

SYLLABUS—DEFENDING YOUR FAITH

Defending Your Faith in a Postmodern Society (NT 2XA3 and MS 2XA3)

McMaster Divinity College (MDC)
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Office hours: By appointment

Summer Term 2014
June 9–13, 2014
Mon: 11:30–4:00
Tue–Thu: 9:00–4:00
(Wed chapel: 11:30–12:00)
Fri: 9:00–12:00

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed with the pastor, Bible teacher, and lay minister in mind. It integrates historical Jesus research with Christian apologetics. In today's society, raising one's voice, rolling up one's eyes, or retorting 'Just believe, then you will understand' simply cannot convince people to believe in Christianity. The questions a postmodern society or an atheist raise are many and serious: does God exist; did Jesus of Nazareth live on earth; is the historical Jesus the Christ of faith; is Christ really both divine and human; did Christ really resurrect; or how do we explain the supernatural? How can or should the church respond to these questions? Christians for the most part have responded through moral, rational, and philosophical arguments as well as personal witnessing. This course tackles the issue by way of studying the historical Christ, the centerpiece of the Christian religion. Participants will be challenged to formulate their own response to these challenging problems and issues.

Specializations: Biblical Studies, Pastoral Studies, Christian Worldview, Church & Culture

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

- a. Knowing
 - Participants will become familiar with atheistical arguments.
 - Participants will become familiar with the major moral, rational, and philosophical arguments of Christian apologetics—the defense of the Christian faith.
 - Participants will learn the key issues and principles involved in the study of the historical Jesus and will use them to formulate a biblically based, Christ-centered response to people who question their faith and the Christian religion.
- b. Being
 - Participants will mature in their spiritual and communal life by being actively engaged in the continual study of the historical Jesus and reflect upon how it relates to one's theology, life, and ministry.
 - Participants will be encouraged by the person, life, and ministry of Jesus, and by how people throughout the centuries have sought to know him in various ways.

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c. Doing

- Participants will engage a wide range of sources, including but not limited to historical Jesus research studies, Christian apologetics, and atheistical arguments.
- Participants will gain additional resources and means to apply what they have learned in the course to their ministerial vocation and place(s) of responsibility in Christian ministry.
- Participants will integrate the things learned from the course with their ministry in the church, especially with reference to a biblical defense of the Christian faith.

III. TEXTBOOKS

a. Required Textbooks

- Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
- Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).
- John W. Loftus and Randal Rauser, *God or Godless? One Atheist, One Christian, Twenty Controversial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

a. Course Readings (c. 525 pages)

Participants should read all the textbooks required for the course.

b. Attendance and Participation (15%)

Learning is a collaborative effort. Participants are expected to attend all class sessions and to come prepared for class discussions. They should engage the class during each class session by way of a question, comment, or suggestion with reference to the topic of discussion. The instructor, in the course of each day's lecture, will ask questions from the assigned book reading and from the class lecture of the day for participants to reflect upon and discuss. Participants may on occasion be divided into groups for group discussion or workshop.

c. Group Debate (25%)

Participants will read *God or Godless* and will trace the main lines of arguments of Randal and John, outlining and writing them down on paper. The outline is due at the start of class time on the day of the debate. Participants will want to retain a copy for their own use in the debate. The outline should include the argumentative supplements, biblical evidence, and other elements learned so far from the class lessons and course readings for purposes of the debate. A five-page single-spaced outline is sufficient for this assignment.

The class will be divided into two groups. One group will defend the case for “God,” and the other group will defend the case for “godless.” Each group will select their own speakers for the opening statement, the rebuttal, and the closing argument. An invited judge or a panel of judges will determine the winner of the debate. If the instructor was

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able to generate enough funds, there will be a prize for the winner, which will be shared with the losing group.

d. Reflection Paper (20%)

In this paper the student will reflect upon the relationship between historical Jesus studies and Christian apologetics, providing a critical response to what has been done so far and a suggestion as to how the church should respond to the issues that a postmodern society and atheists raised. (**Note:** Because participants are engaged in various contexts in ministries and are registered in different areas of program specializations, responses will also vary from one person to another.) This reflection paper will reference the three assigned textbooks. Research and documentation are not necessary for this paper.

Reference to the three textbooks should simply be put in parenthesis (e.g., Allison, p. 10). The length of this paper should be between 700 to 1000 words (c. 3 pages), and it is due two weeks after the last day of class. Participants should send an electronic copy of the paper in PDF format to the instructor's email address.

e. Final Paper (40%)

This is a research paper where participants will theorize or formulate their own conceptual approach to Christian apologetics. Because each participant will have his or her own area of specialization (i.e., Biblical Studies, Pastoral Studies, Christian Worldview, Church & Culture), the research paper should be geared towards one's individual research interest, ministerial vocation, or place(s) of responsibility in Christian ministry.

Thus, the content of the paper should include the following components: (1) an introduction to one's ministerial vocation or place(s) of responsibility in the Christian ministry (c. 1 page); (2) a subsequent section that identifies and explains the need for Christian apologetics within that ministerial vocation or place(s) of responsibility, postulating a concise and clear statement of the problem (c. 1 page); (3) a third section that articulates one's apologetic formula and approach to tackle the problem, using both class and researched materials (c. 6 pages); and (4) a final section that evaluates the pros and cons of the formulated approach, concluding with some anticipated implications on one's ministry (presented in the introduction) once the formulated approach is implemented.

(**Note:** This is a research paper; therefore, participants should demonstrate that they have had enough research work in writing their paper. Sufficient research work can be demonstrated in terms of the number of sources [at least five sources] one has consulted and interacted in writing the paper.)

A well-structured argumentation is also expected in this paper. The paper will not be more than 3000 words (c. 10–11 pages), excluding footnotes and bibliography. It should closely follow the MDC style Guide, and should be typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font and double-spaced. The paper is due one month (30 days) after the last day of the lecture week, and participants should send an electronic copy of the paper in PDF format to the instructor's email address. Papers will be marked by the following criteria.

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- Content (70%): quality of research and argumentation
- Documentation (15%): quantity of sources consulted and formatting
- Writing Style (15%): English grammar and style

Note: Participants whose English is not their first language may wish to have their paper proofread first before submitting it.

V. TEXTBOOK PURCHASE

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

VI. STYLE GUIDES

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

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuideMarch0413.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

VII. LATE PENALTIES AND PROCEDURES

All assignments automatically receive a 1% penalty for each day they are late, and assignments that are more than one week late will receive 0%, unless lateness has been cleared with the Registrar. Saturdays and Sundays do not count as one day.

VIII. ACADEMIC HONESTY

“Be happily hopeful in your work, stand your ground in times of difficulty, and devote yourselves to prayer (Rom 12:12), in order to overcome the temptations of a plagiarist.”

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

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IX. GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

X. COURSE OUTLINE WITH READINGS

Note: This is just a tentative schedule for the course. The final schedule, which will probably look very similar to this schedule, will be given at the first day of class.

Day 1: The Relationship between the Historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith
(Prior Reading: *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*)

Session 1: Course Introduction and Syllabus

Session 2: Think and Listen... What Is History? What Is Theology?

Session 3: Let's Brainstorm... Do You Agree with Dale Allison's Conviction?

Day 2: Overview of the Historical Jesus Research
(Reading: *Mere Apologetics*)

Session 1: Think and Listen... What do scholars say about the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith?

Session 2: Let's Sit and Talk... What can you say and what do you say? Are the scholars right? (Break out into pairs or small groups)

Session 3: Show and Tell... So how do we reconcile the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith? (Groups will show and tell the class their opinion or position)

Session 4: Wrap Up and Reflection... Faith lacking understanding or faith seeking understanding?

Day 3: Overview of Christian Apologetics
(Reading: *Mere Apologetics*)

Session 1: Think and Listen... What is apologetics? Apologetics and contemporary culture

Session 2: Watch and See... The "William Lane Craig and the atheists" debate

Session 3: Think and Listen... The theological basis of apologetics; the reasonableness of the Christian faith

Session 4: Let's Brainstorm... Can the church survive the times without her apologists?

Day 4: Overview of Christian Apologetics (continued)
(Reading: *God or Godless*)

Session 1: Think and Listen... Approaches to apologetics engagement

Session 2: Let's Sit and Talk... What do you think is the best approach?

Session 3: Think and Listen... Opening the door to faith; developing approaches to apologetics

Session 4: Let's Brainstorm... So how do you develop your own approach?

Day 5: Christianity versus Atheism

(**Note:** *God or Godless* outline assignment due [at the start of class time])

Session 1: Watch and See... The God or Godless debate; Who won?

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Session 2: Let's Brainstorm... What have we learned? Where do we go from here?

Session 3: Don't Forget... Your reflection paper is due two weeks from today and your final paper one month from today.

XI. DISCLAIMER

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and 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.

XII. PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allison, Dale C. Jr. *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

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Hazen, Craig J. *Five Sacred Crossings: A Novel Approach to a Reasonable Faith*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008.

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- Ong, Hughson. "An Evaluation of the Aramaic and Greek Language Criteria in Historical Jesus Research: A Sociolinguistics Study of Mark 14:32–65," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 25 (2012) 37–55.
- . "Can Linguistic Analysis in Historical Jesus Research Stand on Its Own?: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Matt 26:36—27:26," *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 2 (2013): XX–XX.
- Porter, Stanley E. *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000.
- . "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek." *TynBul* 44 (1993) 199-235.
- Powell, Mark Allan. *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*. 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Sanders, E. P. *Jesus and Judaism*. 1st Fortress Press ed. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- Wilkins, Michael J., and James Porter Moreland. *Jesus under Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- Wright, N. T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.