

Theology through History: Formation, Development & Trends in Christian Thought

TH 3XZ3/5XZ5/6XZ6

CC/CW/PS

McMaster Divinity College
Winter 2024 (January 10 – April 4)
Wednesday 9:00-10:50
Location: Boardroom

Don W. Springer, Ph.D.
Email: springdw@mcmaster.ca
Hours: Wednesdays, after class, by
appointment

I. Description

This course looks at the key moments in the history of Christian theology, emphasizing the influential figures, controversies, and contexts that shaped Christian doctrine and tradition, with an eye toward understand its relevancy for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry. Our objective is to consider the theology behind: early patristic controversies; movements such as monasticism, the Protestant Reformation, the revivals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century—Great Awakenings, Holiness and Pentecostal revivals; and the rise of new theological movements in the church.

Specializations: Church and Culture; Christian History and Worldview; Pastoral Studies

II. Course Objectives

Knowing:

- Know the significant persons & theological developments in the history of Christian theology.
- Know the important Protestant Reformation theological trajectories and figures.
- Know the issues related to Modernist, Liberal and Postmodern theologies.
- Know the theological and philosophical issues related to Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Post-conservative evangelical theology.
- Be familiar with several important trends in contemporary theology.

Being:

- Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.
- Embrace a deeper sense of your own Christian identity vis-à-vis significant historic Christian theological traditions and contemporary Christian theology and postmodern culture.

Doing:

- Develop analytical and synthetic skills in theological reflection.
- Hone your critical abilities for reading texts in historical theology.
- Gain a comprehensive understanding of the development and trajectories of Christian theology.
- Engage in the process of constructive and generative theological reflection and writing.

III. Course Texts

Plantinga, Richard J., Thompson, Thomas R., Lundberg, Matthew D. *An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Primary Readings will be uploaded to Avene to learn.

IV. Course Assignments

➤ MDiv/MTS/Diploma/Certificate Assignments

1. Annotated Reading Log (4-6 pages) 20%

At the heart of Christian theology is the writings of the founding, and most influential thinkers. These are the “primary” sources for this class. Students will keep a reading log for both primary and secondary readings. Primary source selections require one paragraph of summary analysis and reflection; the textbooks require two pages each (include: a summary of key ideas, potential insights for ministry, and personal evaluation of the book’s thesis and relevance).

➤ Due Date: March 20

2. The Formation of Doctrine Paper (6-8 pages) 30%

Students will write a brief paper demonstrating an awareness of how one major doctrine developed — from its Biblical foundations to its contemporary “fixed” form. The essay will: 1) summarize the classical understanding of one doctrine; 2) summarize the key Biblical texts that form the foundation of the doctrine; 3) identify the one or two key figures and historical moments that moved the doctrine from foundations to contemporary formulation. The final component of the essay depends on the student’s specialization:

- a. Christian History & Worldview will offer critical analysis concerning the development and formation of the doctrine. Which moments in history, which controversies were the most influential?
- b. Those in the Church and Culture will identify historical or ecclesial influences that contributed to the doctrine.
- c. Pastoral Studies students will give extra attention to practical implications for the church today.

➤ Due Date: February 21

3. Research Paper & Presentation (10-12 pages) 40%

Students will write a research paper on a topic related to their personal research interests, but also related to the class focus. The essay requires a clear thesis question and statement and could focus on a key era, individual, doctrine, or controversy in church history. The topic of this paper will be determined by the student’s specialization and developed in consultation with the professor.

➤ Due Date: The Presentations will occur in one of the final four classes of the semester, paper due on April 3.

4. Participation 10%

➤ DPT Assignments

1. Annotated Reading Log (4-6 pages) 20%

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➤ Due Date: February 21

3. Major Research Paper & Presentation 40%

The paper should include four key sections. (1) a brief, but clear explanation of how the paper is rooted in a Practice Led-research approach; (2) 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?) (3) 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. (4) 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.

➤ Due Date: The Presentations will occur in one of the final four classes of the semester, paper due on April 3.

4. Class Participation 10%

➤ **MA/PhD Assignments**

1. Literature Review and Commentary

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.

➤ Due Date: February 7 25%

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.

➤ Due Date: March 6 25%

2. Major Research Paper & Presentation 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 April 1 and will constitute 40% of the course grade.

➤ Due Date: Presentations occur in one of the final four classes of the semester, paper due on April 3.

3. Class Participation 10%

V. Overview of Course and Lectures:

1. January 10 Course introduction & overview
2. January 17 Early Christian theology and the “development” of doctrine
3. January 24 The fathers of theology: Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, etc.
4. January 31 The Medieval Age and the rise of mystical theology
5. February 7 Monasticism, Scholasticism, and Renaissance renewal
6. February 14 Nuclear Theology: the historical, social & doctrinal influences on reformation
7. February 21 *Reading Week*
8. February 28 Giants of the age: Erasmus, Luther, Calvin and the splintering of the West
9. March 6 Counter and radical reformations and Anabaptist theology
10. March 13 The Age of Awakenings: Wesley & Edwards, Pietists & Puritans
11. March 20 Modern, Liberal, and Fundamentalist Theologies
12. March 27 Contemporary Theology: Fundamentalism, progressivism and more.
13. April 3 Evangelical Theology and the contemporary Church: the road ahead.

VI. 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 Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late.
- C. Assignments will be accepted without penalty only in the case of an excused absence. If a
- D. Assignments will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with school-approved activities. If you unable to attend class, you must pre-arrange with the instructor to 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.