A hard copy is given to incoming students in the fall.

Please check with your professor to see which one he/she recommends you use!!

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are an important aspect of improving teaching outcomes and for students and faculty professional development. Therefore, completion of course evaluations are considered a course expectation. Professors will schedule time to fill out the online course evaluation (20-30 minutes) during their last scheduled class of the semester, for students to complete on their personal laptop or a collegium computer. Students who are absent or otherwise unable to complete the online course evaluation in the last class, will be expected to make every effort to do so by the last day of exams. Information about how to access online evaluation forms will be provided to the faculty and students prior to the last week of classes by the ACTS Administration.

Research Ethics

Please note that all research projects involving human participants undertaken by members of the TWU university community (including projects done by ACTS students to satisfy course or degree requirements) **MUST** be approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board. Information and forms may be found at <http://www.twu.ca/academics/research/ethics/> Those needing additional clarification may contact the ACTS Academic Dean's office. Please allow at least three (3) weeks from the date of submission for a review of the application.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire TWU community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the

principles of sound academic scholarship at TWU. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding all forms of plagiarism and cheating in scholarly work. TWU has a strict policy on plagiarism (see academic calendar 2008-09, pp. 37-38). Further details on this subject are contained in the ACTS Student Handbook in section 4.12. The handbook is available online on the ACTS webpage (www.acts.twu.ca) at the following link: www.acts.twu.ca/Handbook.html.

Learning what constitutes plagiarism and avoiding it is the student's responsibility. An excellent resource describing plagiarism and how to avoid it has been prepared by TWU Librarian William Badke and is freely available for download (PPT file) or used as flash (self-running) tutorials of varying lengths from:

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/plagiarism.ppt>

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism.swf> (14 minute flash tutorial)

http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism_Short.swf (8 minute flash tutorial)

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the ACTS Director of Student Life of that fact before the beginning of a course so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. We are unable to accommodate any student who informs the Director of Student Life of a disability after the beginning of class.