**ANALYSIS OF HOW THE MTS CURRICULUM**

**IMPACTS MINISTRY**

**Personal Reflection Essay**

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**Introduction**

From the early moments of his existence after being created by God, man has been challenged to engage with creation utilizing his mind and his ability to reason. In Genesis 2:15-20, God assigned Adam the task of evaluating all the creatures in God’s creation and to name them. This exercise required Adam to consider each creature and to bestow it with a name. God also asked Adam to manage His creation, both the animals and the lands. This challenge required man to use the thinking ability God had placed within him and to learn from his experiences. This paper will reflect upon the need for reason in a believer’s life as well as the necessity of faith in his life. It will seek to explain how a believer must learn to seek clarity with his reasoning skills as he also exercises the ability to draw near to his Creator and trust His character.

**Old Testament Survey I and II**

The coursework in Old Testament Survey I and II was well designed. The workload was quite heavy in reading, map referencing, and writing. The books that were selected for us to read were extremely applicable and will continue to be resources that I reference as I continue to study God’s Word. At first, I was frustrated with the amount of map referencing that was required, but I came to greatly value the way that work allowed me to paint a memorable picture in my mind of the Holy Land and the Fertile Crescent. I doubt I would ever have put in the time to gain that level of detailed learning had it not been required in these courses. The workbook that was required to be completed challenged us to write short paragraphs on very specific information. Again, this level of detailed work forced a focus on the text that was very beneficial.

The professor’s lectures illuminated the passages we studied each week. He was able to explain instances in which competing interpretations were applicable and to highlight a conservative viewpoint. He was very consistent in asserting that his viewpoint was a conservative interpretation of Scripture.

I chose to write my research paper on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52 and 53. The reading that was necessary to gain an adequate background in the material proved to be fascinating. I enjoyed reading the views of Judaism and how they interpret this section of Scripture and found myself fascinated that I had such a confidence that these passages referred to our Lord, Jesus the Messiah. As I considered that confidence, I realized it was the work of the Holy Spirit, who lives within me and teaches me as I read God’s Word. I mention this as this realization will be key to sustaining me as I continue to seek answers in God’s Word. I can be confident that the Holy Spirit will be faithful to meet me and teach me as I grow in my faith and that He will empower my ministry.

**New Testament Survey I and II**

The courses which provided a survey of the New Testament were extremely valuable to my education even though I have spent most of my adult years teaching God’s Word to others. The detailed cartographical work that was required was very helpful to implant the locations spoken of in the Bible into my memory. The thorough discussion of the background context of the culture, families, and governments made the biblical dialogue much more meaningful to me as I studied.

I choose to write a research paper in New Testament I on the acts of the Holy Spirit in order to more fully consider how God acted to expand His call to men and to draw them into relationship with Himself. This work challenged my assumptions and helped me to clarify my belief about God's actions today based upon what I have witnessed personally and what Scripture describes during the birth of the Church.

The New Testament II course further investigated the apostles and illuminated their work of spreading the gospel, which required the Lord to provide guidelines to the new Church. The writers were dealing with real issues and heretical opponents. These stories led me to write a research paper regarding the role of women in ministry and in their churches. This study certainly led me to become convinced of my position in these matters.

**Systematic Theology I and II**

I suspect that many who have pursued this course of study would attest that the material covered in the Systematic Theology courses was the most valuable to have invested time studying. This material will be something that I will return to again and again, as I consider God and who He has revealed Himself to be. The professor's love of the topic also inspired me toward future studies.

The secondary readings we were assigned were also of immense value to me. We read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*, which was very impactful. By far, the book *The Cross of Christ*, written by John Stott, will be a book that I will read repeatedly and will often recommend to others without reservation. I found it interesting to consider the positions of other religions and to compare those positions to those of the Free Church. Those lectures will serve me will as I discuss people's beliefs and assert that I believe to be the truth. One thought that was shared that I have claimed is that Baptists are defined as "people of the Book," I am proud to embrace that definition.

**Hermeneutics**

The study of Hermeneutics was a topic that I had previously heard, but could not have adequately defined if asked to do so. I found the material to be very practical as it provided an excellent construct to use as I read Scripture. The thought that I should always consider my presuppositions and admit them to myself before I attempt to interpret Scripture is invaluable to my future studies. Hermeneutics also aided me in my critical analysis of others' writings. Plummer's book *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* will be a tool that I will continue to use and that I will teach others to utilize.

**Bible Morals and Ethics**

The first course that I took in the Master of Theological Studies curriculum was Bible Morals and Ethics. This course has been very useful as it has been very practical to everyday ministry. I am constantly asked questions by congregants that require me to give answers that rely upon Scripture and that challenge me to help them to understand cultural ethics and how those differ from God’s ethics.

Our studies asked us to consider the value of human life and to consider how that impacts decisions regarding abortion, reproduction, euthanasia, capital punishment, and war. We also read authors who described how society has moved from having a morality based upon Scripture to the having the highest regard for moral relativism. This course also has covered topics such as evolution, homosexuality, and the beliefs of major world religions. We also considered racism, which led me to write a research paper on this subject. My research led me to understand how much God loves all men, and solidified my previously held beliefs on this subject.

**Baptist Heritage**

I found the Baptist Heritage course to be surprisingly fruitful. The material investigated the doctrines that have consistently defined Baptists. I was profoundly impacted by the bravery of the Anabaptists. Their steadfast faith and conviction to resolutely stand on what they understood Scripture to say was both inspiring and convicting to me. I chose to write a term paper on the life of Balthasar Hubmaier and greatly enjoyed researching his life and faith journey.

It was also fascinating to study the English Baptists and trace their journey that lead to the establishment of the American Baptists. The doctrinal issues that they dealt with and the way that God used them to impact the world was is fascinating to consider.

The study of the American Baptist movement was intriguing. Their desire to worship

freely and to empower each church to seek God and serve Him, and the impact of society upon Baptist churches and their impact in turn upon society was a pleasure to study. Their journey into the 21st century helped me to realize what part I have to play to lead Christians to serve God and stand on His Truth as we face the resistance of a godless society. Their model of faithfulness is one I wish to follow.

**Church History I and II**

Church History I and II were difficult to get excited about, partially because there was so much information to cover. I did value learning how the early church dealt with heresies and worked to preserve Scripture. Their efforts have served all that have followed them.

It was also useful to see how God chose to spread His gospel throughout the world. Even persecution furthered the cause of Christ. I was amazed at the depth of sacrifice and serious contemplation that the early fathers put forth, and I enjoyed reading their writings.

The review of history since the Reformation was enlightening. The material we covered helped me to understand the influence of the Catholic Church and how the reformers’ responses changed Christian thought. The Free Church movement which spread from the Reformation was based upon a desire to read Scripture and put it into practice. That thought inspires me today.

Finally, we were able to study the heresies and to see how God’s truth was twisted by others who wished to mislead others away from God. The cults which emerged in the United States followed similar paths and misled people in great numbers. The other world religions also appeared to be distortions or misguided mimics of God’s truth.

These courses provided me with a background to enter into discourse with those who have studied and chosen other faiths. I believe I will be able to point out key distinctions and hopefully be able to prompt others to reconsider the truth about Christianity.

**Christian Apologetics**

I found the course on Christian Apologetics to be much different than I had expected it to be. The professor chose to expose us to several debates recorded on YouTube on a broad array of topics. I had expected to be required to recite rote answers to specific questions about God and His truths. However, we were encouraged to consider the questions an unbeliever might have about God and to be ready to provide a reasonable answer to those questions. Rather than being a defense of the faith, Apologetics was shown to be a tool to share life with unbelievers. The reading was difficult and covered many topics, yet I found it interesting and useful.

I chose to write a research paper from the perspective of a homosexual who felt that Christianity was judgemental and mean. I proceeded to provide arguments that would support this assertion and then wrote to provide clarifying answers to those charges. I attempted to help the unbeliever see that God has always loved them and wants them to enter into a loving relationship with Him. This research will certainly help me as I seek to minister to those whom I encounter who struggle with homosexuality or gender identity.

**Conclusion**

As I conclude this course of study, I am quite proud to have studied under the professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. They were passionate in their actions to share God’s Word with me and truly seemed to care about investing in the students to prepare them to be effective in ministry. I have done quite a bit academic and technical training during my lifetime, and I was pleased to have a course of study in which every course mattered and will prove useful in my ministry.

I had been led by former graduates to believe that certain aspects of seminary study would be outdated and not useful to current day ministry. I can avow that I found the Master of Theological Studies courses to be very useful and applicable to my ministry life. As I embark upon a new challenge in ministry leadership, I proceed empowered and blessed by the efforts of the faculty, the words of our theological ancestors, and the power of the Holy Spirit.