

Reformed Theological Seminary
Apologetics—02ST5450
Orlando, FL
Fall 2019

Instructor: Justin S. Holcomb
Email: jholcomb@rts.edu
Schedule: Sept 9 to Dec 9 (Monday, 3-5pm)
Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students will examine the various approaches to apologetic methodology and engage the most frequently raised objections to the Christian faith. Through this course students will develop skills necessary to evaluate different worldviews and defend the Christian faith. Each student will have an opportunity to develop and sharpen an apologetic methodology and apply it to the task of defending and proclaiming the gospel.

The course is designed to be a basic introduction to the biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations of Christian apologetics. Attention is given to the differences between Christian thought and select examples of non-Christian thought. It will explore some of the assorted challenges to Christian belief and provide a survey of resources for meeting those concerns. There is an emphasis on using the discipline to effectively engage the contemporary scene.

COURSE READING

Required

K. Scott Oliphint, *Know Why You Believe*

Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*

James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*

Timothy Keller, “Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs”

“When Atheists Lack the Courage of Their Convictions”

“Dechurched and Unchurched Phone Survey” by GfK Public Affairs & Corporate Communications
(electronic version available)

“Christianity Objections & Perceptions Among Un-churched and De-churched” by Saurage Research
(electronic version available)

Lesslie Newbigin, “The Gospel and Public Life,” in *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian*
(electronic version available)

Lamin Sanneh, “Jesus More Than a Prophet” (electronic version available)

Christian Smith, “God, Religion, Whatever” in *Soul Searching* (electronic version available)

Greg Bahnsen, “The Great Debate: Does God Exist,” transcript online at http://justinholcomb.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Bahnsen-Stein_Transcript.pdf. The audio version is available at http://www.sermonaudio.ca/bahnsen/BahnsenVsStein_TheGreatDebate-DoesGodExist.mp3.

Select a classic text

Please select a classic book from the history of Christian apologetics. Pick a significant Christian thinker from an earlier era of the church and then locate one of their works that serves as a defense of some aspect of the Christian faith. Select approximately 50 pages to read. Examples include: Augustine, *The City of God*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Against the Gentiles); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*; Anselm, *Proslogion*; John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1; Blaise Pascal, *The Pensees*; William Paley, *Lectures on Natural Theology*; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*; and B. B. Warfield, “Faith in its Psychological Aspect.” There are many others you can choose from beyond this list.

Select a book

Pick one book on a topic you would like to explore more. The list below is not exhaustive. You can select from the list below or propose another book. Please get approval on a book if not listed below. Consider selecting a book that would be relevant to your research paper

- William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong*
- Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views of Apologetics*
- Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*
- Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. *Christian Apologetics in a Postmodern World*
- Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*
- Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready*
- Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetics*
- John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*
- Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*
- John Gerstner, R.C. Sproul, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics*
- Cornelius Van Till, *Christian Apologetics*
- William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*
- Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*
- J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*
- Paul Copan and Ronald Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?": A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann*
- Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*
- Gary Habermas and R. Douglas Geivett, *In Defense of Miracles*

- Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew, *Did the Resurrection Happen?*
- Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*
- Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*
- Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*

COURSE TOPICS

- What is Apologetics: Our Message and Some Methodological Consideration
- Acts and Apologetics
- Worldview Thinking
- Theistic Proofs and Atheism
- Defending and Proving the Resurrection
- Christian Worldview and Science
- Christian Worldview and History
- Miracles
- Trustworthiness of the Bible
- Evil
- Objections Against Christianity from Un-churched and De-churched
- Mercy Ministry and Apologetics
- World Religions and Cults

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. The first paper is an apologetic reflection on one of the major sermons in the book of Acts. The preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection is central in Acts. The Greek verb, "preach the gospel" (*euangelizo*) occurs more in this book than any other in the New Testament. About a third of the book of Acts consists of speeches, and most of these are speeches of Peter or Paul proclaiming the gospel.

This paper should include some background of the sermon's context, an indication of its audience, and the expectations of the sermon. You should also reflect upon the unique apologetic challenges of the context and examine how they were met in the particular sermon. This final part is really a matter of your own personal reflections on the text of Scripture and your examination of it in light of the challenge of unbelief.

This paper will be between 2,000-2,250 words and double-spaced with appropriate footnotes. This paper will constitute 30% of the final grade for the course. Due date is Dec 11, 2019 at 11am.

2. The second paper is to address an argument for the Christian faith OR a major challenge to the Christian faith from modern culture. This might be the resurrection, existence of God, problem of evil, trustworthiness of the Bible, or any other one in which you have a particular interest. The first half of the paper ought to describe the challenge as clearly as possible, citing where necessary proponents of the challenge. In the second half of the paper you ought to formulate a response to the challenge from a Christian perspective.

This paper will be between 2,500-2,750 words and double-spaced with appropriate footnotes. This paper will constitute 50% of the final grade for the course. Due date is Dec 11, 2019 at 11am.

3. Reading Reports (20%): Please use the forms at the end of the syllabus. There are four reading reports due. Due date is Dec 11, 2019 at 11am.

GRADING SCALE & ACADEMIC STANDARDS

A (97-100), A- (94-96), B+ (91-93), B (88-90), B- (86-87), C+ (83-85), C (80-82), C- (78-79), D+ (75-77), D (72-74), D- (70-71), F (below 70)

Class attendance and participation are a central part of this course. If you should miss a class, you are expected to contact another student regarding the information covered.

Late assignments will be graded down 33% for each 24 hours late.

All written assignments should be submitted in Word format. Assignments should be double-spaced with 1" margins on all sides and formatted in Times New Roman 12 point type. Assignments must be submitted electronically.

Do not submit a paper that you submitted for another course. This will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment.

Reading Report for K. Scott Oliphint, *Know Why You Believe*

1. Did you read the entire book? If not, what percentage did you read?
2. Summarize in one paragraph Oliphint's thesis or argument.
3. Summarize in one paragraph Oliphint's method of proving his thesis. How does he "get there"?
4. What are some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on apologetics?
5. Write at least two paragraphs evaluating the book.

Reading Report for Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*

1. Did you read the entire book? If not, what percentage did you read?
2. Summarize in one paragraph Keller's thesis or argument.
3. Summarize in one paragraph Keller's method of proving his thesis. How does he "get there"?
4. What are some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on apologetics?
5. Write at least two paragraphs evaluating the book.

Reading Report for James Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*

1. Did you read the entire book? If not, what percentage did you read?
2. Summarize in one paragraph Smith's thesis or argument.
3. Summarize in one paragraph Smith's method of proving his thesis. How does he "get there"?
4. What are some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on apologetics?
5. Write at least two paragraphs evaluating the book.

Reading Report for Classic Text

1. Did you read the entire book? If not, what percentage did you read?
2. Summarize in one paragraph the author's thesis or argument.
3. Summarize in one paragraph the author's method of proving his thesis. How does he or she "get there"?

4. What are some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on apologetics?
5. Write atleast two paragraphs evaluating the book.

Reading Report for selected apologetics book

1. Did you read the entire book? If not, what percentage did you read?
2. Summarize in one paragraph the author's thesis or argument.
3. Summarize in one paragraph the author's method of proving his thesis. How does he or she "get there"?
4. What are some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on apologetics?
5. Write atleast two paragraphs evaluating the book.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Apologetics 02ST5450

Professor: Justin Holcomb

Campus: Orlando

Date: Fall 2017

| <u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> | | <u>Rubric</u> | <u>Mini-Justification</u> |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None | |
| Articulation (oral & written) | Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. | Strong | Knowledge of Bible, systematic theology, historical theology, history, and cultural information will be presented and articulated in both written assignments and a dialogical teaching approach. |
| Scripture | Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.) | Strong | Student will demonstrate suitable use of Scripture and hermeneutical methods in understanding biblical worldview as it relates to belief and unbelief. Lectures will deal lots with biblical studies. One assignment is focused specifically on a passage the student selects. |
| Reformed Theology | Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards. | Strong | Material will be presented through the grid of Reformed Theology and practice as it relates to apologetic methodology and the Christian faith being presented. |
| Sanctification | Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification. | Minimal | Materials will be presented that give the student a better understanding of the priority of sanctification |
| Desire for Worldview | Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. | Strong | This is the focus of the course. Students will gain an understanding of the need to conform all of life to the Word of God with special focus on "taking every thought captive." |
| Winsomely Reformed | Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.) | Strong | Student reads articles by authors that are not Reformed, and discusses the value of ecumenicalism as it applies to apologetics. Some readings and lectures will focus on presenting the gospel to de-churched and un-churched. |
| Preach | Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. | Minimal | Content of course will influence the content of preaching. One assignment focuses on studying a sermon from Acts. |
| Worship | Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service. | None | |
| Shepherd | Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide. | Minimal | The student will grow in their understanding of the role of apologetics for spiritual maturity (for believers to be more confident in their faith). The course promotes the use of various gifts and encourages students to grow I their concern for non-Christians. |

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| Church/World | Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues. | Strong | The student will gain an understanding of how to interact denominationally, ecumenically, and in the local context as it relates to apologetics and evangelism. |
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