AP 601—INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS
Patrick T. Smith, Course Instructor
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Winterim Term, January 12-16, 2009
(Monday—Friday: 9:00 am-12:00 pm, 1:00-3:30 pm)
Email: ptsmith@gcts.edu

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description

This 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 and incorporating the ministry of apologetics in the context of the local church.

Course Textbooks

Required:


Course Objectives

The student who successfully completes this course should have the ability:

1. To demonstrate the plausibility of the Christian world view that integrates biblical, theological, philosophical and historical truth.
2. To reason, weigh evidence, present and critique arguments for and against the Christian faith.
3. To develop the ability to engage in conversational apologetics.
4. To integrate apologetics in the context of the local church.
5. To minister with passion and humility in the area of defending and commending the faith.

* Students should keep in mind when registering for the course that in the case of a class cancellation due to weather the class will meet on Saturday, January 17th to make up for the missed day.
Course Requirements

NOTE: All written work is to be mailed to the class instructor at: 33 West Dallas Ave., Madison Heights, MI 48071 and should be postmarked no later than January 27, 2009.

1. **Assigned Readings** (*All Degree Program Students*)—some of the reading material is covered in class. However, there are elements that will not be brought out in class but are still essential to gaining an understanding of the material and successfully completing the course. Therefore, the reading provides a rich and necessary component of the learning experience.

   a. **Pre-Course Reading**—Students are responsible for reading the assigned chapters indicated below in the course schedule section of this document before the first class meeting on January 12, 2009 in order to prepare for the one-week intensive. Students will submit a note on the first day of class informing the instructor that the pre-course reading was completed.

   b. **Textbook Reading**—The students will also be responsible for reading the remaining assigned sections of the course textbooks designated in the course schedule by January 27, 2009. A final reading report should be submitted along with the final course assignments that indicates what percentage of the course reading was completed.

2. **Worldview Interaction Written Report** (*All Degree Program Students*)—each student is to establish a contact with someone from another worldview, religious system or new religious movement. The student is to generate a discussion by asking the person questions about his or her worldview and then what the person thinks about Christianity. This should be done in a face-to-face meeting. The student is then to write a paper of no more than five (5) pages in total length that reports the details of the interaction. All reports should be typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, black ink, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. The reports will be graded on their clarity and faithfulness to the assigned topic.

   **Personal Interview:**
   a. Use the seven basic questions or some modification of them from Sire’s *The Universe Next Door*. Make sure you have questions from every major area of a worldview as Sire delineates in his text.
   b. Use the interview method. Have a number of questions available under each heading (or seven basic questions) that can be asked in different ways to: (1) assist the person in answering your question if something is not clear to him or her and (2) help your interviewee further elaborate on a given point. Pay particular attention to those statements that provide insight into what makes the person “tick.”
   c. After the interviewee has provided for you his or her worldview and answered the initial questions, ask what he or she thinks about Christianity. If the opportunity presents itself, answer any questions the interviewee may have about the Christian faith.
   d. Record the results of your conversation.
NOTE: Obviously, be forthright about your intentions and feel free to let the person know about the nature of the class assignment.

Write-up for the class instructor:

a. Give the name of the person you interviewed, where you met, and when.
b. Identify the worldview of the interviewee. If you are unable to clearly identify the person’s worldview (because their beliefs may not “fit” together in some kind of unified whole) then say so.
c. Record the beliefs discussed in your conversation (covering all the major elements of a worldview).
d. Then briefly summarize what approach you could take in interacting with the person if you had another conversation. What points of contact emerged while listening to the person during your time together? How could you use these points of contact to communicate key elements of the Christian worldview?

3. Written Apologetics Sermon/Teaching Presentation (Professional Degree Program Student Assignment Only)—students enrolled in any of the professional degree programs at GCTS (i.e., MDiv., M.A. in World Missions and Evangelism; M.A. in Educational Studies, M.A. in Counseling, or Master of Arts in Religion) are to develop a short biblically based sermon or teaching lesson that addresses an apologetic topic of contemporary importance. The student is to creatively integrate some of the material discussed in the course readings into the sermon not only for illustrative purposes, but also to provide some apologetic content in responding to the particular challenge along with the biblical response. Remember this assignment is to be prepared as if you were presenting it in your church, a college campus, or some other public venue. The text should be 6-8 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. The papers will be graded on their clarity, accuracy and faithfulness to the assignment.

4. Apologetics Church Ministry Proposal (Professional Degree Program Student Assignment Only)—students enrolled in any of the professional degree programs at GCTS (i.e., M.Div., M.A. in World Missions and Evangelism; M.A. in Educational Studies, M.A. in Counseling, or Master of Arts in Religion) are to write a proposal that he or she could submit to a church leader, elder board, or educational planning committee to introduce an apologetics ministry or a seminar in one’s church.

The paper should include a rationale (i.e., why this is needed, any biblical and cultural justification), a target audience (i.e., high school students, college students, young professionals, general lay congregation, church leadership, unchurched/unbelievers invited to attend, etc.), time-frame (i.e., one day, weekend, weekly, monthly, annual event that happens one weekend or over a week, incorporated into Sunday night service, etc.), proposed itinerary of the event (would the event(s) include a video presentation, drama format, any worship songs, testimonies of how apologetics has helped someone in sharing her faith, etc.?), list of topics to be covered (it does not have to be the same topics covered in this class).
Be sure to include the rationale for the topics chosen for the specific church or group within the church. In other words, be mindful of the context and demonstrate this awareness in the proposal. The assignment should show some forethought and coherence as to how your proposal can be implemented, and address some of the perceived challenges of “pulling this off” in the context of the church. The papers are to be no more than four (4) typed pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. The papers will be graded on their clarity, accuracy and faithfulness to the assignment.

5. **Apologetic Response Paper** *(Academic Degree Program Student Assignment Only)—* students enrolled in any of the academic degree programs at GCTS (i.e. M.A. in Old Testament, M.A. in New Testament, M.A. in Biblical Languages, M.A. in Church History, M.A. in Theology, or Th.M.) are to write a paper that responds to a specific challenge facing Christian belief. The instructor will provide a list of potential problems or arguments against some aspect of the Christian faith on a question sheet. Each student is to choose one of the topics and respond to the challenge by applying aspects of the reading material and class discussions to the issue.

Be sure to indicate in your response what issue you are addressing in your paper. The papers are to be 8-10 typed pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. The papers will be graded on their clarity, accuracy, rigor and faithfulness in addressing the issue.

**Course Grading**

The student’s grade will be determined as follows:

**Professional degree program students:**
- Reading Report: 10%
- Worldview Interaction Report: 40%
- Apologetics Sermon/Teaching Assignment: 30%
- Apologetics Church Ministry Proposal: 20%

**Academic degree program students:**
- Reading Report: 10%
- Worldview Interaction Report: 40%
- Apologetics Response Paper: 50%

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**Grading Rubric:** After all the requirements of the course have been completed, the instructor will use the following rubric for the assignment of grades, based on the overall performance of the class. The grades assigned will represent the instructor’s interpretation of the following standard:

- **A** = Outstanding mastery of the subject: excellence is evident in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; unusual ability to retain, analyze and synthesize the material; with a positive attitude making productive contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- **B** = Superior mastery of the subject: sincere effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; ability to master the essential aspects of the material; with a mostly consistent attitude in making contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- **C** = Basic mastery of the subject: inconsistent effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; engagement with the material but difficulty in grasping some of its aspects; with occasional contributions to the learning community in the classroom.
- **D** = Inadequate mastery of the subject.
- **F** = Failure: course must be repeated.

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**Warning on Plagiarism:** Helpful guidelines on plagiarism can be found on the Indiana University website [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/plagarism.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/plagarism.html). This document has the official recognition of the Gordon-Conwell faculty and provides very helpful tools to guide you as you prepare for your assignments. If a student is caught plagiarizing, the student will receive the consequences of this act according to the process established by the seminary.

**Intellectual Property Rights:** To protect the professor’s intellectual property rights with regard to classroom content, students are asked to refrain from audio and video recording of classes, as well as audio, video, and written publication (including internet posting and broadcasting) or live transmission of classroom proceedings.

**Internet Usage:** Students are asked to refrain from accessing the internet at any point during class sessions, unless otherwise instructed by the professor. “Surfing the web,” checking email, and other internet-based activities are distracting to other students and to the professor, and prevent the student from fully participating in the class session.
Course Schedule

Pre-course reading to be completed by the first class session on January 12, 2009:

- Murray, *Reason for the Hope Within* (chs. 1 and 6) - Required
- Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Ch. 1) - Required (Remainder of text not due until Jan 27th).
- Netland *Encountering Religious Pluralism* (chs. 1-4; 6, 8-9) - Required
- Sire, *The Universe Next Door, Third Edition* (Students would need to have at least started this text and made significant progress on a good portion of the text. For the purposes of the report simply indicate how far along you are in the book. Certainly, if possible, I would strongly encourage you to complete the text before class begins.)

JANUARY 12  Background Reading: (See above box for pre-course reading)

Session 1: Course Mechanics/Introduction to Christian Apologetics

Session 2: Biblical Models of Apologetics

JANUARY 13  Background Reading: *RFTHW*—Chs. 13, 5, and 2

Session 3: Faith and Reason (Other Epistemological and Methodological Issues)

Session 4: Faith and Reason continued: Science and Religion

JANUARY 14  Background Reading: *RFTHW*—Chs. 3 and 14/ RF Ch. 8

Session 5: *A Cumulative Case for Christian Theism*: Theistic Arguments and the Resurrection of Jesus

Session 6: *A Cumulative Case for Christian Theism*: (continued)/ Problem of Miracles

JANUARY 15  Background Reading: *RFTHW*—Chs. 7 and 4

Session 7: *Challenges to Christian Faith and Practice*: Religious Pluralism

Session 8: *Challenges to Christian Faith and Practice*: The Problem(s) of Evil

JANUARY 16  Reading: Finish Sire, *Universe Next Door* / Continue reading RF

Session 9: *Dialogical Apologetics*: Having Conversations that Count

Session 10: Apologetics and the Church
Bibliography for Further Study


