Theology of the Person: An African Perspective

Course code: **Fall 2024**
Classes begin: September 9
Reading Week: October 14-18
Last Day of Classes: December 13
Mode of Delivery: Asynchronous (no 'live' class sessions)

Psalms 8:4: *What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*

The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.

FACULTY INFORMATION

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Term Date: Fall 2024.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW & TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Personal Philosophy

My worldview is shaped by my commitment to the four tenets of the evangelical tradition provided by David Bebbington (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1989, 7): Centrality of the Bible, the significance of personal conversion, expression of faith in word and deed, and the centrality of Christ's redeeming work (though I am also aware of other priority areas of evangelicalism such as spiritual formation and revival, social transformation, theology of work, and a few others). Within this evangelical tradition are many ecclesial traditions, which are to be celebrated and honored, though we might not all agree on certain things. Diversity signifies the uniqueness and beauty of the Christian faith. This commitment has shaped my current ministry at the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), leading a continental agency—The Association for Christian

Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), which aims to strengthen theological education through accreditation, research, and capacity-building in order to serve the Church and transform society. My research interests and publications on ethnopolitical cohesion, ecclesial engagement, and political theology are all within the evangelical ethos and depict this commitment.

My Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is shaped by my evangelical commitment. The primacy of scripture should guide our teaching, doctrine, and how we live our lives. It is essential to have a personal relationship with Christ and to be obedient to the Spirit's transforming guidance. This involves expressing our faith through both our words and actions, as well as submitting our lives to Christ's authority. These core beliefs should influence how we engage in scholarship, interact with others (such as students, lecturers, and those in ministry contexts), and prepare for future ministry.

I strongly believe in Christian scholarship that encompasses three key dimensions: knowledge (knowing), inner formation (being), and vocational competencies (doing). These models draw from the traditional pillars of orthodoxy (right faith), orthopraxis (right living), orthopathos (emotional experiences), and doxology (right worship). Theological education should aim to teach and exemplify all of these components in theological scholarship. Through this approach, they can produce graduates who are deeply committed to their faith, intellectually versatile, and dedicated to the lordship of Christ in all aspects of their lives, including their intellectual pursuits, worship, and service.

The words of my mentor and friend, Steve Hardy, inspire my teaching ministry and animate what I do.

> Great fruit is the best indication of excellence in theological education. The graduates of excellent programmes preach better, evangelize better, administrate better, and live better in that their lives faithfully imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. Their learning prepared them well for the ministries to which God has called them.

"Factors that Contribute to Excellence in Theological Education." In *Leadership in Theological Education: Foundations for Academic Leadership*, 83–103. ICETE. Carlisle, UK: Langham Global, 2017)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the theology of the person (theological anthropology) from an African perspective. By the end of this course, students will understand and appreciate what it means to be human from an African theological perspective. They will be equipped to apply this knowledge in their ministerial and professional contexts, fostering a deeper appreciation of the purpose of their existence as individuals created in the image of God and as beings created to know, love, glorify, and enjoy God forever.

COURSE DELIVERY MODE

This course will be delivered online *asynchronously* (no 'live' class sessions are required). I will provide pre-recorded lectures and will often provide other short videos from or of different African scholars, which you will watch and interact with through reflection questions provided at the end of each lecture. A lecture may thus encompass more than one video. I will also assign you some readings of both contemporary theological texts (mainly articles and essays) written by African theologians to gain a deeper understanding of theological anthropology. I expect you to participate in online discussion forums that aim to connect course material with your personal and ministerial context. Please remember to be charitable (practice *ubuntu*—charity) while responding to others' views. All assignments and interactions must be submitted via the A2L platform by the stipulated deadline. No exception. I am available via email in case you need to reach me. I can also have a Zoom call with you if you must speak to me (I am here to help you have a wonderful learning experience).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowing:
- Understand theological anthropology from the African context.
- Explore the significance of theological anthropology for life and ministry today.

Being:
- Appreciate the unique contributions of African Christianity to the understanding of humanity.
- Appreciate the significance of theological anthropology for your life, community, and the church context.
- Cultivate a hopeful and transformative view of humanity in light of Christ's redeeming role.

Doing:
- Engage critically with contemporary African theological anthropologies.
- Participate actively and respectfully in discussions and other class engagements.
- Analyze an African anthropological proposal from a biblical perspective.
- Apply theological insights gained in this class to your personal and ministerial context.

COURSE RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Required Books

- Kapolyo, Joe M. *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2013.

- Ng'weshemi, Andrea M. *Rediscovering the Human: The Quest for a Christo-theological Anthropology in Africa*. Studies in Biblical Literature 39. Peter Lang, 2002.

Required Articles

- Banda, C. "*Ubuntu* as human flourishing? An African traditional religious analysis of ubuntu and its challenge to Christian anthropology." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5, no. 3 (2019): 203–228. https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n3.a10 (open access)

- Joseph, Celucien L. "Toward a Black African Theological Anthropology and Ubuntu Ethics." *Journal of Religion and Theology* 2, no. 1 (2018): 16–30. https://doi.org/10.22259/2637-5907.0201002 (open access; Joseph is a Haitian theologian, but this article specifically examines the thought of Laurenti Magesa, John S. Mbiti, and Bénézet Bujo)

- Owusu-Gyamfi, Clifford. "Onipa: The Human Being and the Being of Human Among the Akan people of West Africa: Towards an African Theological Anthropology." *Trinity Postgraduate Review Journal* 18, no. 1 (2019): 74–94. https://www.esr.ie/index.php/tpr/article/view/1307 (open access)

- van Wyngaard, George J. (Cobus). "The Theological Anthropology of Simon Maimela: Democratisation of Power and Being Human in Relationship." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): Article 1682, 8 pages. https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1682 (open access)

- Tarus, David. "Being Human: Theological Anthropology in the Age of Violence," in Gordon L. Heath and David Tarus (eds), *Christian Responses to Terrorism: The Kenyan Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), pp. 88-105. (This book can be purchased at the MDC Bookstore or online: https://wipfandstock.com/9781498229272/christian-responses-to-terrorism/). I am sure you can also get a copy of the book at the University library.

- Tarus, David and Stephanie Lowery, "African Theologies of Identity and Community: The Contributions of John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi, Vincent Mulago, and Kwame Bediako." *Open Theology* (De Gruyter Open), 2017; 3:305-320. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0024 (open access).

Additional readings may be assigned (e.g., articles and chapter selections within books).

Additional Resources on Theological Anthropology (for your reference—not required)

- Anderson, Ray Sherman. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

- Browne, Herman Beseah. *Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Study of the African and Liberation Traditions*. London: Avon Books, 1996.

- Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

- Cairns, David. *The Image of God in Man*. London: SCM, 1953.

- Cortez, Marc. *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

- Cortez, Marc. *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010.

- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville: Westminster, 2001.

- Gunton, Colin E. and Daniel W. Hardy, eds. *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989.

- Gushee, David P. *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision is Key to the World's Future*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

- Hall, Douglas John. *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

- Middleton, Richard J. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.

- Musopole, Augustine C. *Being Human in Africa: Toward an African Christian Anthropology*. American University Studies 65. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

- Mveng, Engelbert. *Théologie, Libération et Cultures Africaines: Dialogue sur l'anthropologie négro-africaine. Essai*. Présence africaine, 1996.

- Owusu-Gyamfi, Clifford. *The Spirit With Us: Towards A Contextual African Pneumatology and Theological Anthropology*. Afrikanische Theologie / African Theology / Théologie Africaine. LIT Verlag, 2023.

- Schwöbel, Christoph. "Human Being As Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology." In *Persons Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, 141–70. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991.

- Shults, F. LeRon. *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

- Zizioulas, John D. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1: Being Human: An Overview
- Humans as Rational Beings
- Humans as Relational Beings
- Humans as Liturgical Beings

Assignment: Read Chapter 1, "Concepts of Humankind: Old and New," in Joe M. Kapolyo's *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes,* pages 5-18. The chapter explores contemporary anthropological discussions and examines different visions, including Darwin's, Marxist, and Christian understandings of humanity. How would you respond to the differing perspectives from a biblical perspective?

Week 2: African Theologies of Identity

- Pan-Africanism
- Négritude
- African Renaissance
- Liberation Theologies (South African Black Theology, African Liberation Theology, Bosadi Theology).

Assignment: Read David Kirwa Tarus and Stephanie Lowery's "African Theologies of Identity and Community: The Contributions of John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi, Vincent Mulago, and Kwame Bediako" *Open Theology*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, pp. 305-320. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0024.

What lessons did you learn about Africa's quest for identity, self-reliance, and liberation?

Week 3: *Ubuntu*: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."[1]

Assignment: How can you use the concept of *Ubuntu* to advance a theological anthropology that respects "the other"? The following resources provide a good overview of this concept.

Banda C. "*Ubuntu* as human flourishing? An African traditional religious analysis of ubuntu and its challenge to Christian anthropology." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5, no. 3 (2019): 203–228. https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2019.v5n3.a10 (open access).

Julius Mutugi Gathogo. "African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concept of Hospitality and Ubuntu." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (2008) 39–53. Access **here**.

Joe M. Kapolyo's *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes,* pages 19-27 (the main textbook), provides an overview of the African idea of *ubuntu.*

Watch a YouTube presentation by Desmond Tutu titled, "Who We Are: Human Uniqueness and the African Spirit of Ubuntu. Desmond Tutu, Templeton Prize 2013," available **Here**.

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[1] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

Week 4: *Utu*: I am Human Because I Act Human

Assignment: Watch a YouTube video of a children's cartoon titled "Utu: Shared Humanity." The video is available **here.** Look for an opportunity to show the video to children perhaps at your church or at your home. Discuss lessons learned with the children and then share some of the lessons on the platform.

Week 5: The Primacy of Religion: "Africans are Notoriously Religious"[2]

> **Assignment:** Read John S. Mbiti's "Main Features of Twenty-First Century Christianity in Africa," *Missio Africanus* 1/2 (2016), available **here.** What lessons can the church in the West learn from African Christianity? (Identify at least three lessons in not more than 500 words).

Book Review due.

Week 6: Being Human in God's Image
* The various views of the *imago Dei*
* An African understanding of the *imago Dei*
* The significance of the *imago Dei* today

Assignment: Write a 500-word review of the following essay. What lessons did you learn on the role of the image of God in advocating for the dignity of humanity in the context of violence?

> Tarus, David. "Being Human: Theological Anthropology in the Age of Violence," in Gordon L. Heath and David Tarus (eds), *Christian Responses to Terrorism: The Kenyan Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), pp. 88-105

Week 7: Persons with Disabilities in the African Context

Assignment: Read and reflect on the following essay in not more than 500 words. How else do you respond to the critiques of the various interpretations of the doctrine of the image of God in light of the affirmation of the humanity of people living with disabilities?

> Tarus, David. "Being Different: Imago Dei in Light of Disability in Africa," Unpublished Paper. (A PDF copy of the essay will be made available to you.)

Week 8: Biblical Perspectives on the Human Condition

Multimedia Presentation due.

Week 9: Being Human in Light of Christ: Some African Proposals

Assignment: Jesus Christ is the perfect *exemplar* and an *enabler* of humanity as God intended it to be. Explain this theological understanding in no more than 500 words.

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[2] Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

Week 10: Being Human in Light of the Church: Some African Proposals

Assignment: Professor Mercy A. Oduyoye from Ghana writes, "Africans see it [the church] as an *Abusua* [the Akan ethnic community's association of households] of Christ, the coming together of 'relatives' of Christ to be a new community that does the will of God."[3] What do you think of this statement in light of the church today? How do we foster a church that truly accommodates all of us as 'relatives'—brothers and sisters in Christ? (no more than 500 words).

Reflective Paper due

Week 11: Being Human in God's World
　　　Creation, Creativity, and Culture.

Assignment: Reflect on how you would apply lessons learned to advance a theology of creation, creativity, and culture in your context. Focus particularly on your ministry context, such as your church, school, city, etc. (Post the lessons learned on the platform).

Week 12: Being Human in Today's Africa
　　　Community, Conflict, and Cohesion

Week 13: To Be Human and to Be for Humanity: Concluding Lessons from Africa
　　　(To be human is to be in a state of becoming more human)

Assignment: "To be human is to be in a state of becoming more human." What do you understand by this statement? Do you agree with it?

ASSIGNMENTS

Please note that all the assignments *must strictly* follow the **MDC Style Guide** without **exception.**

1. *Online discussions (40 % of final grade)*

2. *Multimedia Presentation (10 % of final grade)*

   Assume you were teaching a Children's Lesson at your home church on the African concept of *Utu* and *Ubuntu.* Create a multimedia presentation (slides or video, maximum 3 minutes) of your key lessons. Be creative.

3. *Book Review (20 % of final grade)*

Read *The Human Condition: Christian Perspectives Through African Eyes*. Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2013, by Joe M. Kapolyo and write a critical book review.

- Discuss the strengths of the book. What does the author do well? Comment on the originality and depth of his argument.

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[3] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The African Family as a Symbol of Ecumenism." *Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 465–478 (pg. 471).

- Point out any weaknesses or areas for improvement. Are there any gaps in his argument? Did he overlook any perspective? How could he have improved his argument?
- Joe Kapolyo writes from an African perspective. Considering what you have learned in this course, what stands out in his argument?
- How does the book contribute to the understanding of the human condition from a Christian and African perspective?
- Provide a final assessment of the book. What did you learn from this African author?

4. Reflective Paper: Being Human in Today's Complex World (30 % of final grade)

Assignment Description: Write a paper (not more than 3,000 words) on the theme of **"Being Human in Today's World: A Theological Reflection on ————————** (pick one issue that this course has tackled). This paper should be grounded in biblical and theological reflection, integrating insights from the course and addressing contemporary challenges.

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.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

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.

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: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011). Online asynchronous courses, such as the ones in the MAGC program, are to include the following statements:

Presence and Meaningful Participation

Presence and participation in this course are expected. Faculty know from many years of experience that a student's level of presence and participation in the course will impact how well she or he will score in the course. Although there are exceptions to this rule of thumb, low levels of presence and participation tend to translate to low grades; mediocre presence and participation tend to translate to mediocre grades; and high levels of presence and participation tend to translate to higher grades. A word needs to be said about what constitutes "presence" (attendance) and "participation" in an asynchronous course. Students must establish a record of participation in academically related activities to meet the expected level of attendance and meaningful participation. Be aware that merely logging into the online class is not, by itself, sufficient as a demonstration of attendance and participation by the student. "Academically related activities" certainly includes participation in and completion of the course requirements that are described below. Additionally, just as students are expected to engage with the course content/materials throughout the week outside of the learning management system (A2L), so also students are expected to engage one another in formative dialogue "outside of class." This is an important part of belonging to and maintaining a community of learning and is a staple ingredient in what constitutes "presence."

Online Etiquette

It is critical in any MDC class that students show respect for classmates and the instructor. This is even truer in the online environment because many of the non-verbal cues that we use to interpret what a person is communicating to us are not present online (except, perhaps in video posts). Therefore, it is especially critical that we be mindful of how our words will be interpreted by those who are reading them. As the instructor of the course, it is my responsibility to monitor communications to ensure that all students feel comfortable expressing their views in a respectful manner. Most if not all courses at MDC are devoted to the interpretation of Scripture. Invariably there will be disagreements; these disagreements must be discussed and negotiated in a respectful manner. This applies to individual and group communications involving the instructor and the others enrolled in the course. The instructor will expect that you will give some thought to your postings. Excessive postings are also frowned upon because these amount to dominating the discussion. Please limit your postings to less than 200 words. Instructors reserve the right to ask students to take a step back to allow others discussion time if she or he feels that an individual is dominating the discussion. In your responses, please try to be clear which point your response refers to. Students who violate these guidelines may be dismissed from class.