THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS: THEN AND NOW
CP 3P1120/CH 5P1150

McMaster Divinity College
Fall Semester 2025

Tuesday 9:00am-10:50am

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In-Person Class and Live Stream Options

Specializations: CW/CC

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the lives of the saints ("then") and their relevance to life and ministry today ("now"), primarily through a reading of their (or their follower's) writings. It is concerned with the historical and theological development of the saints, the role of hagiography in the life of the church, and the appropriation of the lives of the saints for life and ministry today.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Knowing
- to provide an understanding of the historical development of saints, the theological diversity of saints, and the role of the saints in the life of the three main traditions of the church
- to understand the various forms of ministry practiced by saints over the centuries

Being
- to explore (and ultimately appreciate) the different expressions of spirituality and models of ministry as practiced by the many saints of the church
- to provide "friends and mentors" for life and ministry

Doing
- to develop a pattern for one's own vocational direction
- to develop a spiritual disciplines based on the lives of the saints
- to develop in each student an ability to assess hagiography and situations from an historical perspective

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Lawrence S. Cunningham. *A Brief History of the Saints*. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Carolinne White, ed. *Early Christian Lives*. Penguin Classics, 1998.
- Mary-Ann Stouck, ed. *A Short Reader of Medieval Saints*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom. *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia*. IVP Books, 2011.
- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- Selected readings distributed in class.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

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, including AI) 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).

Bookstore

All required and recommended books 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.

Online (Asynchronous) Courses

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." Finally, unless given permission by the professor, students on Zoom are expected to have their camera on.

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.

Miscellaneous

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).

GRADING:

- Position Paper (5%)
- Book Review (15%)
- Church Visit Reflection (20%)
- Research Paper (25%)
- Devotional Journal (25%)
- Participation and Reading (10%)

ASSIGNMENTS:

- **Position Paper** (5%)

Students are to prepare a two-page summary of their views on the saints. Things to be considered are their role in prayer, liturgy, pilgrimage, art, inspiration, etc. This is not a research paper – it is a position paper that requires you to state where you are right now (an exercise in self-awareness and assumptions). Be prepared to talk about this in class.

- **Book Review** (15%)

Students are to prepare a three-page book review of *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia*. The review should answer questions such as: what is the author's thesis? How did the author argue the thesis (structure, sources, methodology, etc.)? What are the weaknesses and strengths of the book? What is the value of reading the book? See *Doing Church History* for further instructions. Be prepared to talk about this in class.

- **Church Visit Reflection** (20%)

Students are to attend either an Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic Church liturgy and prepare a three-page reflection on the experience, paying particular attention to how the saints were referred to in the liturgy, artwork, and architecture. What role did they play? What was the theology of the saints being espoused? In what ways did what you see confirm what you have been reading about the saints, and in what ways did it challenge? What you appropriate some of what you heard and saw? Be prepared to talk about this in class.

- **Research Paper** (25%)

Each student will write a ten-page research paper on a topic related to their specialization. The topic of this paper will be determined by the student's specialization. Presentation of this assignment will be by video recording.

o ***Christian History and Worldview***
Research for this specialization can go in one of two directions. First, it can focus on a theological construction of one's theological position in regard to an issue related to the saints. Or it can develop critical knowledge of a key movement or event in Christian history.

o ***Church and Culture***
Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's position in regard to an aspect of Christians and the saints, with a particular concern for the development of saints in a particular culture.

Results of research will be shared with the class at the end of the semester. There are a number of ways in which this research is to be completed. Traditional academic research paper (5 pages) plus non-traditional formats (popular article for a church or denominational publication 2-3 pages and popular article for a public audience such as the kind posted on a blog or Facebook 2-3 pages).

- **Devotional Journal** (25%)

This is not a research paper. This assignment is concerned with the application of "lessons learned" from the lives of the saints. It should be a weekly journal based on reflections related to textbook readings and class experiences. It should note key thoughts, important quotes, insights into spiritual life and discipline, plans for spiritual development in the future, reflections on actual practices begun during the semester, saints and liturgy, and so on. Near the end of the semester all students will have an opportunity to share 1-2 entries of their journal with the entire class.

- **Participation and Reading** (10%)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Sept 9 Introduction to Course

Sept 16 Hagiography

Sept 23	Discuss/Debate Position Papers **Position Paper Due**
Sept 30	Theology of the Saints (Part 1)
Oct 7	Theology of the Saints (Part 2)
Oct 14	*Reading Week (no class)*
Oct 21	Varieties of Saints (Part 1) **Book Review Due**
Oct 28	Varieties of Saints (Part 2)
Nov 4	Icons, Liturgies, and Holy Days
Nov 11	Saints in Liturgy and Architecture **Church Visit Completed**
Nov 18	Relics and Pilgrimages
Nov 25	The Making of a Saint
Dec 2	Research Paper Presentations **Research Papers Due**
Dec 9	Journal Discussions and Conclusion **Devotional Journals Due**

This syllabus is for information only and remains the property of the respective 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.