
The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.

I. Faculty Information



Name: Dr. Clement Wen

Office hours: Room 210, M 11:00-13:00, W 14:00-16:00, or by appointment (Zoom appointments are also available by request)

Email: wenc20@mcmaster.ca

II. Course Description

This in-person/live-streamed synchronous course will explore the theology and ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), the renowned twentieth-century German Lutheran pastor and theologian whose theological courage amidst the intensity of historical crisis to proclaim and live from a Christ-centered communally-oriented conviction of the Gospel's "costly grace" continues to inspire many to think with and after him. The course involves close readings of primary and secondary texts. Students will take turns presenting and leading discussions about the assigned readings throughout the semester and will also write a major research paper that will be presented towards the end of the course.

III. Course Objectives

With respect to MDC's transformational paradigm of "Knowing...Being...Doing," by the end of the course, students will:

Knowing (K)

- Demonstrate a working knowledge of theological and ethical themes, concepts, historically-contextualized developments, ongoing debates and discussions, and practical life and ministry implications surrounding the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Being (B)

- Cultivate further awareness of the limits of one's own theological positions, so as to be self-aware of the continual need for humility and a pastoral dialogical posture with regard to theological engagement, even while having the courage to maintain theological convictions.
- Appropriately develop convictions about Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics to oneself so as to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

Doing (D)

- Use their own words to explain relevant concepts and their significance concerning the various proposals by or concerning Bonhoeffer which will be explored.
- Engage critically and constructively with the essential discussions and themes which have to do with the aforementioned theological loci.

IV. Course Resources

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.

Every effort has been made to ensure that all the required readings chosen are available full text through McMaster Divinity College's different online databases (or by way of other free resources that are available online). The assigned readings listed below are ordered in accordance with the suggested sequence for reading. A select bibliography of recommended resources can also be found below.

Required Readings

Tietz = Tietz, Christiane. *Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Translated by Victoria J. Barnett. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016. [[DTL](#)]

TBR = Green, Clifford J. and Michael P. DeJonge. *The Bonhoeffer Reader*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. [[DTL](#)]

*At the discretion of the instructor, other shorter journal- or chapter(s)-length readings might be assigned for specific weeks as the semester progresses.

Recommended Resources

Bethge, Eberhard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Revised edition. Translated by Erich Mosbacher, Peter and Betty Ross, Frank Clarke, and William Glen-Doepel under the editorship of Edwin Robertson. Revised and edited by Victoria J. Barnett. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. [[DTL](#)]

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. General editor, Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr. 17 vols. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996–2014. [[DTL](#)]

De Gruchy, John W., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. [[DTL](#)]

Green, Clifford J. and Guy C. Carter, eds. *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. [[DTL](#)]

The International Bonhoeffer Society: <https://bonhoeffersociety.org/resources/>.

Mawson, Michael G. and Philip G. Ziegler, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. [DTL]

V. Course Grading Scale and Activity/Assignment Weights

Grading Scale

Percent Grade	*Letter Grade	Grade Point (12pt scale)	Grade Point (4pt scale)	Grading Guidelines
90–100	A+	12	4.0	for work displaying mastery of the subject matter, creativity, and individualized integration of insights and their relationship(s)
85–89	A	11	4.0	
80–84	A-	10	3.7	
77–79	B+	9	3.3	for work displaying a good level of competence and comprehension
73–76	B	8	3.0	
70–72	B-	7	2.7	
67–69	C+	6	2.3	for work which meets basic course requirements but demonstrates a low level of comprehension
63–66	C	5	2.0	
60–62	C-	4	1.7	
57–59	D+	3	1.3	for work that falls below minimum standards
53–56	D	2	1.0	
50–52	D-	1	0.7	
0–49	F	0	0	unsatisfactory work and/or failure to meet course requirements

*Note that in order to earn credit for this course, you must pass with a grade higher than a D+ (i.e., C- or better). Please see the appropriate handbook for more information about the grading scale, esp. if you are an Advanced Elective (e.g., DPT) student.

Assignment Category Weights

Category	Weight
Class Attendance and Participation	10%
Reading and MDC Bonhoeffer Conference Attendance Log	10%
Reading Presentation and Discussion Facilitation (1)	15%
Reading Presentation and Discussion Facilitation (2)	15%
Oral Presentation of Research Paper	10%
Critical-Constructive Research Paper	40%
	100%

VI. Course Requirements and Expectations

Advanced Elective Students: Students taking this course for Advanced Elective credit (e.g., DPT) will be provided with a syllabus supplement outlining additional requirements that they must meet to receive credit towards their degree program. Advanced Elective students can expect their course requirements to include doctoral levels of reading and research-supported writing, as well as a presentation of their research in a format appropriate to the course. For any questions about what to expect for Advanced Elective requirements in this particular course, please contact the course instructor. **Note:** The syllabus supplement will be made available no sooner than ten days after enrollment in the course. Advanced Elective students are encouraged to register for this course as early as possible so as to ensure that they are made aware of their course requirements well in advance of the course start date.

Expectations and Requirements for ALL STUDENTS Regardless of Program or Specialization

– Class Attendance and Participation (10% of Final Grade)

As graduate-level students, you will be expected to attend all classes in person and actively participate in the interactive portions of the course. By way of in-class lectures and discussion, this component of the course incorporates all three categories of our course objectives as knowledge is built upon (K), the transformational cultivation of both humility and courage of conviction is exemplified in our interactions (B), and as the use of one's own words to express theological ideas and their significance as well as to critically and constructively engage in theological discussion is practiced (D). Due to the give-and-take nature of theological discussions, it is inevitable that there will be differing opinions that are held and expressed. While students (and instructor) are allowed to sincerely express their honest views, it is expected that such will be done respectfully, especially amidst instances of controversy and/or disagreement. As the course instructor, it is my responsibility to manage the classroom environment so that the classroom is a safe place for respectful theological conversation. In instances where an individual is dominating the discussion, I also reserve the right to ask them to take a step back for the purpose of allowing others ample opportunity to participate. Students who violate our classroom guidelines may be dismissed from class.

– Reading and MDC Bonhoeffer Conference Attendance Log (10% of Final Grade)

To meet the objective of developing the desired working knowledge of theological and ethical themes, concepts, and ongoing debates and discussions regarding Bonhoeffer (K), students are required to read the “Required Readings” that have been assigned above as well as attend the MDC Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference on March 18, 2026. On their honor, they will fill out a “Reading and MDC Bonhoeffer Conference Attendance Log” form provided by the instructor via the course's [A2L](#) site (essentially, a check-list and a blank space for a short paragraph reflecting on the conference) prior to **this assignment's deadline (10:00pm on Thursday, April 2, 2026)**. The “Reading and MDC Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference Attendance Log” can be submitted in any desired format (e.g., MS Word .doc or .docx, PDF, JPEG, etc.) using the course's [A2L](#) site.

- *Reading Presentation and Discussion Facilitation (1) (15% of Final Grade)*
- *Reading Presentation and Discussion Facilitation (2) (15% of Final Grade)*

Due to the intended seminar format of this course, students will take turns leading portions of our in-class group discussion through a brief 10–15-minute summary presentation of the selected assigned reading material (more on this during the first day of class) followed by facilitation of the ensuing conversation through at least three or four questions for discussion. A one-to-two-page handout which serves as the presentation’s outline and in-class discussion guide is also to be prepared for the entire group. Outside research beyond the assigned readings is encouraged if such will help students to understand the theological figure or perspective that they are presenting about.

This type of presentation and discussion facilitation fulfills our class objectives of helping students to absorb and consolidate knowledge (K), cultivate a humble theological tone as well as courage of conviction, both of which are transformational in nature (B), and use one’s own words to explain theological content and their significance while also critically and constructively engaging that content (D). Assessment will be based upon overall preparedness whose quality of presentation style and theological content, both orally and as written on the class handout/discussion guide, reflects the course objectives of (K), (B), and (D) while staying within allocated time limits.

Depending on final enrolment numbers, students should expect to play this role twice during the semester, each time counting for 15% of their final grade. Date and theological figure assignments will be allocated during the first or second week of the course. Please note that if class enrollment exceeds ideal conditions for this type of seminar-style of instruction, an adjustment to the syllabus will be made to accommodate a larger class size (e.g., replacing this type of assignment with a different assignment).

- *Oral Presentation of Research (10% of Final Grade)*
- *Critical-Constructive Research Paper (40% of Final Grade)*

A critical-constructive research paper of 3,750-5,750 words which meticulously follows the [MDC style guide](#) can be on anything that is of interest to the student so long as it has something to do with the course content (i.e., the theology and ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and so long as it clearly argues a main thesis from beginning to end (with a proper “thesis statement” explicitly included in the introduction section of the paper). Unless otherwise approved by the instructor, students should choose one or two main theological figures or perspectives to engage with in this paper regarding their respective theological thought and its implications.

The research paper assignment fulfills the course objectives of demonstrating key knowledge (K), allowing transformational opportunity to further cultivate a humble theological posture, yet at the same time maintaining courage of theological convictions (B), and the use of one’s own words to explain theological content and its significance while also entering into critical and constructive engagement with that content (D).

While a more comprehensive list of suggested topics for this research paper will be provided via [A2L](#), *students who wish to write about something else should ask me for permission prior to writing the paper or its proposal*. Along such lines, research questions should be framed in a way that leads to argumentation (e.g., “How might Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s social ontology, as

related to his constructive use of *Geist* and ‘Christ existing as community,’ be constructively relevant to the contemporary theological construction and cultural relevance of ecclesiology?”) rather than merely description (e.g., “What is Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology?”).

In terms of program specializations, the following are examples of research topics which can be written about:

- CC: Critically and/or constructively discuss the contemporary ecclesial and cultural relevance of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the Confessing Church (as opposed to the German Christians movement of the time).
- CW: Critically and/or constructively discuss how Bonhoeffer’s theology and ethics can be a resource for contemporary issues like racism or genocide.

For professional masters-level students, a *minimum* of 8-10 academic sources should be consulted (e.g., peer-reviewed books, chapters from edited volumes, journal articles, etc., and not devotional books, blog posts, Wikipedia, etc.) and along with footnotes, a full bibliography is to be included at the end of the paper which is inclusive of every source cited within the paper while *not including* sources which were not cited in the paper.

A “Research Paper Checklist” will be made available via the course’s [A2L](#) site and more information about this assignment will be given on the first day of class. In the meantime, please keep in mind the following key dates:

- **10:00pm on Friday, January 23, 2026:** a research paper proposal of at least one paragraph that speaks to your proposed research question, tentative thesis statement, and motivation for research is to be submitted via the course’s [A2L](#) site along with a tentative bibliography at the end of the same document.
- **10:00pm on Friday, March 13, 2026:** a full first draft of the research paper is due via the course’s [A2L](#) site so that I have the opportunity to give you formative feedback along with an initial grade for the assignment.
- **Tuesdays during class time on March 24, March 31, and April 7, 2026:** students will be assigned one of these three dates to orally present about their research papers to others in the class. The grade given for the oral presentations will be based upon overall preparedness whose quality of presentation style and theological content reflects the course objectives of (K), (B), and (D) while staying within the allocated time limit.

Note: Those interested in also presenting their paper at the MDC Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference on March 18, 2026 should submit their paper proposal to the conference organizers in accordance with the instructions given in the conference’s call for papers.

- **10:00pm on Thursday, April 2, 2026:** the final draft of the research paper is due via the course’s [A2L](#) site for those interested in making revisions to their earlier submitted first draft, as per the formative feedback received.

VII. Tentative Course Schedule

(subject to change, especially in consideration of final course enrolment)

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings and Assignments
1	Jan 7, 2026	Course Introduction	Tietz, chs. 1–7
2	Jan 14, 2026	Bonhoeffer in Context	Tietz, chs. 8–10 and Epilogue
3	Jan 21, 2026	TBR, Part 1: Student Writings (1)— Discussion of ch. 4: “Jesus Christ and the Essence of Christianity”	TBR, chs. 1–5 Friday 1/23 – Research Paper Proposal Due.
4	Jan 28, 2026	TBR, Part 1: Student Writings (2)— Discussion of ch. 7: “Inaugural Lecture: The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology”	TBR, chs. 6–10
5	Feb 4, 2026	TBR, Part 2: University Lectures (1)— Discussion of ch. 13: <i>Creation and Fall</i>	TBR, chs. 11–13
6	Feb 11, 2026	TBR, Part 2: University Lectures (2)— Discussion of ch. 14: “Lectures on Christology”	TBR, ch. 14
7	Feb 18, 2026	No Class – Reading Week TBR, Parts 3&4: Ecumenical and Pastoral Writings; Theology and the Third Reich [read on your own]	TBR, chs. 15–28
8	Feb 25, 2026	TBR, Part 4: Theology and the Third Reich—Discussion of chs. 21–24 TBR, Part 5: Christian Life and Community—Discussion of chs. 29–30: <i>Discipleship and Life Together</i>	TBR, chs. 29–32
9	Mar 4, 2026	TBR, Part 6: Christian Ethics and Public Life—Discussion of chs. 33–34, 37–39	TBR, chs. 33–41
10	Mar 11, 2026	TBR, Part 7: Theology from Prison: Worldly, Religionless Christianity— Discussion of ch. 44: <i>Letters and Papers from Prison</i>	TBR, chs. 42–44 and Appendix Friday, 3/13 – Research Paper First Draft Due.
11	Mar 18, 2026	MDC Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference (Details TBA)	
12	Mar 25, 2026	Research Paper Presentations (1)	
13	Apr 1, 2026	Research Paper Presentations (2)	Thursday, 4/2 – Reading Log Due; Research Paper Final Draft Due.
14	Apr 8, 2026	Research Paper Presentations (3) Course Conclusion	

VIII. Course Policies.

It is the responsibility of the student to consult the student handbook(s)/catalogue for additional institutional policies.

Submission of Assignments – Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments are to be submitted via the [A2L](#) platform in MS Word (.docx) format so that I am more easily able to provide comments and feedback. Assignments submitted in PDF format may receive less comment and feedback. All written assignments will be run through TurnItIn (a plagiarism checking software).

Late Assignments – “Late” is defined as any time after the above stated deadlines (e.g., if the stated deadline is 10:00pm, 10:01pm on the same day counts as “one day late”; 10:01pm on the next day counts as “two days late,” etc.). Assignments will be penalized 5 points per day late.

Style – All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses, <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in points/grade reductions.

Illness Policy – If you need to miss any part of the course due to illness, please contact me as soon as possible so as to ensure that you do not get behind with regard to the course content (and, where applicable, especially when assignments are due).

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).

Disclaimer – © 2025–2026 by Clement Yung Wen and MDC. This syllabus is the property of the instructor and MDC. It is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class. Students will be kept apprised of any changes.