

**CH/TH 3XE3: THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY
FROM SECT TO GLOBAL RELIGION**

CH/TH 3XE3/5XE5

**McMaster Divinity College
Spring Semester 2021**

**Online Hybrid
Intensive Days:
Saturdays, May 1, 8, 15 (9:00am-3:00pm)**

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath
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*Specialization: Church and Culture; Christian History and
Worldview; Pastoral Studies*

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An examination of the rise of Christianity from an obscure first-century sect to a sixteenth-century global religion. Key events, persons, and theological themes will be examined, as well as important trends and trajectories in both western (Catholic) and eastern (Orthodox) Christianity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing

- to provide students with an understanding of how the Church has grown and developed over the centuries, and how it grew from an obscure sect to a global religion
- to examine various ways in which the Church has attempted to live in and engage with the wider culture
- to help students understand the process of theological development

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 in each student an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1*. Revised version, 2010. (Reading G – refers to chapters)
- Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and How It Died*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. (Reading J – refers to chapters)
- Select primary source readings – online versions
- 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, McMaster Divinity College. 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.

ONLINE COURSE:

Due to Covid 19, this course occurs all online, with both synchronous and asynchronous pre-recorded elements. The class meets on three Saturdays, and on those days there will be synchronous online Webex face-to-face lectures, presentations, and discussions. During the midweek there will also be pre-recorded lectures for viewing before Saturday's class (or, if unable to watch during the week, can be watched on the weekend.). There will also be an optional face-to-face synchronous "Midweek Lounge" where students and the professor can meet and chat about the class, deal with questions, or just connect and get to know one another.

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 ~ www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php.
- 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. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.
- Assignments must be submitted on the day they are due. All other assignments will be considered to be late. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 3% per day (not including weekends) if they attach to their assignment 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.

- Unless noted otherwise, all written work must conform to the MDC styleguide.

COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS

- **Missionary Biography (Due: May 8th & May 22nd)**

There are myriad missionaries in the church that have been instrumental in the spread of Christianity. This assignment allows students to focus on one. There are two stages to this assignment. First, students will present a three-minute summary of the person to class on Saturday, May 8th. Second, students will come up with a creative way to add details and analysis of the person's life and legacy and submit it to the professor a week after the class has ended (May 22nd). The final product may be a traditional paper, or some other creative and innovative approach.

- **Reading Journal Reflections on Three "Issues" Related to the Church's Global Advance (Due: May 15th)**

Students are to journal three issues (theological, pastoral, political, cultural, etc.) related to the church's advance - including a way forward for dealing with such issues. Students will be given an opportunity to share these in the final class. Relate these issues to your specialization.

- **Event Research Paper (Due: May 29th)**

This ten-page assignment provides the opportunity to develop skills in historical research is concerned with trying to gain an understanding of why a particular event in the church occurred. A clearly stated and argued thesis is central to this assignment. In order to do this, you must not only study primary sources, but also secondary sources. As you study the relevant secondary sources you will come to realize that different authors may have opposing interpretations as to why a particular event occurred. These differences are important to note and understand. See *Doing Church History* for further instructions. 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)

The topic for the paper should relate to the student's specialization. Results of research will be shared with the class at the end of the semester.

- ***Church and Culture Specialization***
The primary focus of this research should be on a theological analysis of the person's theological contribution. 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 person in Christian history, including her or her contribution to the life and trajectory of the

church and its theological development.

- ***Christian Worldview Specialization***
Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's theological position in regards to an issue related to ministry based on the person's life and ministry.
- ***Pastoral Studies Specialization***
Research for this specialization can go in one of two directions. First, it can focus on a theological construction of one's theological position - based on the person's life and ministry. Second, it can deal with developing a strategy for dealing with an issue today based on how the person dealt with an issue in the past.

GRADING:

- Online Engagement: 15%
- Missionary Biography: 20%
- Journal Reflections: 25%
- Research Paper: 40%

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Pre-Saturday (Asynchronous Pre-Recorded Lectures)¹

- Introduction to the Class, and to the Study of the History of Christianity
**Doing Church History* Reading Due
- The Roots of the Christian "Sect" and Its Early Growth
Readings: G. 1-4

Saturday, May 1st (Synchronous Engagement)

- Life & Practice in the Early Church
Readings: G. 9, 11
- From Outcasts to Rulers
Readings: G. 5-8; 10, 12
- Councils, Creeds and Canon
Readings: G. 13-26

Wednesday, May 5th, 8:00-9:00pm, "Midweek Lounge" (Synchronous Chat - *Optional*)

Midweek (Asynchronous Pre-Recorded Lectures)²

- The "Dark Ages" and the Rise of the Papacy
Readings: G. 27

¹ You can listen to this pre-recorded material during the week leading up to Saturday, or, if your work schedule does not allow for mid-week listening, you can listen to it on the weekend.

² You can listen to this pre-recorded material during the week leading up to Saturday, or, if your work schedule does not allow for mid-week listening, you can listen to it on the weekend.

Saturday, May 8th (Synchronous Engagement)

- The Church of the East
Readings: G. 28; J. 1-3
- The Conversion of Northwestern Europe
Readings: G. 29-30
- Christendom in the West
- Medieval Spirituality
Readings: G. 34-37; J. 8-9

Wednesday, May 12th, 8:00-9:00pm, “Midweek Lounge” (Synchronous Chat - *Optional*)

Midweek (Asynchronous Pre-Recorded Lectures)³

- The Church of Africa

Saturday, May 15th (Synchronous Engagement)

- Disasters in the East
Readings: G. 32-33; J. 4-7
- The Crusades
Readings: G. 31
- Missions to the Americas & Return to Asia
- Journal Discussions

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.

³ You can listen to this pre-recorded material during the week leading up to Saturday, or, if your work schedule does not allow for mid-week listening, you can listen to it on the weekend.