

CH 3XG3/5XG5/6XG6: CRITICAL EVENTS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

McMaster Divinity College

Winter Semester 2020

Tuesday

9:00-10:50am

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath

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Specializations: CC/CT/CW

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines a wide variety of critical events that have shaped the course of Christian history over the past two thousand years. Specific events and individuals will be examined (e.g. conversion of Constantine), as will be broader movements that impacted the church (e.g. Fall of Constantinople, rise of the Papacy, Renaissance). Analysis will focus on the ways in which historians have understood the events over the centuries, as well as focus on developing an approach to historical research that is able to discern carefully claims of causation in history.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing

- to provide students with a broad understanding of how the church has grown and developed over the centuries
- to examine specifically the critical events in the church's history that shaped significantly subsequent generations

Being

- to explore (and ultimately appreciate) the different expressions of spirituality as practiced by the church throughout history
- to create an awareness of the breadth and diversity of the church, and provide a sense of "place" within the many church traditions

Doing

- to develop an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective
- to acquire an ability to assess textbooks and monographs for the author's assumptions and methodology
- to develop advanced research and writing skills

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Noll, Mark. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. Baker Books (Third Edition, 2012).

- Eusebius. *The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary*. Paul L. Maier, ed. (paperback is fine)
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Third Edition, 2011)
- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.

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.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- **Causation in History Position Paper:** Students will discuss a brief paper on their personal position in regards to the ability to discern God's actions in history. More information on this assignment will be provided in class.
- **Textbook Analysis Paper:** Student's will analyze three different textbooks on the history of Christianity and compare them to Noll's textbook. The focus of this analysis will be how the different authors identified what they considered to be the critical events in the history of Christianity, and how they structured their textbooks as a result. More information on this assignment will be provided in class.
- **"Critical Event" in a Local Church:** Student's will seek to identify the critical event(s) that led to particular local church's rise or fall. No written work is required for submission, but students must be prepared to highlight and discuss their findings with the class. More information on this assignment will be provided in class.
- **Research Paper:** Students will write a research paper on a topic related to their personal research interests, but also related to the class focus on critical events. For instance, a biblical studies student may write on an event in the discipline of biblical studies that was a critical event in the history of Christianity. The paper will need a thesis, and an explanation as to why the event is to be considered a "critical event" in the history of the church. More information on this assignment will be provided in class.

The topic of this paper will be determined by the student's specialization, and developed in consultation with the professor.

- ***Church and Culture Specialization***

The primary focus of this research should be on a theological analysis of a critical event. The focus should be relatively specific, rather than scattered. The interplay between Christian theology and culture should be a critical part of this analysis.

- ***Christian Thought and History Specialization***

The research for this specialization should focus on developing critical knowledge of a key movement or event in Christian history or a deeper awareness of an aspect of a critical event.

○ ***Christian Worldview Specialization***

Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's theological position in regards to critical events in history.

There are a number of ways in which this research is to be completed:

- Traditional academic research paper (5 pages)
- Non-traditional formats (5 pages)
 - Popular article for a church or denominational publication (2-3 pages)
 - Popular article for a public audience, and to be posted on a blog or Facebook (2-3 pages)

All students are expected to complete all assignments based on the instructions provided in *Doing Church History*, and well as the MDC Style Guide.

PhD/MA students are expected to fulfill all assignments at an advanced degree level (additional 7500 words). They will also lead class discussions.

DPT students will follow their own PDT syllabus.

GRADING:

- Causation in History Position Paper: 10%
- Textbook Analysis Paper: 20%
- Critical Event in a Local Church: 20%
- Research Paper and Presentation: 40%
- Participation: 10%

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.
- 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.

- 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/s, 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 (2) Hard copies should be stapled and submitted with a cover sheet.
- Unless noted otherwise, all written work must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. For the PDF click here: <http://www.macdiv.ca/students/documents/MacStyleGuideApr1508.pdf>.
- 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).

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Jan 7	Introduction to the Class
Jan 14	Providence and Causation in History <i>Due: Causation in History Position Paper</i>
Jan 21	Constantine and the Rise of Christendoms
Jan 28	Creeds and Councils
Feb 4	Birth & Growth of Monasticism <i>Due: Textbook Analysis</i>
Feb 11	Battles with Islam
Feb 18	<i>Reading Week</i>
Feb 25	Church Splits/Schisms
Mar 3	Rise and Fall of Christianities
Mar 10	“Critical Events” in a Local Church <i>Due: “Critical Event” in a Local Church Discussion</i>
Mar 17	TBD
Mar 24	TBD

Mar 31 *Research Paper Presentations*
 Due: Research Papers

Apr 7 *Research Paper Presentations*

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.