

CRITICAL EVENTS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

CH 3XG3/5XG5/6XG6

McMaster Divinity College

Fall Semester 2023
Monday, 11:00am – 12:50pm

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath
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Specializations: CW/CC

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, the 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 critical 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 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: HarperOne: 2009)
- 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 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. Of course, you can purchase your books anywhere, but I encourage you to support our local bookstores.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (*not* required for purchasing):

The following is a list of a few books the professor has found helpful on the course's subject matter. This list contains suggestions for supplementary reading only, and the books are not required for the course.

Christopher Baumer. *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2016.

Peter Brown. *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*. Blackwell, 1996.

Henry Chadwick. *The Early Church (Revised Edition)*. London: Penguin, 1993.

Richard Fletcher. *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Michael Green. *Evangelism and the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Hans-Joachim Klimkeit. *Christians in Asia before 1500*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Carter Lindberg. *The European Reformations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996.

Diarmaid MacCulloch. *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. London: Allen Lane, 2009.

Thomas F. Madden. *The New Concise History of the Crusades*. Lanham/Boulder/New York/Toronto/Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Samuel Hugh Moffett. *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume 1, Beginnings to 1500*. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.

Thomas C. Oden. *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2007.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Third Edition, 2011).

Rodney Stark. *The Rise of Early Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

An older but helpful and accessible set of books on this subject are from the six-volume set on the expansion of Christianity by Kenneth Scott Latourette:

- *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The First Five Centuries*
- *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The Thousand Years of Uncertainty, 500-1000*
- *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Three Centuries of Advance, 1500-1800*

GENERAL COMMENTS:

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.

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.

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).

Online engagement does not require conformity to the MDC styleguide. Further instruction for online engagement will be provided in class.

Unless noted otherwise, submitted written assignments requires conformity to the MDC styleguide.

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 and may not be returned at the same time as the papers submitted on the due date.

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).

COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS (MDiv/MTS/Diploma/Certificate):

- Recite Apostles Creed (pass/fail)

Students will be required to memorize and recite the Apostles Creed.

- Causation in History Position Paper (10%)

Students will write a two-page position paper on their personal position regarding the ability to discern God's actions in history.

- Textbook Analysis Paper or Denominational History Paper (40%)

Students 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.

OR

Students will analyze the events surrounding a key turning point in their own denomination or local church. The focus of this paper will be a critical analysis of the "who, what, where, when, and why" a particular event.

- Research Paper (40%)

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. 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. 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 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)
- Participation and Reading Completed: 10%

COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS (DPT):

- Recite Apostles Creed (pass/fail)

Students will be required to memorize and recite the Apostles Creed once per semester.

- 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 1 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 1 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):

- Recite Apostles Creed (pass/fail)

Students will be required to memorize and recite the Apostles Creed once per semester.

- 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 1 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 1 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:

Sept 11: Introduction to Course; Providence and Causation in History

Sept 18: Birth and Early Growth of the Early Church
**Position Paper Due*

Sept 25: Conversion of Constantine and Its Impact

Oct 2: Canon, Councils, Creeds, and Patriarchs (Part One)

Oct 9: **Reading Week – No Class**

Oct 16: Canon, Councils, Creeds, and Patriarchs (Part Two); Birth of Monasticism

Oct 23: Battles with Islam; Three Major Schisms (Part One)

**Textbook Analysis Paper or Denominational History Paper Due*

Oct 30: Three Major Schisms (Part Two)

Nov 6: Rise and Fall of Christianities

Nov 13: Pentecostalism

Nov 20: Vatican Two; Global Christianity

Nov 27: Research Paper Presentations

**Research Paper Due*

Dec 4: Other Key Turning Points; The Future...

**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.**