

The Rise of Modern Christianity
CH 3P1020/CH 5P1050/CH 6R 1070

Winter term 2025
Thursday 4:00 PM–5:50 PM

James R. Payton, Jr.
Course Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course offers an overview of the development of Christianity in the “modern” era—so, from just before the Reformation to the present day. The topic is enormous, and we cannot begin to treat it in depth: while recognizing the impact of Eastern Christianity in its several manifestations and acknowledging the significance of the spread of Christianity throughout the world by the present day, we will focus on what has transpired in Western Christendom. To do that we will especially consider the movements which divided Western Christianity, the ones that sought to reunite it, and some significant contemporary struggles within North American evangelicalism.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing...

- to acquaint students with the broad history of how Western Christendom has developed
- to enable students to recognize significant tendencies toward division and reunion in Christianity’s history during the period
- to help students understand challenges to and criticisms of Christianity as it has developed in the modern era

Being...

- to stimulate an appreciation for the challenges of both defending the Christian faith and welcoming other articulations of that faith
- to develop a sense of being rooted in a historic faith which has impacted the world

Doing...

- to develop in each student an ability to evaluate the ways Christianity has developed in the modern era
- to help students acquire the ability to appreciate what has developed well and to listen carefully to critical viewpoints articulating better ways of going forward

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Textbooks:

- González, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. II: The Reformation to the Present Day* (HarperOne, 2010). {"G" in the assigned readings on the class schedule}
- Payton, James R. Jr., *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings* (IVP Academic, 2010). {"P" in the assigned readings on the class schedule}

Additional sources used for the class:

- Barr, Beth Allison. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* (Brazos, 2021).
- Kobes Du Mez, Kristin. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (Liveright, 2020).

*All students are expected to complete all assignments based on the instructions provided in Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History*, and well as the MDC Style Guide.

SPECIALIZATIONS:

This course and all of the requirements are designed to serve students taking the CC (Church and Culture) specialization and the CW (Christian History and Worldview) specialization. Students may also take the course as an elective.

METHOD:

Instructor's Presentations:

Most classes will have a presentation by the professor. This presentation will seek to build on and further develop what students will have learned from the readings assigned for the class, as well as exploring other themes not in the assigned readings.

Readings:

All readings are to be completed before the class begins. These readings are critical for understanding how modern church history unfolded; the readings highlighted in bold in the class schedule will regularly be discussed in class.

Discussions:

In each class, students should be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for discussion insightfully, bringing questions and offering comments about them. Sometimes the instructor will offer questions to provoke further reflection on the readings or will point to implications of a reading which have not yet come up in that class's discussion. On days when papers are due, students will be invited (and expected) to discuss, informally, what they have found and/or learned in preparing their papers. Participation in all these discussions will be counted toward the discussion/participation grade.

Format:

This class will meet in person at McMaster Divinity College (with livestream available if and as needed).

PROFESSIONAL MASTER'S COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Reflection Paper: Students will prepare (and discuss in class) a **3–4 page paper** laying out their understanding, *before taking this course*, of the significance of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation as they and/or their church view it: what impact (if any) did it have then and what impact does (or should) it still have? This is not a research paper, and students should not consult the readings in Gonzalez or Payton; instead, as they begin this course, students are to reflect on how they see and assess the significance of that Reformation. **Due January 23.**

Response Paper #1: Students will prepare a **5-6 page paper** summarizing and responding to the argument presented in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*. This paper should include assessment(s) of the importance of what Barr has presented for the life of the church in the present day and/or the significance of what her presentation shows about how (some) perspectives have been developed and defended. **Due February 27.**

Response Paper #2: Students will prepare a **5-6 page paper** summarizing and responding to the argument presented in *Jesus and John Wayne*. This paper should include assessment(s) of the importance of what Kobes Du Mez has presented about (much of) contemporary American evangelicalism and what impact(s) this may have (or has had) on the reputation and influence of American evangelicalism. **Due March 20.**

Research Paper: Students will prepare an **8–10 page research paper** on a topic of their interest, drawn from the period of modern Christianity. The topic need not be something we have discussed in class. The topic will be chosen in consultation with and must be approved by the professor. **Due April 10.**

Discussion/Participation: Students will be expected to participate regularly, extensively, and insightfully in class discussions.

GRADING:

- **Reflection Paper: 10%**
- **Response Paper #1 (Barr): 25%**
- **Response Paper #2 (Kobes Du Mez): 25%**
- **Research Paper: 30%**
- **Discussion: 10%**

SYLLABUS SUPPLEMENT: DPT REQUIREMENTS

- **Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately **15–20 sources (c. 4000 pages)** related to the content of the course and how it might relate to your research project; each annotation should be approximately 100 words. (The

required texts and primary sources for the course can be included as part of this book list.) The literature review will be approximately **2000 words**. This assignment is **due February 27** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.

- **Research Presentation:** Students will present to the class the research they are working on for the major paper described below. This will include an introduction describing what is being investigated, the area of the student's DPT practice-led research, and the source(s) being used. The bulk of the presentation will lay out how your topic is important for or the influence it has (or should have) for Modern Christianity. The presentation should be approximately 25 minutes in length, with 10–15 additional minutes for class discussion. This assignment is **scheduled for March 27** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **Major paper:** Each student will prepare a major paper of approximately **5000 words** on a topic related to course content, dealing with at least one primary theological or historical-theological source in Modern Christianity, focused on what they dealt with in their Research Presentation. This paper should reflect both theological depth and insight regarding that relationship. Use and document (via footnotes) a minimum of 15 scholarly resources. This assignment is **due April 10** and will account for **40%** of the final grade.
- **Class participation:** Students will be expected to participate in class discussions. This will account for **10%** of the final grade.

SYLLABUS SUPPLEMENT: MA/PhD REQUIREMENTS

- **Literature Review:** Students will develop an annotated bibliography of **10–12 volumes and 10–12 journal articles or chapters in edited volumes (a total of 5000–6000 pages to be read for this review)** on a contemporary issue in Modern Christianity (such as the development of the “Prosperity Gospel” in North America, or of “Complementarianism” or “Christian Nationalism” in evangelical circles); each annotation should be approximately 100 words. The literature review will be approximately **2000 words**. This assignment is **due February 27** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **Research Presentation:** Students will present to the class the research they are working on for the major essay described below. (The focus for this research will be chosen in consultation with the professor.) The presentation will include an introduction describing what is being investigated (and why it is important), the approach taken to examine the question, and the results of the investigation. The presentation should be approximately 30 minutes in length, with 10 additional minutes for class discussion. This presentation is **scheduled for March 27** and will account for **25%** of the final grade.
- **Major essay:** Each student will prepare an academic thesis paper of approximately **6000 words** on the topic presented in class, to be written at the level of a peer-reviewed journal article. The focus of the paper should be on a significant issue in Modern Christianity, preferably a contemporary one (such as the “Prosperity Gospel” [whether in North America or elsewhere in the world], “Complementarianism,” or “Christian Nationalism”); the focus for this paper will be chosen in consultation with the professor and is to be a written, publishable treatment of what was presented as the “Research

Presentation.” This assignment is **due April 10** and will account for **40%** of the final grade.

- **Class participation:** Students will be expected to participate in class discussions. This will account for **10%** of the final grade.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student’s dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

-- **A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you “tidy up” your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one’s own as if it is one’s own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family

Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Gender Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Submitting Papers

Essays must be submitted via email (preferably) or to Avenue to Learn *at least 30 minutes before the beginning of the class on the day they are due*. Late assignments will lose one letter-grade “step” (e.g., A- to B+) for each day, beginning already with the due date and each subsequent day. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 5% per day (not including Sunday) if they attach to their essay a letter explaining the genuine emergency that delayed them. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will not receive comments and constructive criticism from the professor.

All written work must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. Failure to use appropriate form will result in grade reductions. Further, failure to abide by the “Usage Guidelines” posted on Avenue to Learn by the instructor will result in grade reductions.

- Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins.
- Please do not attend class if you are ill and contagious (e.g., the flu or symptom of Covid 19).

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Dates when assignments are due are marked **in bold and with an asterisk [*]**; readings to be prepared for class discussion appear **in bold**):

Jan. 9 Introduction to the class
 Background: Medieval Christianity’s institutional development

Jan. 16 Background: Christianity’s intellectual development
 G:1–46 **P:13–51**

****Jan. 23 Reflection Paper due****

Luther and other reformers

G:47–86 **P:52–88**

Jan. 30 Conflict among the reformers
G:87–131 **P:89–131**

Feb. 6 Reformation ecumenism
G:131–175 **P:132–172**

Feb. 13 Protestant scholasticism
G:177–219 **P:173–210**

{Feb. 20: no class [MDC Reading Week, Feb. 17–22]}

****Feb. 27 Response Paper #1 due**** {→ no class [prof away]}

****Feb. 27 DPT & MA/PhD Literature Reviews due****
G:221–273 P:211–260

Mar. 6 English reformation & Puritanism
G:275–317

Mar. 13 Pietism and the Enlightenment
G:319–372

****Mar. 20 Response Paper #2 due****
Schleiermacher and Liberal Theology
G:373–415

****Mar. 27 DPT & MA/PhD Research presentations**
Ecumenical movements of the 17th & 18th centuries
G:417–455

Apr. 3 Ecumenical movements of the 19th–21st centuries
G:457–493

****Apr. 10 Research Paper due****
****Apr. 10 DPT Major Paper due****
****Apr. 10 MA/PhD Major Essay due****
Discussion of student paper topics
G:495–530

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READINGS

(1) Development of doctrine:

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)*. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 4. (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

———. *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700)*. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol.5. (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

(2) Impact of Western Christendom:

Holland, Tom. *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*. (Abacus, 2019).

Spencer, Nick. *The Evolution of the West (expanded edition): How Christianity Has Shaped Our Values*. (Westminster John Knox, 2018).

(3) Issues in contemporary evangelicalism:

-- Christian nationalism:

Alberta, Tim. *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*. (Harper, 2023).

Hobbs, Valerie H. *No Love in War: a story of Christian nationalism* (Mayfly, 2023).

-- Deconstructionism/Reconstructionism:

Bick, Angela Reitsma, and Peter Schuurman. *Blessed are the Undone: Testimonies of the Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada*. (New Leaf Network, 2024).

Byrd, Aimee. *The Hope in our Scars: Finding the Bride of Christ in the Underground of Disillusionment*. (Zondervan Reflective, 2024).

Evans, Rachel Held. *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving and Finding the Church* (Nelson, 2015).

George, Ryan. *Hurt and Healed by the Church: Redemption and Reconstruction after Spiritual Abuse*. (Punchline, 2023).

Gushee, David P. *After Evangelicalism: The Path to a New Christianity*. (Westminster John Knox, 2020).

McCammon, Sarah. *The Exvangelicals: Loving, Living, and Leaving the White Evangelical Church* (St. Martin's, 2024).

McKnight, Scot, and Tommy Preston Phillips. *Invisible Jesus: A Book about Leaving the Church and Looking for Christ*. (Zondervan, 2024).

-- Patriarchy:

Bowler, Kate. *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities*. (Princeton University Press, 2019).

West, Cait. *Rift: A Memoir of Breaking Away from Christian Patriarchy* (Eerdmans, 2024).

-- Racism:

Brown, Austin Channing. *Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (Convergent, 2018).

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. (Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2020).

King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. (Anchor, 2012).

McCaulley, Esau. *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope*. (IVP Academic, 2020).

Tisby, Jemar. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan Reflective, 2019).