



**MS 5YC5/6YC6 SYLLABUS**  
**Advanced Research in Practical Theology Winter 2021**  
**McMaster Divinity College**

**Phil C. Zylla, D.Th.**  
**Office #: 215**

Hybrid Course - Winter Term 2021  
Live Streaming Sessions  
Tues., Mar 2 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Wed., Mar 3 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**Synchronous Assigned Time:** 10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m. Wednesdays  
**Phone:** 905-525-9140 Ext. 20104  
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**Biography:**

Dr. Phil Zylla is VP Academic and Professor of Pastoral Theology at McMaster Divinity College. His research interests include theology of suffering, pastoral care, and Christian spirituality. He is author of *The Roots of Sorrow: A Pastoral Theology of Suffering* and is currently working on a volume entitled, *Spiritual Formation of the Congregation*. Before moving into theological education in 2001 Dr. Zylla was active in pastoral ministry in the Canadian context for over 18 years. He is married to Melodie and lives in Ancaster, ON.

**Course Description:**

The past twenty years has witnessed a significant increase in academic research in the field of *Practical Theology*. The growth of this literature is a significant indicator of the emerging intellectual search to find foundational understandings that will support the advancement of the mission of the church in the world. Of course, this is not a new interest. The church has always deliberately reflected on its mission and its practices. However, the widely-felt need for expanding the nucleus of academic literature to support the theoretical interests of practical theology represent a new development in the field. This course is a call for constructive imagination and humility in approaching the great questions that emerge from Edward Farley calls, “the ecclesial existence and the constitutive activities” of the church in the world. The course seeks to draw widely from various thinkers who have helped to shape the current [often contested] direction of *Practical Theology*. Participants in this course will be invited to embrace the intriguing challenge of developing informed and carefully researched contributions of their own, regardless of the complexity of such a task.

*“...my contention is that at the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within the pursuit of this way of life.” - Miroslav Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life” in *Practicing Theology*, Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., (2002), 247.*

*“The basic task that orients practical theology is to promote faithful discipleship. . . We speak of the purpose that sets the basic task of practical theology as supporting and sustaining lived discipleship. Rooted in Christian tradition, practical theology focuses on*

called people who manifest a particular faith through concrete ways of life.” Kathleen A. Cahalan and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology” in *For Life Abundant*, 2008, 67.

“Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.”

– John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2006, 6.

## **Course Objectives:**

### **Knowing**

1. To identify and engage with key theorists in the field of practical theology.
2. To interpret current literature that supports academic research in the field of practical theology.
3. To understand the framework for practice-led research.

### **Being**

1. To discern the personal trajectory of one’s own life and ongoing contribution to research concerning the mission of the church in the world.
2. To deepen one’s concern for the intellectual life of the church.

### **Doing**

1. To evaluate some of the foundational literature in the field of practical theology in order to develop working assumptions regarding practice-led research in this field of study.
2. To locate oneself in the field of practical theology and to determine possible paths for on-going research.
3. To join a relevant academic society related to one’s chosen area of focus in practical theology.

## **Required Course Textbooks:**

Bass, Dorothy C. and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J., ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

Mudge, Lewis S. and Poling, James N., eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

Swinton, John and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2011.

Veling, Terry A. *Practical Theology: ‘On Earth as It is in Heaven’*. New York: Maryknoll Press, 2005.

Ward, Pete.

*Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2017.

### **Course Design:**

This course combines synchronous and asynchronous learning session with a core contact time in the live-stream day and 1/2. While there is no specific grade for ‘course participation’ it is assumed that participants will keep pace with the core readings, the assigned online Primer Lectures, and the required discussion threads. There are times when participants will work quite independently, and other times that we will work as a group collaboratively. I will try to signal the sign posts along the way. Go to the course at Avenue to Learn:

[https://cap.mcmaster.ca/mcauth/login.jsp?app\\_id=1389&app\\_name=Avenue](https://cap.mcmaster.ca/mcauth/login.jsp?app_id=1389&app_name=Avenue)

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

**Course Introduction: Welcome Video Dr. Phil C. Zylla**

#### **Module 1, Week of January 4th**

**Theme: On Becoming a Practical Theologian**

Review: online primer lecture

Read: James D. Whitehead, “The Practical Play of Theology” in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds., 36-54.

Thomas H. Groome, “Theology on our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap Between Academia and Ecclesia” in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds., 55-78.

#### **Synchronous WebEx Introductions Wednesday, January 4<sup>th</sup> 10:00 a.m. EST**

Join the WebEx discussion and give us a brief introduction to who you are and what it means for you to become a practical theologian. What evidence is emerging as you reflect on this challenge?

#### **Module 2, Week of January 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Theme: The Nature of Practical Theology**

Read: John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2016, Part I, Theoretical Foundations, 3-94.

Kathleen A. Cahalan and James R. Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology” in *For Life Abundant*, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., 62-85.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology.” *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2012, 5-26.

Edward Farley, “Interpreting Situations”, in *Formation and Reflection*, Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, eds., 1-26.

*“Theology should not be subdivided into independent fields of study to the extent that it becomes no more than the aggregate of all these sub-disciplines. A field of study is not a section of theology; it is a particular perspective on theology [that is] an indivisible whole.”* LM Heyns and HJC Pieterse, *A Primer in Practical Theology*, 5.

### Online Threaded Discussion –

Using Microsoft Word post to the course at Avenue to Learn a 200-250 word summary of insights gained with respect to the field of practical theology. How is your understanding being shaped? What clarifications have you made? What definitions of practical theology are you encountering in your reading? What is the confluence and dissonance that you are noticing? What is your own emerging definition of the field of practical theology? What new questions are being provoked?

### Module 3, Week of January 18<sup>th</sup> Envisioning Practical Theology

Review: online course Primer Lecture

Read: Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion for Practical Theology*. 2014, 1-88.

Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds. *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*,

- a. Part I, “Envisioning Practical Theology”, 2008, 1-61; and
- b. ONE chapter of Part II – either Chapter 4, 5, 6, or 7. **\*\*Choose the practice that is most aligned with your own research practice interest: ministry integration (Chapter 4), worship (Chapter 5), ritual/liturgy (Chapter 6) or pedagogy (Chapter 7)\*\*.**

### Module 4, Week of January 25<sup>th</sup> Method in Practical Theology

**Read:**

*The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, ed., *Part II*, “Method: Studying Theology in Practice”, 89-266.

**\*\*\*each course participant will choose one of these essays (methods) to reflect on and to summarize in a 750 word (double-spaced) document.\*\*\***

*n.b. In this part of module 1 you will become familiar with a wide range of methods that can be employed in practical theological research. Read for general familiarity the whole section, but focus on a primary method chapter that you have been assigned. Follow the assignment instructions and prepare a 750 word executive summary for your colleagues for posting to the course for all participants to read. Post using course drop box. Module has a description of a good executive summary.*

**Post by: Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021 by 5:00 p.m. EST.**

## Module 5, Week of February 1, Synchronous Session The Bible and Practical Theology

**Join:** WebEx discussion

**Read:** Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, Chapter 3

“The Gospel and Practical Theology”, 39-54.

We will meet at 10:00 a.m.- 11:50 a.m. EST for a discussion about Ward’s perspective on evangelical participation in practical theology. In particular our discussion will focus on the role of the bible in practical theology.

## Module 6, Week of February 8<sup>th</sup> Introducing Practice-Led Research

**Read:** Practice-led Research articles

**Contribute:** to online threaded discussion:

“What is practice-led research?”

McNamara, Andrew, “Six Rules for Practice-led Research.” *Journal of Writing and Writing Courses 14 (Special Issue): 1-15* online:

<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue14/McNamara.pdf>

Carole Gray “From the Ground Up: Encountering Theory in the Process of Practice-led Doctoral Research,” *In Theory? Encounters with Theory in Practice-based PhD Research in Art and Design*, AHRC Postgraduate Conference, De Montfort University and Loughborough Universities, UK, 26 June 2007.

online: <http://carolegray.net/Papers%20PDFs/ngnm.pdf>

Linda Candy, “Practice Based Research: A Guide.” CCS Report (Sydney: Creativity and Cognition Studios, University of Technology, November 2006).

<http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf>

Carole Gray, “Inquiry Through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies”, 1996, in P. Korvenmaa (ed.) *No Guru, No Method? Conference Proceedings*, Research Institute, University of Art and Design. Online:

<http://carolegray.net/Papers PDFs/ngnm.pdf>

Lelia R. Green, “Creative Writing as Practice-led Research”, 2006. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 33 No. 2/3, 174-188.

Michael A. R. Biggs and Daniela Buchler, “Rigor and Practice-based Research”, 2007. *Design Issues*, 23, No. 3, 2007, 62-69.

Stephen Kemmis, “Action Research as a Practice-based Practice”, 2009. *Educational Action Research*, 17, No. 3, 2009, 463-474.

## Week of February 15

No required sessions; ‘Reading Week’; note online suggestions for self care during this week.

## Module 6, Week of February 22

**Book Study:** Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 2008, 1-218.

*“Practical theological interpretation involves four key tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic. It is helpful to conceptualize these four tasks with the image of a hermeneutical circle, which portrays interpretation as composed of distinct but interrelated moments . . . the four tasks of practical theological interpretation interpenetrate.” -Osmer, Practical Theology: An Introduction, 11.*

**Online Threaded Discussion - Group 1**

### **Live Streaming Synchronous Course Time**

**March 2 Tuesday 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.**

**March 3 Wednesday 9:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

- Part I**      **Embracing the Vocation of a Practical Theologian**
- Part II**     **Introducing Practice-led Research**
- Part III**    **Conducting Research in Practical Theology**
- Part IV**    **Shaping the Commitments of Practical Theology**
- Part V**     **Practical Theology as Theology**

#### **Module # 7**    **Week of March 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Book Study:** Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: ‘On Earth as It is in Heaven’*, 2005, 3-244.

*“All this to say that we live in the world as interpreters of the word, that we are always interpreting ourselves and the world around us, that to be human is to be an interpreter of life in all its rich distinctions and variations. The art of interpretation is a fundamental condition of human existence.” -Veling, Practical Theology, 23.*

**Online Threaded Discussion - Group 1**

#### **Module # 8**    **Week of March 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Book Study:** Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church*, 2017, 1-188.

*“Practical theology has a purpose and a reason; it is meant to produce something. It is mistaken to see the main product or result of practical theology as primarily an academic paper, a thesis, or even a book. Practical theology is not just a class taken as training for ministry; it is about changed lives. So the purpose and*

*eventual product of practical theology should be the transformation of individuals and communities.*” Ward, *Practical Theology*, 167.

**Online Threaded Discussion - Group 2**

**Module # 9a Week of March 22**

**Book Study:** Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 2008, 1-218

*“Practical theological interpretation involves four key tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic. It is helpful to conceptualize these four tasks with the image of a hermeneutical circle, which portrays interpretation as composed of distinct but interrelated moments . . . the four tasks of practical theological interpretation interpenetrate.”*

- Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 11.

**Online Threaded Discussion – Group 3**

**Module # 9b Week of March 22**

**Preparation for Practice-Led Research Projects**

**Go to Avenue to Learn** for guidance on how to prepare a practice-led research project design.

**Module # 10 Week of March 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Group Presentations – WebEx Wednesday March 31<sup>st</sup>**

**We will meet in groups of three or four to present our projects to each other and receive feedback from our peers. Plan for 10 min. presentation time and 15 min. discussion time.**

**(n.b. Group times will be established in the face to face time of the course.)**

**Module # 11 Week of April 5**

**Theme:** Servant Scholarship for the Church

**Join:** discussion thread

**Optional Consultations this week: Sign up for WebEx Personal 20 min. consultations with Dr. Zylla - by appointment.**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**1. Method in Practical Theology –**

**15 marks**

You will be assigned one method chapter from *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology – Part II* (89-255). Write a 750 word executive summary of this method and its implications for practice-led research projects. An executive summary means a critical and abbreviated summation of the core themes of the chapter. Pay special attention to the

bibliographical references used in the article and offer direction for others who might want to use this method. Your executive summary should be crisp, accurate, thoughtful and frame for others, the essence of the method and its primary contributors.

Submit to course assignment dropbox.

n.b. Come prepared to introduce your executive summary to others in the course when we meet face to face in March.

**Due: January 29, 2021 by 5 p.m. EST; class presentation on March 2 or 3.**

## **2. Locating Yourself in the Field of Practical Theology 25 marks**

One of the key goals of this course is to sift through the general field of practical theology in order to locate yourself as a practical theologian. It is essential that you come to terms with your own vocational history, your sense of personal mission and identity, and discover the approach that will sustain you as you enter into the field as a professional practical theologian. This should be written in a **12-15 page essay** which includes the following elements:

- a. autobiography – Describe your vocational, intellectual, ecclesial and spiritual history.
- b. Give an account of your intellectual and spiritual mentors.
- c. Describe your current understanding of practical theology and practice-led research.
- d. Summarize your educational path [including your current program].
- e. Describe your current relationships and plans in respect to ecclesiastical bodies and academic societies.
- f. What are your five year goals in the field of practical theology (looking ahead)?
- g. Outline concrete plans that you are making to establish your voice as a practical theologian.
- h. Include significant interaction with the readings of the course, especially the methodological choices that you are forming as a practical theologian.

**Due: March 1, 2021 by 5 p.m. EST**

## **3. Critical Book Study 10 marks**

**You will be assigned to a critical book study Group** (Ward, Veling, or Osmer). Write an 5-7 page critical assessment of the textbook your group has been assigned to review. Post your paper to the group discussion and be prepared to engage in critical dialogue with others. What are the key arguments put forward by the book? What is the proposed approach to practical theology? How can the book be used to support research in practical theology? In what ways does this approach support practice-led doctoral research? What are the differences in this approach from other volumes that we have reviewed in this course?

n.b. ALL THREE TEXTS ARE REQUIRED READING FOR ALL DPT COURSE PARTICIPANTS. Only one will require a critical written review.

Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 2008.

or

Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: 'On Earth as It is in Heaven'*, 2005.

or

Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church*, 2017.

Each summary should include:

- a. a description of the primary contribution of the book/chapters to the theoretical lense of practical theology



- b. a brief summary of the primary insights gained from reading the book/articles and their wider import
- c. a brief statement about how this supports your own work in practice-led research.

**Due: March 8, March 15 or March 22**

### **3. Presentation of Individual Creative Proposal for Professional Practice 20 marks**

Each course participant will create a proposal related to professional practice in his or her chosen focus area in the Doctor of Practical Theology program. The proposal should be creative and draw from the experience that the participant has in the practice. The proposals will be first presented in outline form in class for review and feedback from peers. A sign-up list will guide the presentation date on WebEx.

**Due: outline or powerpoint Monday, March 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. EST**

#### **Presentation: March 31, 2021 times TBA**

Submit a presentation to the course website for your colleagues to respond to in the WebEx conversation scheduled for that week. For your presentation, you can use the screen to present a powerpoint or other type of presentation. Please submit the powerpoint presentation outline as part of the exercise for grading. Each presenter will have approx. 10 min. to introduce their topic and 15 min. for discussion at the WebEx meeting.

### **4. Essay in Practical Theology 4000 words 30 marks**

Write an academic essay (4000 words) that critically engages both theory and practice in your area of focus. Draw deeply from course material and locate your essay in the larger discussion of the field of practical theology. Describe the theoretical lenses that supports your primary research and offer detailed consideration of the methods employed. The essay should reflect:

- a. A carefully selected meta-practice that is relevant to the participant's own vocation experience and research direction.
- b. A thoughtful articulation of problems and issues related to research in this area of practical theology and potential solutions.
- c. Skill in selecting and appropriating methods that will yield productive research in this area.
- d. Location of this topic within the wider field of practical theology.
- e. Demonstration of capacity to contribute to practice-led research on the chosen topic.

**Due Date: April 7<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. EST**

**Late Papers: Late assignments will be docked 2% each late business day. (Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as extended illness, etc.)**

**Spacing: All assignments are to be double-spaced.**

**Assignment Submission: All assignments are due by the end of the required day (5 p.m. EST).**

**Contacting the Professor: Dr. Phil C. Zylla**

#### **Mailing Address:**

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**E-mail:** [zyllap@mcmaster.ca](mailto:zyllap@mcmaster.ca)

**Consultation with Professor:** by appointment - contact me directly by email [zyllap@mcmaster.ca](mailto:zyllap@mcmaster.ca)

**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://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

**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 at [www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/](http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/)

**Gender 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), NVC (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

**Textbook Purchase:** All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book Service. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore will not be open due to COVID-19 restrictions until further notice.

For online purchase, you may contact READOn Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3 Phone 416.620.2934 Text: 416 668 3434. Fax 416.622.2308

Email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). **Free Shipping is available to students.** Other book services may also carry the texts.

**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 to and including the first day of class.