BAPTIST HISTORY & POLITY
TH 3P1080/CH 3P1060

McMaster Divinity College
Fall Semester 2026

Specializations: Christian History Worldview (CW), Pastoral Studies (PS)

Regular Asynchronous Weekly Online
Occasional *Optional* Online (times TBD)

Professor: Gordon L. Heath
gheath@mcmaster.ca
Office Hours (#221): Monday 11:00am-1:00pm; Wednesday 9:00-11:00am (Zoom or inperson)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Baptists are one of the world's largest Protestant denominations, numbering close to 100,000,000 adherents. This course is an introduction to the history, doctrine, organization, and style of Baptist congregational life and mission. It begins with the birth of the movement in the early 1600s in England, and continues to the present-day development of a global multi-ethnic movement. Special attention will be given to the development of Canadian Baptist churches, and cultural engagement in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Note that this course is required by the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec (CBOQ) for accreditation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing
- To survey the major ideas, personalities, and developments in Baptist life.
- To provide an understanding of how the Baptists have grown and developed in a variety of countries and continents.
- To place the contemporary issues Baptists face within a broader historical context.
- To know how Baptists are similar to, and different from, other expressions of Christianity.

Being
- To gain practical insight into the work of being a leader within a local Baptist church.

- To understand the role of Baptist distinctives and practices in the development of effective ministry within the CBOQ.

Doing

- To develop skills in maintaining and nurturing a healthy, effective, and personally satisfying vocation.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Gordon L. Heath, Dallas Friesen, and Taylor Murray. *Baptists in Canada: Their History and Polity*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2021.
- David Bebbington. *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People.* Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010.
- Sharon Bowler, ed. *Canadian Baptist Women.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016.
- Taylor Murray and Paul R. Wilson, eds. *Canadian Baptist Fundamentalism*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2022.
- Gordon L. Heath and Dudley Brown, eds. *The Black Baptist Experience in Canada*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2025.
- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- *Common Expression: A Canadian Baptist Manual for Worship and Service*. Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Ministries, 2020.
- Various online primary sources made available in class.

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.

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 to build their own (or church) library. Students are *NOT* required to purchase or read these books.

- Harry A. Renfree. *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada*. Mississauga, ON: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988.
- Shirley Bentall. *From Sea to Sea: The Canadian Baptist Federation, 1944–1994*. Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1994.
- Stuart Ivison and Fred Rosser. *The Baptists in Upper and Lower Canada before 1820*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956.
- Robert E. Johnson. *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Keith G. Jones and Ian M. Randall, eds. *Counter-Cultural Communities: Baptistic Life in*

Twentieth Century Europe. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008.

- Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins. *Baptists in America: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Bill J. Leonard. *Baptist Ways: A History*. Valley Forge: Judson, 2003.
- Leon McBeth. *The Baptist Heritage.* Nashville: Broadman, 1987.
- William H. Brackney. *Baptists in North America*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds. *Baptist Theologians*. Nashville: Broadman, 1990.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Position Paper: 5%
- Online Engagement (and Reading Report): 30%
- Biographical Presentation: 20%
- Resolving Board Issues: 15%
- Research Paper or Denominational Newspaper Summary: 30%

This entire course is online through the avenuetolearn system at McMaster. In other words, all instruction will take place online through recorded lectures, online posts, etc. There will be times for "face-to-face" Zoom conversations, but they will be optional for students.

The following assignments will be explained in detail in a video presentation by the professor.

- Position Paper (5%)

Students will write a two-page position paper on why they are (or are not) a Baptist. This not a "research paper" that requires a trip to the library, rather, it is a personal statement of where students are in relationship to the movement.

- Online Engagement (& reading report) (30%)

Students will complete weekly readings and watch lectures, as well as respond to posted comments by other students and professor. This is an important part of the class that allows for interaction and engagement by all. There will also be occasional *optional* virtual face-to-face meetings for times of discussion. At the end of the course students will report on how much the texts they have read – and that will also factor into this grade.

- Biographical Presentation (20%)

Each student will post on avenue to learn a five-minute video summary of a prominent Baptist's life and contribution. Students will comment on avenue to learn on other presentations.

- Resolving Board Issues (15%)

Students are to prepare papers that resolve "board issues" discussed in class. Particular attention

is to be paid to Baptist distinctives and context. Students will post their papers online and respond to comments from other students.

- Research Paper or Denominational Paper Summary (30%)

Research Paper
The ten-page research paper provides an opportunity for students to pursue an area of research that intrigues them. The topic for the paper should relate to the student's specialization. Results of research will be shared with the class by way of a five-minute video.

- Christian History and Worldview

The research for this specialization should focus on developing critical knowledge of Baptist history, or a deeper awareness of Baptist theology/worldview.

- Pastoral Studies

Research for this specialization can go in a number of directions. It can focus on a theological construction of one's theological position in regard to an issue related to Baptist history and polity. It can deal with developing a strategy for dealing with issues related to Baptist history and polity. It can deal with Baptist resources for pastoral ministry. And so on.

Denominational Paper Summary
The ten-page assignment summaries the major themes of one year of the *Canadian Baptist*, the bi-weekly paper of the CBOQ. The aim is to get a sense of what issues were being addressed in a chosen year. The *Canadian Baptist* has been digitized, and the years available for student access will be made available when the semester starts. Results of research will be shared with the class by way of a five-minute video.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Academic Honesty
Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting the authorship or ownership of written work through deception or other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include copying or using unauthorized aids during tests or examinations; plagiarism, that is, presenting another person's (or generative AI's) words, ideas, data, or creative work as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement and citation; or submitting work for credit in more than one course without instructor permission.
A special note about Generative AI: Students are expected to do their own thinking and write their own papers and assignments. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work. The use of AI to produce content that is then submitted as though it were the student's own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. While AI tools may be used to correct errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI must <u>not</u> be used to translate assignments from a student's native language into English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in the English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

AODA
In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster

Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (https://sas.mcmaster.ca/) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term in which they are enrolled. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.
Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC)**: sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

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 student will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments. When referencing biblical texts, students should preserve the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God while using gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Biblical quotations should be taken from a gender-inclusive translation such as: NRSVue (2022), NIV (2011), CEB (2011), NLT (1996), or CEV (1995).

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

College Style for Submission of Written Work
All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the **McMaster Divinity College Press Style Guide** https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/
Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Online (Asynchronous) Courses

Presence and Meaningful Participation
Presence and participation in this course are expected and a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well they will score in the course. 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.
Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the

expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. Students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week both within and outside of the learning management system (Avenue to Learn).

Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for both classmates and the instructor. This is even more important in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that people use to interpret communication are largely absent. Therefore, students should be especially mindful of how their words may be interpreted by those who read them. Course instructors will monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course.

Unless noted otherwise, submitted written assignments requires conformity to the MDC style guide.

Essays must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. All other essays will be considered late. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 5% per day (not including weekends) 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 and may not be returned at the same time as the papers submitted on the due date. Submit an electronic copy on the due date or a hard copy before the due date if you are unable to be in class on the due date because of a foreknown absence.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Weekly Online Instruction Accessed Through "avenuetolearn": avenue.mcmaster.ca.

Occasional *Optional* Face-to-Face Accessed Through https://mcmaster.zoom.us/j/6185125107
(time for this is TBD and will be posted on avenuetolearn)

Week Starting Sept 14: Introduction to Class & Reformation Era

- Reading: Heath, *Doing Church History*, all

Week Starting Sept 21: Baptist Origins

- Reading: Heath, Friesen, Murray, *Baptists in Canada*, ch.1
- Position Paper to be submitted by 11:00pm, Tuesday, Sept 22

Week Starting Sept 28: Baptists in America & Canada

- Reading: Heath, Friesen, Murray, *Baptists in Canada*, ch.2

Week Starting Oct 5: Baptists around the Globe

- Reading: Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries*, all

Week Starting Oct 12: *Reading Week (no class)*

Week Starting Oct 19: How Baptist Churches Work
- Reading: Heath, Friesen, Murray, *Baptists in Canada*, chs.3-7

Week Starting Oct 26: Biographical Presentations
- Reading: Bowler, ed., *Canadian Baptist Women*, all
- Biographical Presentation to be submitted by 11:00pm, Tuesday, Oct 27

Week Staring Nov 2: Baptist Distinctives I
Reading: Murray and Wilson, eds. *Canadian Baptist Fundamentalism*, all

Week Starting Nov 9: Baptist Distinctives II

Week Starting Nov 16: Baptist Distinctives III
- Resolving Board Issues to be submitted by 11:00pm, Tuesday, Nov 17

Week Starting Nov 23: Baptist Organizations
Reading: Heath and Brown, eds. *The Black Baptist Experience in Canada*, all

Week Starting Nov 30: Baptist Issues

Week Starting Dec 7: Research Paper Presentations
- Research Paper or /Denominational Paper Summary to be submitted by 11:00pm, Tuesday, Dec 8

Week Starting Dec 14: Looking to the Future
- Reading: Heath, Friesen, Murray, *Baptists in Canada*, ch.8

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.