

McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE
ECOLOGY AND THEOLOGY
Hybrid—Theology 3XT3, 5XT5

Term: Fall 2019 (online modules start Sept. 9th)

Face-to-face Dates: Oct. 15th and 16th T/W; 1.5 days

Instructor: Dr. Jason C. Robinson, BA, BRE, MA, MTS, MA, PhD

Email: robinjc@mcmaster.ca Please do not use “Avenue to Learn” email platform, just your regular McMaster email.

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

Developing an informed and relevant ecological perspective requires that we ask very important ethical and theological questions about nature and our role(s) in creation. This course explores the many ways in which our current ecological crisis challenges us to rethink our values, beliefs, and the scope of our moral-environmental obligations. Through our exploration of the history and controversies of eco-theology, students will consider the interrelation of religion, ethics, and the environment with the ultimate goals of becoming better informed and active citizens in the world.

Course Objectives:

Knowing

- By the end of this course students will possess greater knowledge of eco-theology in the Christian tradition.

Being

- By the end of this course students will be able to identify new ways in which to meaningfully develop Christian character in response to pressing ecological concerns, including social justice, poverty, and issues of sustainability—guided by ethical principles that are rooted in biblical and theological traditions.

Doing

- By the end of this course students will be able to apply theologically informed views to contemporary ecological concerns, including those related to one’s own life and ministry contexts.

Required Text:

- Jenkins, Willis. *Ecologies of Grace Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780199989881
- Long, D. Stephen. *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780199568864

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, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

Course Requirements:

Assignments	Worth
Critical Analysis and Summary Notes/Journal	20%
Discussion Postings and Class Participation	20%
Sermon/Lesson	20%
Major Paper	40%

DPT Course Requirements (ONLY):

DPT: Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.	
Assignments	Worth
Literature Review 2000 words (approximate) Minimal expectations for reading 4000 pages.	25%
Literature Review Summary 3000 words (approximate)	25%
Major Paper Approximately 8000 words (approximate)	40%
Discussion Postings and Class Participation	10% Breakdown: 5% for online postings (or 1% per posting) 5% for class participation
*It is expected that DPT students will contact (email) the instructor at the beginning of the term to discuss strategies for completing assignments, research areas, feasible due dates, etc. Details on these assignments are located below the regular course assignment requirements.	

Regular Course Requirements**(1) Critical Analysis and Summary Notes/Journal**

Students will read Stephen Long's *Christian Ethics* and make notes that both summarize, critically assess, and begin to apply any two of the four chapters.

Instructions

- The assignment is to be 2000-3000 words (excluding references).
 - Make each of the following three categories account for roughly 1/3 of the paper each.
- Summary

- Take note of major themes.
- What are the main arguments/points of the chapter?
- Are there controversial issues or claims made?
- Critical analysis
 - How are your own views being challenged or changed?
 - What new questions are you encountering and why are those important to you?
 - Do you find anything particularly difficult and/or enlightening (revealing)?
- Application
 - How might some of the new ideas learned apply to your own context (vocation, congregation, life circumstance) in a meaningful way?

The purpose of this assignment is to engage students in introductory matters of Christian ethics, i.e., history, vocabulary, major issues, that may then, in the larger context of the course, be applied.

(2) Sermon/Lesson

Write a 2000-3000 word (excluding references) sermon or lesson—designed for an adult only audience—in which you consider a major problem covered in this course.

Instructions

- Examine any major eco-theological issue from our textbooks, e.g., Christian stewardship, environmental virtues.
- Pick a topic that you believe is particularly relevant today.
- Explain why it is a problem and how there are different ways of interpreting it (different theological, cultural, and biblical traditions).
 - Try to briefly present two or three alternatives (interpretations) as space allows.
- Convince your hypothetical audience (congregation, students, etc.) that your interpretation and response is most appropriate, i.e., argue “why” they should believe your position is superior to the others.
- Ultimately you want your audience to become informed but to be directed toward possible courses of action that are meaningful.

(3) Discussion Postings and Class Participation

Part A Discussion Postings

Students are expected to provide a brief commentary on any part of the assigned reading (any course readings) for any five (5) online modules. Each one should be between 250-300 words. The commentary should pick one brief quote from the readings and then examine its meaning and significance. Is it interesting? Explain why? Is it important? How so? No research is expected beyond our texts. This is an opportunity to engage with the material you find most interesting.

Class members are welcome (and encouraged) to reflect on other peer work in a supportive and professional manner, while also raising questions and offering their own views (again in a kind and professional manner).

*Grades are “not” awarded for responding to other student posts but this is a valuable learning opportunity to engage with others.

- Posts are graded on whether you have engaged meaningfully/thoughtfully with course material. Each is graded as a pass or fail.
- Commentaries are worth 2% each for a total of 10% of the course.
- Each post must be uploaded to the relevant dropbox by 11:59pm on the last day of each relevant module. Students cannot post to module dropboxes retroactively.

- Late posts cannot be accepted without medical/crisis-type justification.

Part B Class Participation

Active participation during our face-to-face classes is worth 10% of the course. Students will engage in controversial debates during class meetings. Students will be randomly divided into groups and each group will be assigned a side to defend on a specific debate. Students will be graded on contributions provided, rather than by physical attendance to class.

(4) Major Paper (3000-3700 words excluding references)

This is both a research and argumentation paper. It is expected that students will go beyond the lectures/notes by researching topics through scholarly materials. Each student will argue for a position (for or against something). In other words, merely describing an eco-theological problem as one might for an encyclopedia is insufficient. It is expected that students will fight for a position by being as persuasive as possible (i.e., giving reasons for “why” one should believe the author).

Instructions

- Your project must identify one major issue. Students are given broad discretion on this matter.
- In the paper you will argue:
 - (1) Why that issue is a problem?
 - How, specifically, is “good” being challenged?
 - (2) Why is it difficult to resolve?
 - Are there historical, social, political, religious, theological reasons the problem remains unresolved?
 - (3) How might we begin to solve it?
 - Offer suggestions in terms of practical strategies toward resolution, e.g., education, funding, challenging social norms/stigmas, political lobbying.
- Be sure to write a paper on an issue that you “have not” previously worked upon.
- Avoid quotes unless essential to your argument, and then only if thoroughly examined and critiqued.

Essential elements that should be present in all papers:

- (a)** a sustained treatment of the major issues (rather than sporadic comments on minor issues),
- (b)** an argument for or against a specific view (including a counterargument to whatever position is taken),
- (c)** clear evidence of research (e.g., peer-reviewed books, journal articles, book reviews),
How much research? You need however much it takes to be thorough, i.e., deep/complete/meaningful. I would recommend a minimum of 6-8 academic sources just to get you thinking on a topic. You shouldn't be quoting from these (avoid quotes!) but there will be some great ideas you might use (paraphrase and then cited as sources used).

- (d) some connection between the material researched and a contemporary problem or issue it addresses (e.g., potentially solves) within your specialization, and
- (e) clear evidence of your own views and opinions being challenged (i.e., stating what you think, and then producing questions that challenge your views—in short, show that you are interacting with and thinking about the material sincerely).

- **Avoid most “common” online materials** (e.g., blogs, non-academic sites, anonymous websites). Good online material will be found, first and foremost, through a library’s subscription to online content.
There is a lot of good material online but you need to be discerning. Is it peer-reviewed? Is it written by an academic? Is it accepted by other academics?
- **Avoid using lecture notes.**

DPT Advanced Elective Course Assignment Details	
I. Literature Review:	<p>a. The student will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately 15-20 resources (4000 pages) related to <i>the topic of the course</i> and write a 100-150 word annotation for each one. The required texts for the course can be included as part of the book list. The literature review will be approximately 2,000 words. This assignment is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 25% of the course grade.</p> <p>b. A paper will also be prepared that summarizes the key learnings from the annotated bibliography and provides a cogent foundation for a theology and practice of <i>the topic of the course</i>. The paper will be approximately 3,000 words. It is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 25% of the course grade.</p>
II. Major Paper: <i>Develop a suitable title for the paper according to the topic of the course</i>	<p>The paper should include four key sections. First a brief, but clear explanation of how the paper is rooted in a Practice Led-research approach, second an exploration of the challenges and problems that provoke this study (i.e. why does this ministry practice need to be addressed? What are the problems that you want to identify?) Third, a consideration of a foundational theology of the practice of ministry under consideration in this course and a deep consideration of how new approaches to this practice can be employed in helping to address and improve ministry practice in this area. Fourth some reflection on the application of these ideas to the students own ministry context (both in terms of the local church and also their ministry beyond the local church).</p> <p>The essay will follow the same guidelines for essays posted above.</p> <p>The paper should be approximately 8,000 words. It is due (to be determined in consultation with student) and will constitute 40% of the course grade.</p> <p>a. Discussion Postings and Class Participation 10%</p>

Avenue to Learn

This course is a hybrid course with two days of face to face meetings (1 full day; 1 half day). The course modules can be accessed by registered students through McMaster University's Avenue to Learn. Please sign up early and purchase the textbooks as soon as possible. For information on Avenue to Learn: http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/help/manuals/A_Quick_Guide_to_Avenue.pdf

Policy Statements:

Late Penalties

Late assignments will receive 2% per day deductions.

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>

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 the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a violation of the integrity of persons in the form of unsolicited, unwelcome, verbal or physical behaviour, which discriminates on the basis of gender about a person's body, attire, gender, marital status or economic status. Among faculty, staff, and students, sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

College Style for Submission of Written Work

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 <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

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 until the first day of class.

Mini Biography

Jason C. Robinson, BA, BRE, MA, MA, MTS, Ph.D. (Guelph-McMaster-Laurier joint Ph.D. Programme)

Dr. Robinson has taught at several universities including Wilfrid Laurier University, York University, and Guelph University. Robinson specializes in hermeneutics (theories of interpretation), 20th-century continental philosophy, philosophical theology, philosophy of religion, social and political thought, and ethics. His most recent book is in the philosophy of education, *Foundations of Education: A Social, Political, and Philosophical Approach*. Other areas of research interest include interdisciplinary studies, the nature of time, and aesthetics. His current project, a co-authored book with Stanley Porter, is forthcoming through Routledge, *Active Hermeneutics: Situating an Interdisciplinary Account of Understanding*.