



McMaster Divinity
College

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)

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.

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: Baptist 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 summarizes 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 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 Generative AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work for you. Using AI to produce content for you and then submitting that content as if you produced 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. Additionally, although there may be value in using an AI tool to correct mistakes in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI is not to be used for translating from your native language to English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

GuardMe Statement

Students at McMaster Divinity College have access to the GuardMe Student Support Program (GMSSP), which offers free, confidential mental health and wellness support 24/7. Through the program, students can connect with counsellors, access helpful tools and resources, and receive support anytime, from anywhere. Support is available by phone (1-844-451-9700) or visit gmssp.org to download the Student Support App.

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

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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 are expected to have their camera on for Zoom discussions.

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.

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](https://avenuetolearn.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](https://avenuetolearn.mcmaster.ca))

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 Starting 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.