

# CH/TH 3XV3/6XV6: CHRISTIANS AND VIOLENCE

## McMaster Divinity College

Winter Semester, 2022

Saturday 9:00am-4:00pm

January 15, February 5, February 19, March 19

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath

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*Specializations: Church and Culture (CC),  
Pastoral Studies (PS), Christian History Worldview (CW)*

*“Dulce bellum inexpertis”*

Desiderius Erasmus

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been marked by terrorism, war, and violent persecution of religious minorities. Christians are to engage culture, but what do they do when that culture is violent? How are Christians to live in the midst of such horrors? Do they take up arms to defend themselves and others, or do they turn the other cheek? This course will examine Christian thinking and practice on militarism, the restraint of war and paths to peace, including just war, non-violence, pacifism and revolution. At the heart of the course is identifying an ancient Christian tradition on war and peace and thinking about how to appropriate it in the modern world.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

### *Knowing*

- to provide an understanding of how the church's view of a Christian's participation in warfare has developed and differed over the centuries
- to examine various ways in which the church has attempted to live in and engage with the wider culture during specific military conflicts
- to understand the process of theological development

### *Being*

- to encourage students to reflect on and develop their own view of Christians and war
- to nurture a sense of how to live in a culture of violence yet still be a faithful servant of Christ

### *Doing*

- to develop in each student an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective
- to develop the ability to think theologically about profoundly complex ethical issues
- to sharpen rhetorical skills

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- Gordon L. Heath, *Christians, the State, and War: An Ancient Tradition for the Modern World* (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022) \*arriving in February\*
- Thomas F. Madden. *The New Concise History of the Crusades*. Lanham/Boulder/New York/Toronto/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. (updated student edition)
- Gordon L. Heath and David K. Tarus, eds. *Christian Responses to Terrorism: The Kenyan Experience*. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2017.
- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008. [H1]
- Various primary sources distributed by professor

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Please try to support local book sellers such as READ ON Bookstore. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9B 6E2: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## 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>.
- Please follow the McMaster Divinity College style guide for assignments. <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/MDCStyleGuide> 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 submitted on the day they are due (email submissions are acceptable). All other essays 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 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.

- Assignments should be emailed directly to the instructor. To avoid any potential problems, students are advised to keep their working notes and a copy of their paper until a final mark has been received.
- Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins.
- Please do not attend class if you are ill.

#### COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS (MDiv/MTS):

Most classes will have a presentation by the professor. This presentation will seek to build upon and further develop the readings of the text and reader, as well as explore other themes not in the two texts.

All readings are to be completed before the class begins. These readings will not only be a critical component to understanding the content, but also will be an important part of the class discussions. Some classes will have a short primary source reading that should be read before the class begins. On certain days there will be a discussion of the source. See *Doing Church History* for more details on questions and issues related to primary sources.

- Personal Reflection (15%)

This three-page personal reflection should be a brief summary of the student's personal opinion about whether or not Christians should ever be involved in warfare. Mention of why such an opinion is held is also expected.

- Book Review (25%)

This three-page review of *The New Concise History of the Crusades*. Special note should be made in regard to how the book intersects with the student's specialization. See *Doing Church History* for more information on how to write a review.

- Movie Review/Discussion (10%)

Students will watch *Machine Gun Preacher* and then discuss it. Students need to be prepared to discuss whether or not they agree with the pastor's response. A one-page executive summary of the student's position is to be submitted to the professor.

- Research Paper (40%)

This ten-page paper is on a subject related to the student's specialization. There are a number of parts to this research project:

- Traditional academic research paper (5-6 pages)
- Non-traditional formats (5-6 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 research paper must be written with the student's specialization in mind:

- ***Church and Culture Specialization***

The primary focus of this research should be on a theological analysis of a past culture or our contemporary culture in regards to Christian attitudes and actions towards war. 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 in Christian history, or a deeper awareness of Christian theology related to violence and the church.

- ***Christian Worldview Specialization***

Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's theological position in regard to an issue related to Christians, war, and peace.

- Participation/Reading (10%)

### **COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS (DPT):**

Most classes will have a presentation by the professor. This presentation will seek to build upon and further develop the readings of the text and reader, as well as explore other themes not in the two texts.

All readings are to be completed before the class begins. These readings will not only be a critical component to understanding the content, but also will be an important part of the class discussions. Some classes will have a short primary source reading that should be read before the class begins. On certain days there will be a discussion of the source. See *Doing Church History* for more details on questions and issues related to primary sources.

- Literature Review and Commentary (25% & 25%)

The student will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately 15-20 resources (4000 pages) related to the topic of the course and write a 100 word annotation for each one. The required and recommended 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 October 6 and will constitute 25% of the course grade.

A commentary 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 the topic of the course. The paper will be approximately 3,000 words. It is due November 3 and will constitute 25% of the course grade.

- Major Research Paper (40%)

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). The paper should be approximately 8,000 words. It is due December 1 and will constitute 40% of the course grade.

- Class Participation (10%)

### **COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS (MA/PhD):**

Most classes will have a presentation by the professor. This presentation will seek to build upon and further develop the readings of the text and reader, as well as explore other themes not in the two texts.

All readings are to be completed before the class begins. These readings will not only be a critical component to understanding the content, but also will be an important part of the class discussions. Some classes will have a short primary source reading that should be read before the class begins. On certain days there will be a discussion of the source. See *Doing Church History* for more details on questions and issues related to primary sources.

- Literature Review and Commentary (25% & 25%)

The student will develop an annotated bibliography of approximately 15-20 resources (6000 pages) related to the topic of the course and write a 100 word annotation for each one. The required and recommended 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 October 6 and will constitute 25% of the course grade.

A commentary 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 the topic of the course. The paper will be approximately 3,000-4,000 words. It is due November 3 and will constitute 25% of the course grade.

- Major Research Paper (40%)

This paper is a major research paper. Ideally the student aims to prepare something for publication such as a journal article. Regardless, the work must be on a subject mutually agreed upon between professor and student. The paper should be approximately 8,000-10,000 words. It is due December 1 and will constitute 40% of the course grade.

- Class Participation (10%)

### **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

In the case of a snow day, the class will meet in live-streaming synchronous mode.

<https://mcmaster.zoom.us/j/6185125107>

**January 15: An Ancient Tradition (Part 1) \*Personal Reflection Due\***

Introduction to the Course  
 The Formation of an Early Church Tradition  
 An Ancient Tradition, the State, and the Sword  
 Personal Reflection Discussion

**February 5: An Ancient Tradition (Part 2) \*Book Review Due\***

An Ancient Tradition and Loyalty to Jesus  
 An Ancient Tradition and the Value of Human Life  
 An Ancient Tradition and Fallen Creation  
 Book Review Discussion

**February 19: An Ancient Tradition (Part 3) \*Movie Review\***

An Ancient Tradition and Engaging the State  
 Embracing the Best, Avoiding the Worst: Living an Ancient Tradition  
 The “Secondary” Debate  
 Movie Discussion

**March 19: An Ancient Tradition in the Modern World \*Research Paper Due\***

Weapons of Mass Destruction  
 New Weaponry  
 Post/Next-Christendom(s)  
 War on Terror  
 Rise and Decline of Powers  
 Research Paper Presentations

**This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the professor. This syllabus is prepared with the best information available, but the professor reserves the right to change the content and format of the course.**