



McMaster Divinity
College

The World and Writings of John Wesley CH 3P1130/CH 5P1160

McMaster Divinity College
Winter Semester 2026
Tuesday, 4:00-5:50pm

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath
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In-Person Class and Live Stream Options

Specializations: CW/CC

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Considered by many to be the “father of evangelicalism,” John Wesley is a fascinating figure who was instrumental in the formation of modern-day evangelicalism. This course will examine his life, theology, impact, as well as study his social context and associates (and enemies!).

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing

- to provide students with an understanding of John Wesley’s life and writings, as well as his contribution to the life of the church over the centuries

Being

- to explore - and ultimately appreciate - the diverse ways people and movements have shaped the history of Christianity
- to create an awareness of the breadth and diversity of the Church, and provide a sense of “place” within the many church traditions
- to be discern one’s calling for service in the church

Doing

- to develop in each student an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective, and, in particular, to be able to assess critically the various claims made about Wesley throughout the church’s history

- to learn from Wesley's life and writings so as to be a more effective leader in the church, academy and the world

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Richard P. Heitzenrater. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- *The Journal of John Wesley*. http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Wesley_Journal.pdf
- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- Reading of primary sources from sites such as <http://wesley.nnu.edu/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY (not required for purchasing):

The following books are related to the course material and provide a helpful reading list for those who would like to pursue the course material further or build their own persona library on the subject. Students are NOT required to purchase or read these books.

- John R. Tyson. *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- John Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Harry S. Stout. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Five volume "History of Evangelicalism Series" by IVP Academic:
 - Mark A. Noll. *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*
 - John R. Wolffe. *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of More, Wilberforce, Chalmers and Finney*
 - David W. Bebbington. *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*
 - Geoff Treloar. *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Mott, Machen and McPherson*
 - Brian Stanley. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Graham and Stott*

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.

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).

Bookstore

All required and recommended books 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.

Online (Asynchronous) Courses

Presence and participation in this course are expected. Faculty know from many years of experience that a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well she or he will score in the course. Although there are exceptions to this rule of thumb, low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades.

A word needs to be said about what constitutes "presence" (attendance) and "participation" in an asynchronous course. Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Be aware that merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. "Academically related activities" certainly includes participation in and completion of the course requirements that are described below. Additionally, just as students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week outside of the learning management system (A2L), so also students are expected to engage one another in formative dialogue "outside of class." This is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning and is a staple ingredient in what constitutes "presence." Finally, unless given permission by the professor, students on Zoom are expected to have their camera on.

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.

Miscellaneous

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).

GRADING:

- Journal Reflection (30%)
- Biographical Presentation (25%)
- Research Paper (35%)
- Class Participation and Reading (10%)

ASSIGNMENTS:

Along with completing participating in class, weekly readings, and participating in class discussions and debates, each student will be required to complete the following written assignments and presentations. More information will be provided in class:

- Journal Reflection (30%)

Students are expected to write and submit a ten-page reflection paper on Wesley's *Journal*. This reflection should answer questions such as what does this journal tell us about Wesley, his theology, his ministry, and early evangelicalism? What is the value of reading this journal? What does this journal not tell us? If possible, try to relate aspects of your reflection to your specialization. Please use this version of the diary:

http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Wesley_Journal.pdf

- Biographical Presentation (25%)

Students will prepare a biographical presentation for the classroom on one of Wesley's associates (or enemies). This presentation should be a critical analysis concerned with the life and legacy of the person.

- Research Paper (35%)

Research Paper: Each student will write a ten-page research paper on a topic related to their specialization. The results of this paper will be shared at the end of the course when students orally present their papers to the class.

- *Church and Culture*

The primary focus of this research should be on a theological analysis of eighteenth-century culture in regard to Wesley and/or Methodism. The focus should be relatively specific, rather than scattered. The interplay between Christian theology and culture should be a critical part of this analysis.

- *Christian History Worldview*

Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's theological position in regard to an aspect of Methodist and/or evangelical issues, with a particular concern for the development of theology in the eighteenth century (and how it relates to today).

- Class Participation and Reading (10%)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

- Jan 6 Introduction to the Class
 Reading: *Doing Church History*
 Reading: Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, ch. 1
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ch. 1
- Jan 13 John Wesley's Life
 Reading: Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, chs. 2-3
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ch. 2
- Jan 20: John Wesley's Life
 Reading: Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, chs. 4
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ch. 3
- Jan 27 John Wesley's Life
 Reading: Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, chs. 5
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, chs. 4-6
- Feb 3 John Wesley's Associates (and Enemies) * **Journal Reflection Due**
 Reading: Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, chs. 6
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, chs. 5-7
- Feb 10 Methodism After Wesley
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, chs. 8-9, 12-17
- Feb 17 *Reading Week (No Class)*
- Feb 24 Biographies ***Biographical Presentations**
- Mar 3 Theology and Writings
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, chs. 9-10
- Mar 10 Theology and Writings
 Reading: Maddox and Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, chs. 11-13
- Mar 17 Theology and Writings

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| Mar 24 | Methodism in Canada |
| Mar 31 | Research Paper Presentations * <i>Research Papers Due</i> |
| Apr 7 | Methodism Today and in the Future |

This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.