

**Introduction to Eastern Liturgy**  
**MS 3P1590**  
**McMaster Divinity College**  
**Winter Semester 2026**

**Specializations:** CC, CW, PS

Asynchronous Online. A2L.  
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**Course Description:**

The word "liturgy" is associated with Christian worship, meaning that every Christian act of worship or ritual is a liturgy. Liturgy is the public prayer of the church. However, it has become more commonly used in the context of the Eucharist. Liturgy aims to study worship texts to understand the various elements of worship academically. This understanding is vital for participants because it reflects the worship that has been performed in the early centuries of the church. The study of Eastern liturgy offers a crucial understanding of Christian history, theology, and spirituality, as well as a rich and diverse liturgical tradition. This course provides an introduction to the liturgical celebrations of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, encompassing the Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopian traditions, their liturgy, practices, theology, and spirituality.

**Course Objectives:**

Knowing:

- This course offers students a broad overview of the essential development of liturgy and ritual over the centuries. Students will also gain an understanding of the liturgical foundation and background knowledge, which deepens their appreciation for theological and spiritual thought within the church.

Being:

- By the end of the course, students will have a broad learning of the basic principles of liturgical studies in theology and spirituality in the Oriental Orthodox Churches.
- It will help them to have a basic knowledge of these churches, their worship, and rituals.
- Also to help students to understand a public worship and to share their faith perspective with others.

Doing:

- Strengthen each student's ability to emphasize the significance of the ritual approach to understanding God's mystery.

### **Required Books:**

- Alexopoulos Stafanos and Johnson E. Maxwell. *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*. Collegeville, MN. Liturgical press, 2022.
- Aimé-Georges Martimort, et al. (ed.) *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*; translated by Matthew O'Connell. 4 vol. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1986-1988.

### **Method:** *Avenue to Learn*

The course is asynchronous and can be accessed through *Avenue to Learn*. Weekly online access is available via A2L at [avenue.mcmaster.ca](http://avenue.mcmaster.ca).

### **Assignments:**

- The first paper 5-7 pages: this paper focusing on one of the topics listed in the syllabus. It is due on February 26.
- The second paper 10-12 pages: Students must submit a research paper on liturgy in general. The second paper is due on April 6. Both papers should be emailed to the instructor.
- Book review 3-5 pages: Each student is required to read a book on the subject and discuss its strengths, weaknesses, the author's argument, and what they learned from it. The book has to be approved by the instructor in order to make sure that it is an academic book.
- On line Discussion: A weekly discussion will be held. The instructor will post one question, and students must write a response of 150–200 words in reply.
- **Note:** The first and second papers has to be sent to the instructor via email.

### **Grading:**

- The first paper: 30%
- The second paper: 45%
- Book review: 15%
- On line discussion: 10%

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **January 5**

- Introduction: Syllabus  
Introduction to Liturgy
  - Why study liturgy?
  - What is liturgy? (See Frank Seen on page 16)

## January 12

- Introduction to Liturgy
  - Why do we worship? (See Frank Seen on page 14)
  - How does liturgy relate to culture? (See Frank Seen, p. 42)
- Oriental Orthodox Churches: Who are they?

## January 19

- History of Liturgy
  - The first four centuries (Didache, Justin, Tertullian, Ambrose)
  - Early liturgy
  - (See Frank Seen on page 17, 35), (Jasper, p. 21, 49), (Adolf Adam, p. 29)
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. 1, 19–43

## January 26

- Structure of Liturgy
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. 1, 85-225 includes:
    1. The Assembly, 89–111 (Adolf Adam, p. 56, 59)
    2. From Local Assembly to Universal Church 113–129
    3. The Dialogue between God and His People 131–171
    4. Liturgical Signs, 173–225

## February 2

- Theology of Liturgy
  - Introduction to Eastern Liturgy
    1. The Rites of Christian East 20–33
    2. Methodology
    3. Phases in the Evolution of Influence in the development of Eastern Theology 20
    4. The Characteristics of Eastern Liturgies 22
    5. The Liturgical Rites of the Christian East 23
      - Armenian Rite 25
      - The Coptic Rite 30
      - The Ethiopian Rite 31
      - The West Syrian 33
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. 1, 227–280 includes:
    - The liturgical fact, 233–240
    - The Liturgy as Act of the Church, 240–248
    - The Ministerial Exercise of the Priesthood of Christ 249–251
    - Mystery in the Biblical and Christian Tradition 254–259
    - The Christian Liturgy and the “Time of Salvation” 259–262
    - Celebration of the Paschal Mystery 262–266
    - The Liturgy, “Teaching of the Church” 274–276
    - The Liturgy as Witness to Tradition 277–280

## **February 9**

- Sacraments, Eucharist
  - Introduction to Eastern Liturgy (See Adolf Adam, p. 139)
    - Anaphoral Structure 90–96
    - The Armenian Rite 92
    - The Coptic Rite 95
    - The Ethiopian Rite 96
    - The West Syrian 96
    - The Liturgy of the Word 100–105
  
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. II, 7–36; 49–106
    - From Supper to Mass 7–19
    - From Jewish “Blessing” to Christian Eucharistic Prayer 20–36
    - The Entrance Rites 49–58
    - The Liturgy of the Word 59–68
    - The General intercessions or Prayers of the Faithful 69–75
    - The Preparation of the Gifts 76–84
    - The Eucharistic Prayer 85–106

### **February 16–20: Reading Week–No class**

## **February 23**

- Eucharist
  - Introduction to Eastern Liturgy:
  - The Anaphoras 108–132
    - The Armenian Anaphora of St. Athanasius 108
    - Coptic Rite 120
    - Ethiopian Rite 125
    - West Syrian Rite 132
  
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. II, 125–186

### **First paper due**

## **March 2**

- Eucharist
  - Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy: Communion & Dismissal Rite 141–152
    - Liturgy of Presanctified 146
    - Eastern eucharistic Theology 147
    - Eucharistic Consecration 148
    - Liturgical Commentaries 151
    - “Life of Christ” Symbolism in the Liturgy 152
  
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. II, 107–123
    - The Communion 107–123

## March 9

- Christian Initiation and Reconciliation
  - Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy 41–67
    - a. The Making of Catechumens:
      - West Syrian 45
      - Coptic & Ethiopian 47
    - b. Prebaptismal Rite and Baptism: (Adolf Adam, p. 114; 180)
    - c. Prebaptismal anointing 48
      - Armenian 48
      - West Syrian 49
    - d. Consecration of the Baptismal waters 51
      - Armenian 53
      - Coptic & Ethiopian 54
      - West Syrian 54
    - e. Formula of Baptism
      - Armenian 59
      - Coptic & Ethiopian 59
    - f. Chrismation Table 59
      - West Syrian 60
    - g. Chrismation 60
      - Armenian 61
      - Coptic & Ethiopian 62
      - West Syrian 62
    - h. First communion 65
    - i. Reconciliation, 67–83
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. III
    - Christian Initiation 1–63
    - Penance & Reconciliation 101–115.

## March 16

- Sacraments of Marriage and Ordination (Adolf Adam, p. 228, 226)
  - Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy:
  - Rites of Marriage 233–260
    - The Armenian 234
    - The Coptic Rite 243
    - Ethiopian Rite 248
    - West Syrian 254
    - Conclusion 260
  - Ordination 262–275
    - Proclamation of the Result of the Election 264
    - The Bidding 266
    - Prayer of the People for the Ordinand 268
    - The Imposition of the Gospel 269
    - The Sign of the Cross 269

- The Imposition of the Hand 270
- The Ordination Prayer 271
- For a Bishop 272
- For a Presbyter 272
- For a Deacon 275
- The Church at Prayer, vol. III
- Ordination 139–162
  - Ordination in the Early Church 141–144
  - Ordination in the Eastern churches 144–149
- Marriage 185–188; 192–197
  - The First Three Centuries 186–189
  - The East: The Rite of Crowning 192–197

### **March 23**

- Time in the Liturgy
  - Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy, 162–183
  - The Liturgical Year 162
    - The Armenian Rite 163
    - The Coptic Rite 170
    - The Ethiopian Rite 174
    - The West Syrian Rite 183
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. IV, 1–150
    - Sunday and the Week 11
    - Sunday 11–25
    - The Week 25–29
    - The Year 31
    - The Easter Cycle 33–76
    - The Christmas Season 77–88
    - The Feasts of the Lord in Ordinary Time 97
    - The Transfiguration of the Lord 97–98
    - The Triumph of the Cross 99–100
    - The Feast of Dedication 100–101
    - The Veneration of the Saints 108–117
    - The Veneration of Mary 130–132; 134–136

### **March 30**

- The Liturgy of the Hours
  - Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy, 185–214
    - a. The Liturgy of the Hours 185
    - b. The Psalter 187
      - The Armenian 193
      - The Ethiopian 205
      - The West Syrian 214
      - Conclusion 222

- The Church at Prayer, vol IV, 151–275
  - a. The Hours of Prayer 157
    - Jewish Prayer in the Time of Christ 157
    - The Example of the Prayer of Jesus 160
    - The Ideal of the Apostolic Community: Ceaseless Prayer 162
    - The Hours of Christian Prayer and Their Symbolism in the Church in the Third Century 164
    - The Communal Prayer of the Hours after the Peace of Constantine (Fourth-Fifth Centuries) 170
    - The Liturgy of the Hours in the Mystery of the Church 187
    - The Place of the Psalms in Christian Prayer 190
    - The Delivery of the Psalms 201
    - The Biblical Canticles 207
    - Hymnography 211
    - Hymns in the Proper Sense: The Eastern Tradition 213
    - Biblical Readings 220
  - b. The Varied Forms of the Liturgy of the Hours 233
    - In the East: Egypt and Ethiopia 234
    - The Armenian 240
    - The Western Syrian 240

## April 6

- Anointing the Sick and Christian Burial (Adolf Adam, p. 193)
  - Introduction to Eastern Liturgy: Healing, 291–318
    - a. The Early evidence 292
    - b. Hagiopolite 296
      - Coptic & Ethiopian 302
      - West Syrian 307
      - Armenian 314
      - Conclusion 318
  - Rites for Christian Burial, 318-351
    - Armenian 319
    - West Syrian 329
    - Coptic 342
    - Ethiopian 349
    - Conclusion 351
  - The Church at Prayer, vol. III Sick, 117–137; Christian Death, 221–240
    - a. Blessing of Oil for the Sick 118–120
      - The Anointing of the Sick in the Eastern Churches 124–126
    - b. The Celebration of death as a “Passover” 222–224
      - The Rites of Funerals 238–240

- Conclusion: Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgy (p. 363–383)

## Second paper due

### For Further Reading:

Adam, Adolf. *Foundations of Liturgy: An Introduction to Its History and Practice*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical, 1992.

Bouyer, Louis. *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Bradshaw, Paul F. *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical, 1996.

———. (ed.) *Essays in Early Eastern Initiation*. Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove, 1988.

———. (ed.) *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Gelineau, Joseph. *The Eucharistic Prayer: Praise of the whole Assembly: A Search for a Celebratory "model" for "making Eucharist together"*. Washington, D.C.: Pastoral, 1985.

Hanson, R.P.C. *Eucharistic Offering in the Early Church*. Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove, 1979.

Jasper, R.C.D. and G.J. Cuming (eds.). *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edited by Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson. ACC 94. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019.

Johnson, Maxwell E. (ed.) *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical, 1995.

Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.

Senn, Frank C. *Introduction to Christian Liturgy*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

———. *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell E. Johnson. *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*. Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical, 2022.

Wainwright, Geoffrey, and Karen Westerfield Tucker, eds. *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

### **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).

### **Highly Recommended for Online (Asynchronous) Courses**

#### – Presence and Meaningful Participation

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.”

#### – Online Etiquette

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.

### **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](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

**Note:** This syllabus is the instructor's property and is prepared using currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.