

BRIERCREST

LIFE IN THE MESS: A THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION (THEO 751)

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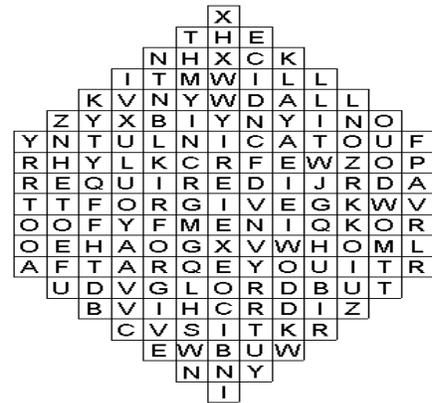
Course Date: May 9-13, 2016

Class times: May 9, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm; May 10-12, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm; May 13, 8:30 to Noon

Credit: 3 credit hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will evaluate contemporary models of forgiveness and reconciliation from both a theological and counseling perspective. A Gospel-centered model of forgiveness and reconciliation will be presented out of which practices of forgiveness and reconciliation can be explored. Issues to be considered may include, but are not be limited to: the semantics of forgiveness and reconciliation; systemic and corporate dynamics of forgiveness and reconciliation; the problem of unrepentance; forgiveness and memory; forgiveness and reconciliation in non-ecclesial/non-Christian contexts; and the role of the local church in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation.



COURSE INTEGRATION:

Jesus teaches his followers to pray, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Despite the simplicity of this line in the Lord’s Prayer, the practice of asking and extending forgiveness remains one of the most difficult challenges of the Christian life. This is probably because forgiveness is able to be practiced, paradoxically, only in the midst of broken relationships and in the context of broken structures of family, church, and society. In this regard, there is no Christian calling or ministry that will not, at one level or another, be required to discern how to work toward the goal of seeing human relationships reconciled through the practice of giving and receiving forgiveness. This course will be of interest to anyone who faces the ordinary messiness of human interaction, including pastors, Christian counselors, mediators, organizational leaders, and parents.

COURSE TEXTBOOKS:

Required for all credit students:

Allender, Dan B. and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1992.

Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*. Mariner Books, 2004.

Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

MA Theological Studies, MA Biblical Languages & Exegesis and MDiv students are required to read:

Martin, Ralph P. *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997.

MA Leadership, MA Marriage & Family Counselling; Masters of Christian Ministry students are required to read:

Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker*. 3d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004.

Certificate or non-degree students: Read either Martin or Sande above according to interest.

Recommended but not Required for All

Brauns, Chris. *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

I just discovered Braun's book this past year, and it is the closest account to my own views that I have found. I am not requiring it only because it echoes so much of what I teach already that I wanted texts that provide fuller perspectives than my own. Nevertheless, I highly recommend Brauns' book.

These texts are available both at the [Briercrest Bookstore](#) and the online [Textbook Store](#) (Amazon.ca driven).

Students are expected to refer Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and *Guide for Writing Research Papers*, available as PDF documents here: [Important Documents](#).

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on [Canvas](#), BCS's online learning system, and their [myBriercrest.ca](#) (accessed via [Briercrest Live](#)) email account.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, it is my hope that students will:

- Develop a more thoroughly biblical understanding of the meaning and practices of forgiveness as theologically centred in the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ;
- Grapple with and critically assess current attitudes and models to forgiveness;
- Become more self-aware (and self-critical) in how personal life narratives, gender, ethnicity, and ecclesiastical backgrounds shape attitudes and practices of forgiveness;
- Recognize the theological implications (positive and negative) implicit in commonly used practices and procedures of dealing with conflict in relationships;

- View the process of reconciliation in holistic terms such that individual and corporate issues are more closely linked;
- Begin to work with a practical model of forgiveness and reconciliation when dealing with issues of forgiveness and reconciliation in interpersonal and corporate relationships;
- Sharpen their ability to identify problems and to propose theologically consistent and practical solutions to pastoral situations where forgiveness and reconciliation is required.

COURSE OUTLINE/CONTENT:

Note: The following is meant to be a conceptual outline of topics to be covered, and may not be dealt with in the order listed.

I. Assessing Contemporary Models of Forgiveness: Making a Mess

- “Forgiveness as Unconditional love”
- “Forgiveness as Self-Healing”
- “Forgiveness as Conflict Avoidance”
- “Forgiveness as Moral Obligation”
- “Forgiveness as Moral Triumph”

II. Re-Reading Key Biblical texts

III. A Biblical Theology of Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Living in the Mess

- The God and Gospel of Reconciliation (Leviticus 26; 2 Corinthians 5)
- Peace, Harmony, and Fellowship (*Shalom*) (1 Corinthians 1:9)
- Love and Forbearance (Galatians 6:1-2)
- Sin/Enmity (Genesis 3; Romans 5)
- Confrontation (Matthew 18)
 - Excommunication (1 Corinthians 5)
- Confession (Psalm 32; 1 John 1)
- Repentance (Jeremiah 15; Luke 17)
- Forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21ff)
- Discipline (Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5)
- Restoration (Luke 15; Galatians 6)
- Return to Fellowship (1 John 1)

III. Short-circuiting Reconciliation: Making Life Messier Than It Already Is

IV. Pastoral Problems in Reconciliation: Getting Our Hands Messy

Note: These are only meant as starting points. We will seek to identify and sharpen the issues as a class and work together toward proposing initial solutions to these problems as part of the seminar.

- What if I *can't* forgive?
- What if one of the parties dies?
- What if it is someone in authority over me?
- What if it is an issue of sexual or physical abuse/violence?
- What if it is a corporate or systemic wrong?

- Can organizations/institutions/governments “repent” and/or “forgive”?
- Is repayment necessary? To what extent?
- When should forgiveness and reconciliation go public?
- Can I/we ever forget the wrong/survive the pain?

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

PRE-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS (Due May 9, 2016, first day of class)

A. Reading: Course text reading

Read the three texts by Volf, Allender/Longman, and Gobodo-Madikizela in preparation for the course. You will be asked the first day of class to report on your pre-course reading. Although there are no marks awarded for reading, there is a 2% deduction for each 100 pages (or part thereof) of textbook reading not completed before the first day of class.

B. Pre-Course Reflection Paper – 25%

Choose **ONE** of the following three options on which to do a pre-course paper.

A) Read *Bold Love* in its entirety. As you read, think of a situation you have faced or are facing in which forgiveness and reconciliation is needed. Being careful not to break confidentiality (i.e., do not use actual names or reveal situations that might reveal identities), write a 3-4 page (900-1200 words) reflection paper on how some of the strategies reflected in chapters 10-12 might relate to or help you in your situation. You should also indicate whether the person(s) in question fit into one of the broad categories listed in chapter 10-12: 1) The Evil Person; 2) The Fool; and 3) The Normal Sinner. If you plan to reflect on a past situation that is already resolved, you might want to focus on how your situation may have illustrated some principles from Allender and Longman’s book, or how things could have been worked out differently. This paper will be evaluated on how well you are able to bring the content of the book to bear on a concrete, real life situation. It is *not* intended to be a restatement of the content of the book, i.e., the content will be assumed. Feel free to reference the book using simple parenthetical annotations. E.g., (p. 35).

B) Read *Exclusion and Embrace* in its entirety. Write a 3-4 page (900-1200 words) reflective paper in which you identify **two** or **three** of the most helpful/profound/important themes in Volf’s book. Provide a rationale for why these themes were so important to you and anticipate how they might inform your own personal or ministry context in the future. If you make specific references to real life situations, be sure to be careful not to break confidentiality (i.e., do not use actual names or reveal situations that might reveal identities). This paper will be evaluated on how well you are able to anticipate how the content of the book might be brought to bear on concrete, real life situations. It is *not* intended to be a restatement of the content of the book, i.e., the content will be assumed. Feel free to reference the book using simple parenthetical annotations. E.g., (p. 35).

C) Read *A Human Being Died that Night* in its entirety. Write a 3-4 page (900-1200 words) reflective paper in which you reflect on the following question: What are the benefits and drawbacks to Gobodo-Madikizela’s primarily *psychological* account of her interpretation of Eugene de Kock and his personal

and political involvements in the apartheid regime? How might a theological and/or biblical have helped or hindered her account? This paper will be evaluated on how well you are able to think through the benefits and limits of a psychological perspective on forgiveness and reconciliation using Gobodo-Madikizela's as a case study. Note: This is *not* intended to be a restatement of the content of the book, i.e., the content will be assumed. Feel free to reference the book using simple parenthetical annotations. E.g., (p. 35).

MID-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

There are no mid-course assignments, but participants are asked to engage fully in all class discussion.

POST-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS (Due July 8, 2016 – 8 weeks after last day of class)

A. Constructive Book Review (25%)

Write a four page (1000 word) “constructive book review” of either the Martin or Sande books (depending on which book is required for your major). Your constructive book review should aim to engage the book from the perspective of your disciplinary major and while certainly having an eye open to areas of weakness in the book, will seek also to build upon the book's strengths. In other words, a constructive book review *must* seek to assess the books from a critical, biblical perspective, but it *must* also seek to anticipate how the book's contribution could be *extended* to a particular issue within the discipline.

Example 1: If you are Leadership major and reading Sande's text, you will need to provide your assessment of any biblical or theological weaknesses you see in Sande, but you will also go on to show how Sande's approach might suitably complement other aspects of Leadership theory (e.g., conflict management, problem solving, etc.), or alternatively, how attention to these other aspects may help to strengthen Sande's own approach.

Example 2: If you are an MA Theological Studies, Old Testament major, you will need to provide your assessment of any biblical or theological weaknesses you see in Martin, but you may also want to go on to show how Martin's theology may be complemented by certain Old Testament themes, or alternatively, how certain Old Testament themes may in fact be in tension with Martin's perspective and needing some form of “reconciliation.”

The overall goals of the constructive disciplinary book review, then, is to show 1) that you have read the text against the standard of the Bible, and 2) to show how your increasing expertise in your discipline can be integrated (or how it may stand in tension with) the content of the book.

Due: July 18, 2016 (8 weeks after class)

B. Major Research Project (50%)

It is expected that the major research project for this course will provide an opportunity for you to apply what has been learned in the course and in your own research to a topic within your own academic discipline (major) or ministry. Choose one of the following options upon which to do your major project. Papers should be no more than 12 pages in length (not including front and back matter), and should demonstrate thoroughness of research (i.e., reading and using both Scripture and other books, articles, resources), depth of insight, careful documentation, and adherence to Briercrest Seminary Format guidelines.

1. Theological exegesis – Choose a biblical text or set of texts pertaining to one of the sub-titles in the “model” (course outline #II above). Do a thorough theological exegesis on one or several of these texts and demonstrate how your findings might supplement, complement or even challenge the model as it is presented in class. Thorough theological exegesis will take care to consider not only the exegetical issues of the text (grammar, syntax, semantics, etc.) but also will be conversant with the ways in which various Christian traditions have read (or may have misread!) these same texts. Broad use of resources (including commentaries, monographs, journal articles, etc.) will be necessary for this project.

2. Theologian of Reconciliation – Choose a historic or contemporary theologian on which to do a careful study, exposition and evaluation of her or his theology of reconciliation, or some closely associated topic. (E.g., forgiveness, confession, repentance, etc.) Attention to primary sources by the theologian is a necessity, along with judicious use of scholarly secondary sources.

3. Pastoral counselling issue – Identify a particular situation in which you might realistically be called upon (or are now being called upon) to give counsel or to serve as a mediator working toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Beginning with the model presented in class, provide a thorough investigation into the theory, processes and procedures that ought to be followed to bring about resolution to the issue. You should be careful to define the parameters of the context (e.g., serving as a professional counsellor; serving as a pastor; helping as a friend, etc.) and then proceed to develop your strategy in accordance with the practices acceptable for that context. (E.g., How might serving in a “non-Christian” setting affect how you might bring to bear the principle of an explicitly “Christian” model of reconciliation?)

Note well: In accordance with standard counselling practice and ethics, all identities of real individuals involved should be protected, i.e., do not use actual names or write the paper in such a way that the identity of the person could be surmised. Papers where the identity of persons is not sufficiently protected will not be accepted.

4. Leadership Study – Do a case study in which you identify a Christian leader (whether well-known or not) who has had to face public exposure for moral failure (whether or not the leader was actually restored). Do an analysis of how the failure was dealt with, whether successfully or not. Using the model of forgiveness and reconciliation presented in class, identify where you perceive the process either succeeded or failed and make suggestions on how things could be improved in similar situations in the future. Be sure to acknowledge some of the particular problems of ‘power differential’ in the leadership position. In other words, how did the power differential affect the leader’s ability to seek and to give forgiveness and reconciliation (or not)?

Note well: In accordance with standard leadership case study practices and ethics, all identities of real individuals involved should be protected, i.e., do not use actual names or write the paper in such a way that the identity of the person could be surmised. Papers where the identity of persons is not sufficiently protected will not be accepted. An exception to this “rule” can be where the story of the leader being studied has already been made public and received attention in media and print.

5. Popular Media Content Analysis – Using a specific “popular” medium (e.g., newspapers, weekly news magazines, religious or non-religious magazines, such as *Reader’s Digest*, pop songs, evangelical hymnody, popular Christian books, internet sites, written or recorded sermons, etc.), do a “content analysis” of the theories and theology of forgiveness either implicitly or explicitly evident in that medium. Where possible, track historical “progression/development” in how the medium speaks about “forgiveness and reconciliation,” especially as it pertains to major historical events (e.g., before and after 9/11).

Propose a theory that might help to explain the phenomena, including the theological implications that may arise from the consumption of these popular manifestations. It may be necessary to include a “packet” of documentation (photocopies, disk with web sites, etc.) to include with the written analysis.

6. *The Church and Socio-political Case Study* – Choose a particular socio-political context upon which to engage in a case study whereby a current or historical problem is analyzed with the goal of proposing a process and anticipated solution. E.g., The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in regard to First Nations; Francophone/Anglophone relations in Canada; Israel/Palestine; clergy misconduct in a particular denomination; the problem of Christian-Jewish or Christian-Muslim relations, etc. The study should be engaged, where possible, on the basis of official documents related to a specific aspect of the problem and have as a goal making suggestions for possible means of dealing with corporate issues of reconciliation, particularly in contexts where Christianity is not always (or rarely) the dominant voice. Practical attention should be paid to how the local church (or denominations) may best be involved and at what levels to fostering reconciliation in the situation studied.

7. *SPECIAL OPTION: Annotated bibliography*: For students interested in working on a thesis or SRP (Service Related Project) on a topic in the field of forgiveness and reconciliation, students may produce an annotated bibliography of books and articles (both at the popular and academic level) which would be the beginnings of a literature review. The bibliography should be topically organized and should include a three sentence annotation for each entry. Sentence 1: general description of the work; sentence 2: major strength; sentence 3: major weakness. Of course, the greater number of sources covered, the better, but attention should be focused upon major works where available. Before proceeding on this option, the student should gain approval in advance from the instructor.

8. *OTHER*: The instructor is open to alternative project as well. However, permission must be sought from the instructor no later than May 31, 2016. Permission to grant an alternative must come in the form of a one paragraph description (use #1-6 above as examples) of the project you wish to complete.

Due: July 18, 2016 (8 weeks after class)

BRIERCREST POLICIES

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current [Seminary Calendar](#).

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular they register. If this is impossible, arrangements must be made with the course professor. A maximum of 1 full day of class can be foregone. Students should request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit if additional time is missed.

Class Times

Class will start at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. Class times for the remainder of the week will be established by the professor. When the syllabus

does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans. Students should plan to be in class until 1:00 p.m. on Friday.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Late Assignment Policy

Time management is a necessary ingredient in the development of a disciplined life. Students are encouraged to begin their assignments well in advance of the due date. Though individual faculty members may disallow late assignments at their discretion, the following is a statement of policy concerning late assignments:

- All assignments must be submitted as stated in the course syllabus.
- Late assignments will be accepted for one week from the original due date with a penalty of 10 per cent deducted from the assignment value. All late assignments must be submitted within one week of the due date.
- Assignments submitted more than a week after the original due date will not be accepted and will receive a "0".

Extensions

All extensions must be requested through Academic Services. Professors do not have the authority to grant extensions beyond the syllabus due date. Extensions are normally not granted beyond the syllabus due date. However, in rare extenuating circumstances beyond a student's control (e.g., death in the family, extended illness or tragedy), the student may request a two-week extension through [Academic Services](#). Please note that school, family, ministry commitments or busyness do not qualify as extenuating circumstances for an extension. Should the student fail to complete the assignments by the due date (or the extension date, when applicable), a grade will be assigned according to the work the student has submitted.

Note: Acquiring an extension according to the policy above is the sole responsibility of the student.

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 25-26 in the [Seminary Calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or illness who may need academic accommodations should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Student Success Centre in person (Room #215), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (studentsuccesscentre@briercrest.ca).

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