

# Foundations in Theology and History I

## TH 1A03

Fall Semester, 2014  
Tuesday, 1:30-3:20pm

Instructors:

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

A fusion of Christian history and theology that explores the story of Christianity from a small band of disciples to the world's largest religion that prepares you for your life of faith and ministry in today's world. This foundational course provides the background necessary for further theological and historical studies.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

#### ***Knowing***

- ways the Church has grown and developed over the centuries
- the process of theological development
- a range of Christian perspectives in regards to the major categories of systematic theology
- key Christian thinkers and theological traditions
- various ways the Church has attempted to live in and engage with the wider culture

#### ***Being***

- appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.
- achieve greater appreciation for the diverse forms and theologies of the historical and global Church.
- explore (and ultimately appreciate) the different expressions of spirituality as practiced by the Church throughout history

#### ***Doing***

- assess documents and situations from an historical perspective
- develop skills in the art of theological reflection and expression
- identify and describe the dynamic and personal nature of theology
- engage in the process of constructive theological reflection and expression
- distinguish between the essentials and non-essentials of the Christian faith, particularly as this relates to cultural expressions of Christianity.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (revised 2010).
- Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
- Thomas A' Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (any version)

- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- Recommended (especially for students studying theology for the first time): Grenz, Stanley J., Guretzki, David, and Nordling, Cherith Fee. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

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](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

### ASSIGNMENTS:

The first semester's assignments help students develop specific skills within the disciplines of theology and church history. We especially encourage efforts to bring creative reflection to bear on issues vital to contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry.

- Theology Paper: Students will write a research paper in theology.
- History Paper: Students will write a research paper related to the history of the church.
- Biographical Paper: Students will write a five-page paper reflecting on the life, legacy and contemporary application of a person's life and ministry.
- Off-Campus Visit & Reflection: Each student will be required to attend an Orthodox Church service and write a two page reflection on the visit.
- Recite Apostles Creed: Each student will be required to memorize and recite the Apostles Creed once per semester. (pass/fail)

### GRADING:

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| • Theology Paper | 40%            |
| • History Paper  | 40%            |
| • Orthodox Visit | 20%            |
| • Apostles Creed | pass/fail      |
| • Participation  | x factor (+/-) |

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

- 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>
- 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.

- Essays must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. All other essays will be considered to be 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.
- Two forms of submission of work are possible: (1) Electronic copies in MS Word. Please send the document with your last name and the paper title in the file name: for example, Studebaker.Wittmer.docx. (2) Hard copies should be stapled and submitted with a cover sheet.
- 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.
- Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins.
- Please do not attend class if you are ill and contagious (e.g. the flu).
- 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.

#### **COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS:**

- **Theology Paper: Theological Reflections Skills**

This ten to twelve page assignment provides the opportunity to develop skills in systematic theology. The paper should develop a thesis on a theological topic/issue and detail why it is important for contemporary Christian thought, life, and/or ministry. For example, how do Arminians and Calvinists explain the purpose of prayer in light of God's sovereignty and why does it matter? The paper should take account of appropriate alternative viewpoints and draw on credible academic resources. This assignment gives you experience working in a major topic area of systematic theology. Please talk to the professor/s, if you are unsure of a suitable topic.

- **History Paper: Person**

This ten to twelve page assignment provides the opportunity to develop skills in historical research and is concerned with trying to gain an understanding of a historical figure's life and legacy as well as a contemporary application of the person's life and ministry. This is a fusion of historical and theological research, as well as an intentional application to contemporary life. See *Doing Church History* for further instructions. Please talk to the professor/s if you are unsure of a suitable topic.

- **Orthodox Visit**

This two-page assignment requires you to visit an Orthodox Church for a Sunday worship service, and to write a reflection paper. Please keep in mind the following:

1. When you attend, be respectful. Do not “take notes” like a tourist, but participate as much as you are able. Again, do not show up to criticize, but to learn and grow.
2. Attach a bulletin to your reflection.
3. Your reflection should note things like (but not limited to) the following: the liturgy, the architecture, the iconography, the sacraments, the music, the theology expressed (verbally but also in other ways)

- **Recite Apostles Creed**

All students are required to memorize and recite the Apostles Creed. This can be done at any time during the semester, and is to be recited to the professor. This assignment is a “pass/fail” assignment – it must be passed in order to pass the class.

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Sept 9  | Introduction to the Class<br>Readings: <i>Doing Church History</i>              |
| Sept 16 | Early Church History<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath   |
| Sept 23 | Early Church History<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath   |
| Sept 30 | Doctrine of God<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath        |
| Oct 7   | Doctrine of God<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath        |
| Oct 14  | Doctrine of Christ<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath     |
| Oct 21  | Doctrine of Christ<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath     |
| Oct 28  | Medieval Church<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath        |
| Nov 4   | Medieval Church<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath        |
| Nov 11  | Doctrine of the Church<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath |
| Nov 18  | Medieval Church<br>Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath        |

- Nov 25      Doctrine of the End Times  
Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath
- Dec 2        Medieval Church  
Readings: relevant chapters from Gonzalez and McGrath