

Current Issues in Theology

PhD – CHTH G105-C03

MA – TH 6XC6

McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2023 (Sept 12–Dec 10)
Tuesday 9:00-10:50
Baptist Heritage Room

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Hours: Tuesdays, after class, by
appointment

I. Description:

This course provides an opportunity to explore and to develop scholarly expertise in contemporary issues in theology. To achieve that goal, course lectures and discussions cover significant topics in contemporary theology (e.g., theological hermeneutics, theology of religions, and the doctrine of the Trinity) and student projects and papers provide an opportunity to develop proficiency in a specific area of theology.

II. Course Objectives:

My goal for the course is for you to develop vocational competency as a scholarly researcher in the area of theology that will serve you in fulfilling your research program at McMaster Divinity College and more broadly develop your calling as a theologian. With this in mind, the knowing, being, and doing learning objectives delineate specific objectives to facilitate achieving the vocational goals of the course.

A. Knowing:

1. Know key areas of contemporary theology.
2. Know and be familiar with the contributions of key figures in contemporary theology.
3. Begin to “gain specialized command of contemporary theology, related to your area of research.

B. Being:

1. Become a critical and constructive theological leader.
2. Appreciate the value of current theological movements for the church and your life.
3. Be a respectable, respectful, and significant theologian.
4. Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.

C. Doing:

1. Develop the ability to present informative lectures and facilitate student discussions.
2. Research and present to peers original research on a substantial topic in contemporary theology.
3. Hone critical reading skills in primary literature.
4. Develop the ability to analyze secondary scholarship in light of primary texts.

III. Required Text(s):

1. Darren Sarisky, *Reading the Bible Theologically* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
2. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
A. Book Review/Primary Text	10%	Day of presentation
B. Lecture and Syllabus	30%	Day of presentation
C. Thesis Paper and Presentation	50%	Paper due one week after presentation (Nov 28 & Dec 5)
1. Presentation (15%)		
2. Paper (35%)		
D. Response and Facilitation	10%	Day of presentation
E. Participation:	X	Every class session
Total: 100%		

V. Course Outline (*tentative*):

Week	Date	Topic
1	9/12	Introduction to the Course PART ONE: LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY A. Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method
2	9/19	Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method (continued)
3	9/26	B. Lecture & Discussion: The Trinity
4	10/3	B. Lecture & Discussion: Trinity (continued)
5	10/10	10/9-15 Reading Week/Hybrid Intensive Week • Our class will not meet this week and will not have online content.
6	10/17	C. Lecture & Discussion: Atonement

7	10/24	C. Lecture & Discussion: Theological Anthropology
8	10/31	D. Lecture & Discussion: Participation/Union with Christ (theosis)
9	11/7	E. Lecture & Discussion: Creation and Grace (eco-theology)
10	11/14	F. Lecture & Discussion: Retrieval Theology
11	11/21	PART TWO: STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS
12	11/28	STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS CONTINUED
13	12/5	CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

VI. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- I prefer Word docs rather than PDFs. Use the following format for file names: your last name.assignment.docx [Springer.BookReview.docx].
- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.
- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form posted in Avenue.
- All assignments must conform to (and will be marked against) the MDC Style Guide.

A. Book Review:

1. Purpose: Develop the ability to comprehend and analyze primary source scholarship in a field of study (for this course, contemporary theologians can serve as primary texts).
2. Description:
 - a. Write and present in class a review of a book on a topic related to the course.
 - b. You are encouraged to write the review on a book that you will use in the thesis paper.
3. Format:
 - a. Length: 750–800 words. Double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font.
 - b. A review should include the following elements:
 - 1) Contextualization: first book of its kind, a new study on such and such topic, reflects a tradition or school of thought, etc.?
 - 2) Statement of the thesis.
 - 3) Description of the content and its relationship to the thesis; does it support the thesis?

- 4) Critical analysis: fairly point out the strengths and weaknesses.
- 5) Statement of the book's value and suitable audience(s).
- 6) Although not included in a review for publication, please include a statement expressing the book's usefulness for your area of research (if used for the paper).

4. Presentation:

- a. Provide . . .
 - 1) A summary of the book's thesis and argument
 - 2) A summary of your assessment of the above
 - 3) A statement about the role it plays in your research.
- b. Interact with colleagues on the review
- c. Time: 10 minutes.

B. Lecture & Syllabus:

1. Purpose: This assignment provides experience *preparing* a syllabus and *delivering* a lecture for teaching in an undergraduate setting.
 * The preparation of the syllabus helps fulfill one requirement of the Mastery Checklist.

2. Description:

You will prepare a syllabus on a topic related to theology. You will also prepare a lecture on one of the lecture topics listed in the syllabus. You may use this assignment to investigate an area that will promote your research program (e.g., prepare for doctoral comprehensive exams and MA thesis/PhD dissertation topics). You should, however, gear the syllabus and the lecture toward an undergraduate audience.

3. Guidelines:

a. Research:

- 1) Research for the lecture will account for the supplemental reading for advanced degree students (approximately 5,000-6,000 pages)
- 2) Documentation of reading and research:

Please provide an annotated bibliography of the reading consulted in the preparation of the lecture (the annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text and the what it contributes to the course syllabus and/or lecture).

b. Syllabus:

- 1) The syllabus should contain the usual elements listed in a syllabus—title, course description, assignments, course outline.
- 2) The lecture outline can be based on a 13 or 15 week semester (15 week is more common for US schools)

c. Lecture:

- 1) The lecture should present and discuss the primary content points of the topic (or sub-topic) in the syllabus lecture outline.
- 2) Lecture handouts/outlines and PowerPoint are helpful, but not required.

- 3) Length: The lecture/discussion is to last thirty-minutes.
4. Evaluation: Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following:
 - a. Upload your lecture notes, syllabus, and annotated bibliography to Avenue.
 - b. Does the lecture accurately present and discuss the topic?
 - c. Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation/discussion of the content?
 - d. Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it have value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry?
 - e. Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?
- C. Thesis Paper and Presentation:
1. Purpose: This assignment gives you experience writing article, essay, and chapter length theological papers and presenting research in an oral form similar to that performed at academic conferences.
 2. Description:
You will *write* and *present* a thesis paper on a topic related to the topic of the course. I encourage you to investigate the issue from the perspective of your discipline and area(s) of research interest. You are encouraged to use the class as an opportunity to work on papers to 1) present at academic society meetings and/or submit to journals for publication and 2) use in preparation for comprehensive exams, and 3) use for dissertation preparation.
 3. Guidelines for the Paper: The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .
 - a. Content and argument:
 - 1) Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports). An example of a thesis statement: “the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church for the 21st century.”
 - 2) Describe your topic.
 - 3) Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.
 - 4) Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.
 - b. Presentation:
 - 1) Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid excessive first-person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).
 - 2) Use and document a *minimum* of fifteen scholarly resources.
 - 3) Accurately document sources according to MDC Style Guide.
 - 4) Paper length: 20–25 pages. Not to exceed 7,000 words.
 - 5) Provide a bibliography (list only sources cited in the paper’s footnotes).
 - 6) Use footnotes.
 4. Presentation of Paper:

- a. Each student paper presentation will take approximately fifty minutes (one segment of a class session).
 - b. The presentation includes three parts:
 - 1) Presenter presents the paper: approximately thirty minutes.
 - 2) Response: approximately fifteen minutes.
 - 3) Class discussion of the paper and response: approximately five to ten minutes.
 - c. A written submission/outline to the class is not required, but is encouraged as it may be beneficial to other students in the course.
5. Possible thesis paper topics and areas:
- Theological Hermeneutics: Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer
 - Radical Orthodoxy: James K. A. Smith and Katherine Pickstock
 - Pentecostalism
 - Theology and Science
 - Theological Anthropology
 - Trinity
 - Atonement theology

D. Respond to Paper Presentation and Facilitate Discussion:

1. Purpose: Provides experience responding to and moderating academic presentations and discussions, such as one might do at an academic society meeting.
2. Description:

Each student *prepares a critique* and *facilitates a discussion* of a thesis paper presentation. You can go through point by point as a monologue or start by raising and offering your thoughts on the paper's primary contributions and arguments and invite discussion based on your remarks and interaction with the paper and then so forth through the rest of the points you have identified.

 - a. The critique:
 - 1) Remember to be charitable; not only Christian, but since academia is a small guild, it is self-preservation.
 - 2) Critical (includes highlighting and discussing problems *and* strengths):
The critique should explore the following sorts of issues:
 - Does the paper have a thesis?
 - Does the content develop and support the thesis?
 - Does it use appropriate sources?
 - Does it interact with the relevant secondary literature?
 - b. The discussion:

You should keep the presentation to time limit and effectively manage student discussion (do not let one person dominate the interaction; move on to a new issue if discussion begins to go off on tangents and run down rabbit trails). Be sure to

elicit comments from all people present. You might want to have some prepared questions and discussion prompts to facilitate the initial discussion.

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

B. Academic Honesty:

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

C. AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

D. 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, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

E. Style:

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. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuide.pdf>

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus.
- C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late [after the beginning of class equals one day late], the grade is reduced to 85).
- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.
- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

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.