

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN MINISTRY
MS 2X03
MCMaster DIVINITY COLLEGE

Instructor: Wendy J. Porter, Ph.D.

Term: Winter/Spring 2014 (Term 2)

Location: TBA

Time: 4 Saturdays 9:00–4:00

Credit Units: 3

Class Dates: January 18, January 25, March 15, April 12

Contact Information:

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Course Description

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN MINISTRY

One of the essentials of personal, professional and spiritual growth, as well as long-term effectiveness in ministry, is developing the discipline of reflecting theologically on our own experience and practice. In Christian ministry, the ability to reflect on experience through a well-focused theological lens is foundational to the development of our inner spiritual lives and meaningful personal ministry. This course is designed to help us understand the importance of theological reflection on our lives and ministry, and then to implement the art of theological reflection for the purpose of transforming the practice of ministry (whether that be for one-on-one counseling, general congregational care, chaplaincy, parish nursing, or the more public roles of ministry, such as preaching, teaching and worship-leading). This course invites us to explore personal (embedded and deliberative) theology, discover how theological reflection may shape us and our ministry, become familiar with the resources, practise skills necessary for engaging in it and leading it, and develop a method that fits you and your ministry.

Specializations:

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW; PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING; PASTORAL STUDIES.

Those with interests in one or more of these specializations should find this class valuable for ministry and personal development. Those with a specialization in **Christian Worldview** includes those interested in para-church ministries, lay ministry leadership, and those simply interested in developing advanced theological competence. Those with a specialization in **Pastoral Care and Counseling** includes those interested in military, hospital and community chaplaincy, associate pastors with family ministry responsibilities, those interested in or already involved in NGO work, as well as the various types of social ministries. Those with a specialization in **Pastoral Studies** includes those interested in ministry roles as senior or associate pastor, lead pastor, or other full-time vocational ministry that involves the primary leadership responsibilities. This class should also be considered essential for **Teachers** and **Worship Leaders**.

Through required reading and reading assessments, lectures, class discussions, and the completion of assignments, students should fulfill the following course objectives:

Knowing

- to learn the importance of reflective practice, and to understand the central aspects of developing the ability to become reflective practitioners;
- to understand what theological reflection is;
- to become familiar with the resources for theological reflection;
- to learn to recognize embedded theology versus deliberative theology;
- to recognize various approaches to theological reflection;
- to develop your own model for doing theological reflection.

Being

- to become more self-aware of the essential components of your own embedded theology;
- to be shaped by ongoing personal deliberative theology in spiritual, theological and professional growth;
- to begin to embrace and embody theological reflection in all areas of life;
- to be transformed by the integration of the practice of theological reflection on experience into our ongoing work as ministry practitioners.

Doing

- to develop the ability to engage effectively in theological reflection;
- to learn how to integrate theological reflection into the practice of ministry;
- to develop the ability to effectively lead others in theological reflection;
- to create a plan for the ongoing implementation of leading theological reflection, and teaching others to lead it effectively.

Course Textbooks*

Required textbooks for this course are:

1. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2nd edn, 2006).
2. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005).
3. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Sources* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

You are encouraged to purchase your textbooks from the Divinity College's book service, READ On Books, Room 114, McMaster Divinity College. Bernice Quek provides these books at reasonable prices as a service to the Divinity College, and students that enroll in a class but purchase their books elsewhere make reasonable planning difficult. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class and are available for advance purchase at READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1; phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. website: <http://www.readon.ca/>

You are also encouraged to read more widely in this subject area according to your interests and ministry challenges.

Course Requirements and Assignments

READING for CLASS DAY 1: Please come to the first class having read the book by Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*. This is a short book and will give you some introduction to the practice of theological reflection, which will make the first day much more profitable.

READING for CLASS DAY 2: Please come to the second class having read the first book by Elaine Graham et al., *Theological Reflection: METHODS*. This book is fairly lengthy, so start it sooner rather than later. It outlines 7 methods of theological reflection, and you will have already chosen one on the first day of class that you will present for your third assignment.

ASSIGNMENT 1

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION “DINNER PARTY”

Due: Saturday, January 25, by 4:00 p.m., 1 week after the first class.

Length: 1500-2000 words. May be submitted electronically.

Marks: 20%

This is an imaginary dinner party, where you choose one or more guests to represent the various areas outlined below. Thoughtfully choose a real-life problem/event/crisis or trend that is theologically troubling for you as a believer or in conjunction with your ministry or specialization. Choose something that prompts you to ask or wonder where God is in the situation.

- **Description:** Describe the issue or scenario from your own perspective. Be brief, clear and objective. Do not make any value judgments at this point.
- **Prayer and Spiritual Discernment:** Choose a guest (historical, family member, pastor or spiritual counselor) or imagine inviting the Holy Spirit personally to speak up throughout the dinner conversation. How would this guest direct you in your theological reflection about this matter?
- **Scripture:** Choose an imaginary guest who has a deep understanding of Scripture to be the voice that represents this throughout your conversation. How would this person thoughtfully explore one or more passages of Scripture that could be relevant to this situation or problem (not just a list of verses or proof-texts)? This person should show discernment in their (your!) choice of passage(s), and evidence of deep, honest personal wrestling with Scripture in relation to the issue.
- **History / Tradition:** Choose one or two historical guests to represent one or more perspectives on the issue. For instance, how did believers in the past deal with or struggle with or address a similar issue? (Think creatively before you say, “They didn’t.”) How might a person or artifact from history influence current thinking about the issue? Select from thinkers, writers, events (or artists) in history that prompt and provoke thoughtful engagement on the topic. Choose sources that challenge you to think deeply. You must be selective, for the range of possibilities is wide, including such things as:
 - the thoughtful or outspoken writings of a Church Father

- the life-story or reflections or actions of a saint
- events or struggles in the history of the church (perhaps the history of your own denomination)
- literature or poetry or art of someone deeply spiritual and thoughtful, etc.
- **Experience:** Invite a guest who is compelling in sharing his/her own personal experience, or make this your own contribution. Consider experience that challenges or potentially influences the direction of your theological reflection about the situation.
- **Culture:** Choose a guest who represents contemporary or generational or ethnic culture that has some bearing on the issue. How does this culture bring its own challenges or complexities—or even creative solutions—to the problem or situation? How does this cultural perspective cause you to think more deeply about the reasons for and implications of the particular problem you are assessing?
- **Reason and Logic:** Invite a guest who is rational (not that the rest are not!) and has great ability to weigh evidence and give good direction. How does this guest weigh the insights that have been considered and the options for addressing the issue or moving forward in some way? For instance, what happens if you have competing resources—Christian history versus contemporary culture, or Scripture versus personal experience—how do you resolve this? Does this person suggest that you need to dig more deeply? Or live with the ambiguity? If the problem requires some kind of action or response on someone’s part, what must you or others do to move forward?
- **Result:** So, now, at the end of the dinner conversation, where *do* you think God is in this situation? And is there some kind of response that you must make, some action you must take as a result?

This assignment provides you with tools to begin using Theological Reflection in real-life situations that have relevance for your own spiritual life and for that of your ministry.



ASSIGNMENT 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SCRIPTURE

Due: Saturday, February 15 by 4:00 p.m., 1 week after the second class.

Length: 1500-2000 words. May be submitted electronically.

Marks: 20%

Use the same basic categories as in the first assignment to tackle a Scripture passage that you find challenging or difficult or particularly relevant, whether personally or for ministry. You may choose to use “guests” or simply use the categories themselves. Scripture passages are to be chosen in consultation with the professor within the first two weeks of the course.

Adapt the categories as required. For example, in the case of **Scripture**, determine how other Scripture passages can or should be used to help interpret or shed light on this passage. For **History / Tradition**, you may draw on insights from a commentary writer, or you may select the life of a believer who struggled with or lived by this passage, or you may show how battles in church tradition were the result of difficulties identified in this passage, and so on. Personal **Experience** or contemporary or ethnic **Culture** may strongly influence current understanding of this passage, and you may want to explore how or why this is so. Employing **Logic** and **Reason** will be essential to seeing which pieces of your theological reflection should be acted on, or what direction you will take in understanding this passage, perhaps for the purpose of preaching, or

teaching or counseling others, or for shaping a service. In the **Result**, describe how God has moved or challenged you through this passage and if your new insights into this passage requires some kind of active response on your part or that of others.



ASSIGNMENT 3

CLASS PRESENTATIONS: SEVEN METHODS OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Due: Saturday, March 15.

Marks: 25%

In order to introduce the class to the range of possibilities in doing theological reflection, and to assist in developing your own model of theological reflection, students will prepare and creatively present one of the methods included in the *Methods* textbook at our “Market Day for Methods”. Depending on class size, students will present this individually or work together in small groups (sign-ups will take place on the first day of class). Use the two companion textbooks as your main starting-point: **Theological Reflection: Methods** and **Theological Reflection: Sources**, as well as any other relevant resources. Each individual/group will have 25 minutes on the third class day to:

- creatively present (“sell”) their method;
- introduce interesting key players or contributors (“testimonials” - these may be drawn from the textbook, but consider others that may do something similar);
- articulate how this method is valuable and useful (why someone should “buy” it);
- offer a brief critique of the method; and
- innovatively involve the rest of the class in at least one significant portion of the presentation that convinces us that it is a workable method, one worth considering (“buying”).

If presentations are done in small groups, each student will take the lead role in presenting or conducting at least one part of the overall presentation. Please provide some kind of hand-out that gives an outline/overview of the presentation and/or other pertinent information. Come prepared with copies for the class.

NOTE: Your presentation should be interesting and creative, and your “product” should be something that others want to consider. Show us how it works. Engage us in trying it out. Convince us that this method is useful and valuable for theological reflection. Marks will be assigned in part on how compelling and interesting you or your group is in presenting your method, as well as its grasp of the essentials of the method.



ASSIGNMENT 4

LEADING A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION GROUP (TWO SESSIONS) AND EVALUATIVE PAPER

Due: In-Class Spoken Summary of your Two Sessions: Saturday, April 12 (final class)

Due: Accompanying Evaluative Paper (1500 words): THURSDAY (NOT SATURDAY), April 16, by 4:00 p.m. Electronic submissions accepted.

Marks: 35% of the course grade.

NOTE: You MUST plan this well in advance in order to complete the assignment.

Each student will assemble a small group to meet two times (approx. 1 – 1½ hours each meeting). Choose approximately 5-6 people from your church, or draw on colleagues or friends, but not fellow classmates from this course. The two meetings could be a week apart, or they could be on successive days. (Do **not** leave this until the end of the semester. The earlier you do this, the quicker you will begin to understand how theological reflection works and be able to further refine your own model.)

During the first meeting, you will *introduce* the group to Theological Reflection; i.e. what Theological Reflection is and how to engage in it as a group, using your own chosen approach. Then you will either give the group a pre-prepared topic or case study for theological reflection, or choose a topic or case study together as a group (and agree to send them the details immediately by email), which you will use as the basis for your theological reflection at the second meeting. Ask your group members to come prepared for that second meeting.

In the second meeting, you will *lead* the group in theological reflection on the topic that was prepared, and you will use your chosen method or model that you introduced in the previous meeting. Whatever your choice of method, or model that you have developed or adapted, this second meeting is where you are “test-driving” it.

The accompanying evaluative paper for this assignment (1500 words) will briefly summarize these two sessions and will include your own personal evaluation of what you learned about *introducing* theological reflection to others, what you learned about *leading* theological reflection, and anything you learned about theological reflection in the process. Having tried it out, is there anything that you would change in the way you teach what theological reflection is, or in how you handle leading theological reflection, or in the method/model itself? (Note: Evaluation of this paper will be on the basis of depth of personal insight and growth, not on whether you made mistakes or not, or whether everything went perfectly or not. You should, however, be somewhat concerned about your mark if you did not learn anything from the process and thought that everything went absolutely perfectly!) For the final component of this paper, outline some specific steps that you would be prepared to take in order to integrate meaningful theological reflection in your life and ministry.

This assignment will help you develop the skills for leading theological reflection in a way that makes sense to you, it will help you refine your approach because you have tried it out, and it will give you an opportunity to set a plan in motion as to how you will integrate it in life and ministry.

Come to the last class prepared to present a brief oral summary of your experience in these two sessions, and some insights and learnings that you gained in the process.

You are welcome to hand in your brief accompanying Evaluative Paper on the final class day, or take until the following **Thursday** (but not later) to finalize your thoughts and evaluations.

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**Successful Completion of this Class for Credit** requires that each of the assignments be attempted. Failure to make a valid attempt to complete each of these requirements may constitute grounds for failure of the course.

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## **Tentative Class Schedule**

### **CLASS 1—SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 2013: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: MORE THAN A MUSING**

**NOTE:** Please come to the first class having read the book by Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*. This book is short but essential reading. It will painlessly introduce you to the notion and process of theological reflection.

#### Topics for the Day

Lucy Steps Inside: Introduction to Theological Reflection  
Overview of Course Syllabus  
Are You a Reflector?: Significance of Action–Reflection  
What Is Theological Reflection?: Definitions and Development  
Uncovering Embedded Theology  
How Do I Look?: Developing Observation Skills for Theological Reflection  
Discovering Deliberative Theology  
Resources for Theological Reflection  
Intro to the TR “Dinner Party”

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### **CLASS 2—SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2013: HOW THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION SHAPES WHAT YOU KNOW, WHO YOU ARE, AND WHAT YOU DO**

**NOTE:** Please come to the second class having read the first book by Graham et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*. This book is lengthy, so begin early. It will introduce you to various ways that people do theological reflection.

#### Topics for the Day

Risky Business?: The “What If”s of Doing Theological Reflection  
Spirals, Funnels, Flow Charts or a Tree: Developing Your Own Model  
TR Dinner Party: Who to Invite?  
TR *on* Ministry, *in* Ministry, and *as* Ministry  
Where the Rubber—and Reflection—Meets the Road: Leading TR in Your Ministry Context

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### **CLASS 3—SATURDAY, MARCH 15, 2013 METHODS IN OUR MADNESS!**

Student Presentations: “Market-Day for Methods”  
Theological Reflection and Worship

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## **CLASS 4—SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2013**

### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION THAT FITS *You*: DEVELOPING TR FOR YOUR LIFE AND MINISTRY**

In-Class Oral Summaries on “Leading a Theological Reflection Group” Assignment

Defining your Philosophy of TR and Action-Plan

Moving Forward with TR for your Congregation or Ministry Context

Class Art: TR through Art and Objects as an Ongoing Skill for Life and Ministry



#### **A Learning Community**

This class is designed to be a learning community, a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation, constructive input and active engagement with one another, with Scripture, with ideas, and in the ongoing development and strengthening of our faith and ministries. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be challenged, deconstructed and formed, or re-formed, through our mutual learning experience. As professor, it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I am a fellow learner in the community and wish to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together. I welcome the responsibility and opportunity to give thoughtful evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class and through written work, so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration. As a responsible member of our learning community, you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means not only that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity, but that you will come prepared to be fully engaged in and with the class. Your attendance is required as your presence is necessary for our community (i.e. class) to function at an optimal level.

Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order. Late assignments will be docked at the rate of 5% for each day late (with each assignment counted as 100%). Assignments should be submitted in hard copy on standardized paper.

Connections with each of you outside class time are welcome. Please feel free to make an appointment if you think this would aid your learning experience in any way.

#### **\*\* Statement on Academic Honesty**

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>.

#### **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 all MDC assignments.

**Please Note: 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 at any time.**