

Current Issues in Theology **CHTH G105-C05, TH 6XC6**

McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2016
Tuesday 10:30-12:20
Office: 216

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Hours: M Noon-2:00pm; T 1:00-3:00pm

I. Description:

This course provides an opportunity to explore and develop scholarly expertise in contemporary issues in theology. To achieve that goal, course lectures and discussions cover significant topics in contemporary theology (e.g., theological hermeneutics, theology of religions, and the doctrine of the Trinity) and student projects and papers provide an opportunity to develop proficiency in a specific area of theology.

II. Course Objectives:

My goal for the course is that you will develop vocational competency as a scholarly researcher in the area of contemporary theology that will serve you in fulfilling your research program at the Divinity College and more broadly your calling as a theologian. With this in mind, the knowing, being, and doing learning objectives delineate specific objectives to facilitate achieving the vocational goals of the course.

A. Knowing:

1. Know key areas of contemporary theology.
2. Know and be familiar with the contributions of key figures in contemporary theology.
3. Begin to acquire specialist command of a specific area of theology related to your area of research.

B. Being:

1. Become a critical and constructive theological leader.
2. Appreciate the value of current theological movements for the church and your life.
3. Be a respectable, respectful, and significant theologian.
4. Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.

C. Doing:

1. Develop the ability to present informative lectures and facilitate student discussions.
2. Research and present to peers original research on a substantial topic in contemporary theology.
3. Hone critical reading skills in primary literature.
4. Develop the ability to analyze secondary scholarship in light of primary texts.

III. Required Text(s):

- A. David Ford with Rachel Muirs, *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
- B. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
A. Book Review/Primary Text	10%	Day of presentation
B. Lecture and Syllabus	30%	Day of presentation
C. Thesis Paper and Presentation	50%	Paper due one week after presentation
1. Presentation (15%)		
2. Paper (35%)		
D. Response and Facilitation	10%	Day of presentation
E. Participation:	X	Every class session
Total: 100%		

V. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- I prefer electronic submissions. Please use Word or Pages. Use the following format for file names: your last name.assignment name.docx [Studebaker.InterpretingCulture.docx]. PDF files may not receive electronic comments.
- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.

- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form attached to the syllabus
- All papers and assignments should conform to (and will be marked against) the MacDiv Style Guide

A. Book Review:

1. Purpose: Develop the ability to comprehend and analyze primary source scholarship in a field of study (for this course, contemporary theologians can serve as primary texts). This assignment helps fulfill one of the areas of the Mastery Checklist.
2. Description:
 - a. Write and present in class a review of a book on a topic related to the course.
 - b. You are encouraged to write the review on a book that you will use in the thesis paper.
3. Format:
 - a. Length: 750–800 words. Double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font.
 - b. A review should include the following elements:
 - 1) Contextualization: first book of its kind, a new study on such and such topic, reflects a tradition or school of thought, etc.?
 - 2) Statement of the thesis.
 - 3) Description of the content and its relationship to the thesis; does it support the thesis?
 - 4) Critical analysis: fairly point out the strengths and weaknesses.
 - 5) Statement of the book’s value and suitable audience(s).
 - 6) Although not included in a review for publication, please include a statement expressing the book’s usefulness for your area of research (if used for the paper).
4. Presentation:
 - a. Provide . . .
 - 1) A summary of the book’s thesis and argument

- 2) A summary of your assessment of the above
 - 3) A statement about the role it plays in your research.
- b. Invite and lead discussion of the review
 - c. Time: 15–20 minutes.

B. Lecture & Syllabus:

1. Purpose:

This assignment provides experience *preparing* a syllabus and *delivering* a lecture for teaching in an undergraduate setting. The preparation of the syllabus also helps fulfill one of the requirements of the Mastery Checklist.

2. Description:

You will prepare a syllabus on a topic related to contemporary theology. The lecture should be one of the lectures listed in the syllabus. You may use this assignment to investigate an area that will promote your research program (e.g., prepare for doctoral comprehensive exams and MA thesis/PhD dissertation topics). You should, however, gear the syllabus and the lecture toward an undergraduate audience.

3. Guidelines:

a. Research:

1) Research for the lecture will account for the supplemental reading for advanced degree students (approximately 5,000-6,000 pages)

2) Documentation of reading:

Please provide an annotated bibliography of the reading consulted in the preparation of the lecture (the annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text).

b. Lecture:

1) The lecture should present and discuss the primary content points of the topic (or sub-topic)

- 2) Lecture handouts/outlines and PowerPoint/Prezi are helpful, but not required
- 3) Length:
The lecture and discussion will take a fifty-minute period of the course. We will have two for each session of the student lecture segment of the course.

4. Evaluation:

Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following . . .

- a. Please submit to the professor a copy (electronic or hard copy) of your lecture notes and annotated bibliography used to develop the lecture.
- b. Does the lecture accurately present and discuss the topic?
- c. Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation/discussion of the content?
- d. Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it have value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry?
- e. Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?

C. Thesis Paper and Presentation:

1. Purpose:

This assignment gives you experience writing article, essay, and chapter length theological papers and presenting research in an oral form similar to that performed at academic conferences.

2. Description:

You will *write* and *present* a thesis paper on a topic related to the topic of the course. I encourage you to investigate the issue from the perspective of your discipline and area(s) of research interest. You are encouraged to use the class as an opportunity to work on papers to 1) present at academic society meetings and/or submit to journals for publication, 2) use in preparation for comprehensive exams, and 3) use for dissertation preparation.

3. Guidelines for the Paper:

The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .

a. Content and argument:

- 1) Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports).
 - Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.
- 2) Describe your topic.
- 3) Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.
- 4) Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.

b. Presentation:

- 1) Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid excessive first person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).
- 2) Use and document a *minimum* of fifteen scholarly resources.
- 3) Accurately document sources according to the [MacDiv Style Guide](#).
- 4) Paper length: 20–25 pages. Not to exceed 7,000 words.
- 5) Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).
- 6) Use footnotes.

4. Possible thesis paper topics and areas:

- Theological Hermeneutics: Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer
- Radical Orthodoxy: James K. A. Smith and Katherine Pickstock
- Pentecostalism
- Theology and Science
- Theological Anthropology
- Trinity
- Atonement theology

D. Respond to Presentation and Facilitate Discussion:

1. Purpose:

Provides experience in responding to and moderating academic presentations and discussions, such as one might do at an academic society meeting.

2. Description:

Each student *prepares a critique* and *facilitates a discussion* of a thesis paper presentation.

a. The critique:

- 1) Remember to be charitable; not only Christian, but since academia is a small guild, it is self-preservation.
- 2) Critical (includes highlighting and discussing problems *and* strengths):

The critique should explore the following sorts of issues:

- Does the paper have a thesis?
- Does the content develop and support the thesis?
- Does it use appropriate sources?
- Does it interact with the relevant secondary literature?

b. The discussion:

You should keep the presentation to time limit and effectively manage student discussion (do not let one person dominate the interaction; move on to a new issue if discussion begins to go off on tangents and run down rabbit trails). Be sure to elicit comments from all people present. You might want to have some prepared questions and discussion prompts to facilitate the initial discussion.

3. Guidelines:

a. Each student paper presentation will take approximately fifty minutes (one segment of a class session).

b. The presentation and discussion typically includes the following items:

- 1) Presenter presents the paper: approximately thirty minutes.
- 2) Response: approximately fifteen minutes.

You can go through point by point as a monologue or start by raising and

offering your thoughts on the paper’s primary contributions and arguments and invite discussion based on your remarks and interaction with the paper and then so forth through the rest of the points you have identified.

- 3) Class discussion of the paper and response: approximately five to ten minutes.
- c. A written submission/outline is not required, but is encouraged as it may be beneficial to other students in the course.

VI. Course Outline (tentative):

Week	Date	Topic	Book Review Presentations	Lecture
1	9/13	<p>Introduction to the Course</p> <p>PART ONE: LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY</p> <p>Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method</p> <p>Reading (copies will be distributed first day of class for the readings listed below, except for course textbooks):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vanhoozer, <i>Postmodern Theology</i>, chs. 1, 3, 9, and 10 • Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” in <i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i> • Charles Hodge, <i>Systematic Theology</i>, vol. 1:1–20 • Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology</i>, 21–26 • John Macquarrie, <i>Principles of Christian Theology</i>, 4–17 • David Tracy, <i>Blessed Rage for Order</i>, 24–34 • George Lindbeck, <i>The Nature of Doctrine</i>, 15–19, 32–35, & 112–19 • Kevin Vanhoozer, <i>The Drama of Doctrine</i>, 4–25 		Studebaker
2	9/20	Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method (continued)		Studebaker
3	9/27	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Trinity</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review an introduction to the Trinity—e.g., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, <i>The Trinity: Global Perspectives</i> (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). 		Studebaker
4	10/4	Lecture & Discussion: Trinity (continued)		Studebaker

5	10/10	Thanksgiving/Family Day/Reading Week		
6	10/18	Lecture & Discussion: Theology of Religions		Studebaker
7	10/25	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics ●Reading: TBD	1. _____	1. _____
8	11/1	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics ●Reading: TBD	2. _____	2. _____
9	11/8	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics ●Reading: TBD	3. _____	3. _____
10	11/15	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics	4. _____	4. _____
11	11/22	PART TWO: STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS ● Paper 1 _____ Respondent _____ ● Paper 2 _____ Respondent _____		
12	11/29	● Paper 3 _____ Respondent _____ ● Paper 4 _____ Respondent _____		
13	12/6	CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT		

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact 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. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. 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>

C. 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.

D. Style:

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/MDCStyleGuide.pdf>
Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus.
- C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late [after the beginning of class equals one day late], the grade will be reduced to 85).
- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.
- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with

school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

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 up to and including the first day of class.