

Apologetics: 04ST5450

Feb 14-15, Mar 27-28, Apr 17-18, 2020

Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA



David Owen Filson, Ph.D.

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Feb 14-15, Mar 27-28, Apr 17-18, 2020 – Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta, GA

Instructor: Dr. David Owen Filson, Ph.D.

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January 21-24, 2019: Mon-Thu, 9:00am-4:30pm

I. Course Description & Objective

Kanye West and Jay Z rap in *No Church in the Wild...*



“Human beings in a mob
What's a mob to a king?
What's a king to a god?
What's a god to a non-believer?...

Swedish folk duo, First Aid Kit sing beautifully haunting harmonies in *Hard Believer* (a song they dedicate to Richard Dawkins)...



“Well I see you’ve got your bible
Your delusion imagery
Well I don’t need your eternity
Or your meaning to feel free
I just live because I love to
And that’s enough you see
So don’t come preach about morality
That’s just human sense to me
Well, it’s one life and it’s this life
And it’s beautiful...”

Prog Rock Icons, Rush – *Faithless*...

“I don’t have faith in faith
I don’t believe in belief
You can call me faithless
But I still cling to hope
And I believe in love
And that’s faith enough for me

I’ve got my own spirit level for balance
To tell if my choice is leading up or down
And all the shouting voices
Try to throw me off my course
Some by sermons, some by force
Fools and thieves are dangerous
In the temple and marketplace



How does the believer in Christ take to heart and take to the arts, the office, the university classroom, and the corner table at Starbuck’s Peter’s encouragement to “...always be prepared to make a defense (ἀπολογία – apoloģian) to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1Pe 3:15)? How do we give ourselves over to meaningful relational persuasion among the disinterested and skeptic alike to the beauty and sweetness of Christ, and at the same time, “destroy strongholds, arguments, and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2Co 10:5)? This course, through lecture, reading analysis, discussion, and engagement with various media (music, art, literature, and movies) explores the biblical, theological, and philosophical, and practical contours and trajectory of Christian apologetics, and seeks to equip students with the character, method, and content needed

for the task, whether in relational evangelism, campus ministry settings, or the pulpit and local church. Special attention will be given to relevant challenges, such as the New Atheism, the problem of evil, and (post)-postmodern pluralism.

II.a Required Texts

- *John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (P&R Publishing, 2015).
- *Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (P&R Publishing, 2nd edition, 2003, with editorial notes by William Edgar).
- *James N. Anderson, *Why Should I Believe in Christianity* (Christian Focus, 2016).
- *K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord: The Power of Scripture for Defending the Faith* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2003).
- *David Robertson, *The Dawkins Letters: Challenging Atheist Myths* (Christian Focus Publications, 2007).
- *Apologetics Reader Packet (Files will be available on Canvas).

(Select supplemental bibliography will be made available on Canvas).

II.b Recommended Texts

- *Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Zondervan, 2000).
- *K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith*, (Crossway, 2013).
- *Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

III. Assignments and Evaluation (Percentages are designed, so as to not have student's grade overly weighted on one project. So, take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy the process;-) All completed assignments to be returned via Canvas. You may access Canvas (<https://rts.infrastructure.com>) using your usernames and password.

Exam: short answer and essay questions, 30%

You will be given a set of study questions at the end of the week. Your exam will consist of a selection of those questions. You will take the exam on your own, and then return to me via Canvas. Exam questions will reflect lectures and readings. Due: March 15, 2019.

Paper, 40%

Students will complete one of the following paper options:

1) Apologetic Letter to a Friend – a substantive and annotated email exchange or letter to a friend, who is not a believer. This person can be anyone, from a self-professing atheist, a Muslim, a curious inquirer, or a Christian who is starting to seriously question the faith. A first exchange (at least one substantive email, letter from each party, etc.) showing the potential of ongoing conversation is due on **Apr 3, 2020**. Target length 3,500-4,500 words. Do not choose this option, if you think it is necessarily an easier option than a research paper. I will be looking for thoughtful, articulate incorporation of the (admittedly) substantive goals and principals of apologetics we will have learned in class. Be fair and respectful of other positions in the dialogue/debate. Straw men will be easily detected and submerged in red ink! I will be looking for humility, coherent, clear, and critical thinking, good style and formatting (Chicago or Turabian), creativity, evidence that course lectures and readings have made an impact on your own formation as an apologist. Please include a bibliography of sources that have been referenced, quoted, or have otherwise influenced your dialogue/exchange. 12-pt. font, double-spaced, 10pt. font footnotes (Endnotes will not be in the “not-yet” of the new heaven/new earth, and will not be a part of the “already” of what you turn in to me). Final draft due **May 8, 2020**.

2) Apologetic Methodological or Historical Research Paper – a research oriented and academically robust essay on issues in apologetics. Possible topics:

An Analysis of the Apologetic Method of John Frame and Cornelius Van Til

The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer

Philosophical Paradigm Shifts and the Apologetic Task

The Problem of Evil in Light of the Compassion and Glory of the Triune God

Methods, Myths, and Misdirections of the New Atheism

The Apologetics of Old Princeton

The Apologetic Contours of Calvin’s Institutes

Students may propose a paper topic of specific interest for evaluation/approval by the professor. Possible topics could include: 1) Use of evidences in a presuppositional framework; 2) apologetic implications of trinitarian worship; 3) apologetics and the resurrection of Christ; 4) some aspect of science and faith. There are many things you may want to explore. Let’s talk!

Thesis and outline due by **Apr 24, 2020**. Final draft due **May 8, 2020**. Page range: 12-15, including a bibliography of at least five substantive primary and secondary sources (books) and at least two academic journal articles. Style, formatting, and quality requirements are the same as option 1. Your paper should be modeled after a theological journal article in a reputable,

scholarly journal, such as JETS, WTJ, etc. Again, I like substantive, scholarly footnotes that show deep reading and analysis that, while germane to your topic, may not be as stylistically conducive to the flow of the main body. Endnotes are a NO!

Class Participation and Book Seminar Discussion and Analyses, 30%

During the week, we will devote some time to discussion of the required texts in a seminar format. The class will be divided into groups. Each group will be assigned one of the following titles from the list of required texts (*Apologetics* by Frame, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord* by Oliphint, *Why Should I Believe in Christianity* by Anderson, or *The Dawkins Letters* by Robertson) to read and lead seminar discussion the week of class. Groups may divide up their assigned text and appoint spokespersons within each group for different sections of their book. This will make getting through each book by the end of the week a manageable task. After our week is finished, students will complete readings of all required readings (not including the Apologetics Reading Packet or Plantinga) and write a three-page book recommendation/review on each book. These papers will emphasize theological analysis and critique, with an eye toward ministry in the local Church. Due **May 8, 2020**.

IV. Course Trajectory (Lecture handouts and related documents will be accessible on Canvas, under “Files”).

Friday, Feb 14 (6:00-9:00pm) & Saturday, Feb 15 (9:30am-4:30pm), 2020

A) Ethos of the Apologetic Task – Is our boldness born out of our brokenness?

Humility & Conviction
Hope & Compassion
Hospitality & Community

B) Empowerment for the Apologetic Task – Can we have confidence in apologetics?

Provision – Spiritual Mindedness
Prayer – Supplication and Spiritual Warfare
Piety – Sanctification of Heart

Engaging the Apologetic Task

Group Participation and Apologetic Dialogue: Haters, back off!

C) Epistemology and the Apologetic Task – The inescapability of truth, or where in the world did you get that idea?!

Trusting Authority (Primary Biblical Considerations for Apologetics)
Tale of Two Adams: Rebellion & Resurrection (Primary Theological Considerations)
Trajectory of Apologetics (Primary Historical Considerations)

Engaging the Apologetic Task

Group Participation and Apologetic Dialogue: Questions of Authority

Friday, Mar 27 (6:00-9:00pm) & Saturday, Mar 28 (9:30am-4:30pm), 2020

D) Epistemology and the Apologetic Task, cont'd.

Thinking Analogically (Primary Philosophical and Methodological Considerations)

Transcendental Argumentation & Covenantal Apologetics

Survey of Approaches to Apologetics

The Place of Evidences

E) Equipping for the Apologetic Task – Where do we feel the pressure?

The New Atheists

Science and the Bible

Engaging the Apologetic Task

Group Participation and Apologetic Dialogue: Defeater Arguments

Friday, Apr 17 (6:00-9:00pm) & Saturday, Apr 19 (9:30am-4:30pm), 2020

F) Equipping for the Apologetic Task, cont'd.

Postmodernism as Relic of Recent Vintage?!?

The Problem of Evil & World Religions

Islam and the Necessity of Trinitarian Monotheism

The Apologetic Value of Trinitarian Worship

Pastoral Ministry, Preaching, and Apologetics

Importance of Apologetics Bibliography

Seminar Discussions of Required Readings and Luncheon

Pizza will be provided on our final Saturday together to reward your week perseverance!

There will be much rejoicing!



Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Student Services Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 42 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 14)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 42)

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Apologetics
 Professor: David Filson
 Campus: Atlanta
 Date: Spring 2020

<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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students will be exposed to the ST, HT, BT, and PT connections to the theory and task of apologetics, and be expected to assimilate biblical apologetic methodology with a view toward various ministry settings.
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.)	Moderate	While much of this course is theological and philosophical in nature, a significant portion will be devoted to exegetical foundations for apologetics, with the use of original languages.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	This course seeks to show the inseparable connection between confessional Reformed theology and a truly Calvinistic apologetic.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	There will be a constant emphasis on the inseparability of Spirit-wrought character and the apologetic task.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	The operative foundation of this course will be a biblical and Reformed view of the five main pieces of the worldview puzzle: theology, anthropology, epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
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	An entire unit on the ethos of the apologetic task will set the trajectory for the course as it relates to interacting with unbelievers, differing apologetic

			methodological approaches, and other theological/denominational traditions.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Xns.	Strong	Throughout the course, and especially the final weekend, much attention will be devoted to the relation of apologetics to liturgy, preaching, evangelism, counseling, preaching, and other facets of ministry.