

# Theological Reflection in Ministry

## MS 3AO3

Instructors:

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Term: Fall 2010 (Term 1)

Room: TBA

Time: Thursdays 10:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.

Class commences: September 9

### Course Description

One of the essentials of personal and professional growth and long-term effectiveness in ministry is developing the discipline of learning to reflect theologically on our own experience and practice. In Christian ministry, the ability to reflect on experience through a theological lens is foundational to the development of our inner lives and personal ministry. This course is designed to enable students to begin to understand the importance of theological reflection on ministry and then to implement the art of theological reflection for the purpose of transforming the practice of ministry (whether that be one-on-one counseling, general congregational care, chaplaincy, parish nursing, or through the more public roles of ministry, such as preaching, teaching and worship-leading). The course will allow students to explore their own personal theology, the range of theological resources, the essence of theological reflection as an art, how theological reflection informs ministry practice and how to lead others in doing theological reflection.

Through required reading and reading assessments, lectures, class discussions, and the completion of assignments, the student should fulfill the following course objectives:

### Knowing

- to learn the importance of reflective practice, and to understand the central aspects of developing the ability to become reflective practitioners.
- to understand what theological reflection is, what the resources for theological reflection are, to become familiar with various approaches to theological reflection, and to develop their own model for doing theological reflection.
- to learn the difference between embedded theology and deliberative theology and how to identify their own embedded theology.

### Being

- to become more self-aware of the essential components of their own embedded theology and to be encouraged to engage in ongoing personal deliberative theology for their spiritual, theological and professional growth.
- to begin to embrace and embody theological reflection in all areas of life
- to become aware of the options of deliberative theology and the potential to move beyond embedded theology

- to be transformed by the integration of the practice of theological reflection on experience into their ongoing work as ministry practitioners.

### **Doing**

- to develop the ability to engage effectively in theological reflection.
- to learn how to integrate theological reflection into their practice of ministry.
- to develop the ability to effectively lead others in theological reflection.
- to create a plan for the ongoing implementation of leading theological reflection.

### **Course Textbooks**

Required textbooks for this course are:

1. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, ***How to Think Theologically*** (Fortress, 2nd edn, 2006).
2. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, ***Theological Reflection: Methods*** (London: SCM Press, 2005).
3. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, ***Theological Reflection: Sources*** (London: SCM Press, 2007).

We encourage you to purchase your textbooks from the Divinity College's book service, READ On Books, Room 218, McMaster Divinity College. Bernice Quek goes to great lengths to provide these books at reasonable prices as a service to the Divinity College, and students that enroll in a class but purchase their books elsewhere make reasonable planning difficult. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class and are available for advance purchase at READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1; phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca).  
website: <http://www.readon.ca/>

Students are encouraged to read other materials according to their interests and needs. The instructors will be happy to provide a list of possible books of interest.

### **Course Requirements and Assignments**

**1. Class Presentations: Methods of Theological Reflection.** In order to introduce the class to some of the wide range of possibilities in doing theological reflection, and to assist in the later task of developing your own model of theological reflection, students will work together in small groups to prepare and creatively present some of the methods that are available, using the two companion textbooks as the main starting-point. Students will sign up in small groups, proportionate to class size, for a class presentation of one of the 7 methods of theological reflection represented in the text, **Theological Reflection: Methods**, and drawing on relevant source materials found in the companion text, **Theological Reflection: Sources**, as well as any other relevant

resources. Each group will have 30 minutes in the appropriate class to present their selected or assigned method, introduce its key players or contributors, articulate its strengths for practical use, offer a critique of the method, and creatively involve the rest of the class in at least one portion of the presentation. Each student should have the lead role in presenting or conducting at least one part of the overall presentation. Please provide some kind of hand-out that gives an outline/overview of the presentation and/or other pertinent information.

**Due:** According to the sign-up sheet, available on the first day of class. Class presentations will take place over 3 weeks: **October 21, October 28 and November 4.**

**Marks: 25% of the course grade.**

**2. Theological Reflection on Scripture.** Students will choose one biblical passage from a selection of passages that will be provided for this exercise. Students will be expected to engage with the passage in a way that employs various resources that aid theological reflection, with a resulting commentary that demonstrates genuine engagement with the passage. Close attention to the passage, depth of thought and insight, and consideration of the practical out-workings of these insights will be key to this assignment. This assignment provides students with the opportunity to begin to work out an approach to Scripture that will be useful for teaching, preaching and meaningful sharing from Scripture that is essential to a life of faith and ministry.

**Due: October 28th**

**Length: 1500-2000 words.**

**Marks: 20% of the course grade.**

**3. Leading a Theological Reflection Group.** Students will assemble a small group (approximately 4-6 people, not fellow classmates, preferably people from your own church) to meet 2 times. During the first meeting, you will introduce the group to Theological Reflection (i.e. teach the group what Theological Reflection is) and give the group a pre-prepared topic or case study for theological reflection, which they will take home with them in preparation for the second meeting. In the second meeting, you will lead the group in reflecting theologically on the topic that was prepared. The written assignment, coming out of these two meetings, will be a basic outline of the proceedings of the two sessions and your own personal reflection on how the leading of the group went. This assignment is designed to assist you in beginning to determine what your own approach to and model of Theological Reflection will look like, how you will implement it, and will be foundational to preparing your final paper for the course.

**Due: November 18. 1500-200 words.**

**Length: 1500-2000 words.**

**Marks: 25% of the course grade.**

#### **4. Final Paper: Personal Philosophy of Theological Reflection and Action-Plan**

For this final paper, students will interact with the importance of reflection on experience as an approach to doing theology and as a necessity for personal growth and ministry development. They will also present their own philosophy and model of theological reflection, and articulate how they intend to use it in their own faith journey and ministry practice. Finally, students will communicate how they will implement the discipline of theological reflection into their intended ministry context and how they will lead others toward employing the art of theological reflection in their own Christian journey.

**Due: last day of class, December 2.**

**Length: 3000-3500.**

**Marks: 30% of the course grade.**

Penalties: Late papers will be decreased by 1% per day.

#### **College Style for Submission of Written Work:**

All written work is to be submitted in accordance with the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, available on the McMaster Divinity College website.

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#### **Tentative Class Schedule\***

1. September 9

Overview of Course Syllabus; Introduction to the Subject; Significance of Action-Reflection

2. September 16

What Is Theological Reflection? Definitions and Historical Development; Embedded Theology; Developing Observations Skills for the Purpose of Theological Reflection (Video Case Study)

3. September 23

Deliberative Theology; Doing Theology on Purpose

4: September 30

Resources for Theological Reflection; Further Developing Skills of Theological Reflection (Video Case Study)

5: October 7

The Risk of Doing Theological Reflection; Case Study

6: October 14

Developing Your Own Model; Theological Reflection on Scripture; Preparation for Next Week's Case Study

7: October 21

Student Presentations; Case Study; Case Study Debriefing

8: October 28

Student Presentations; Theological Reflection on Ministry Practice

9: November 4

Final Student Presentations

10: November 11

Theological Reflection and Worship

11: November 18

Theological Reflection on Preaching

12: November 25

Theological Reflection and the Arts

13: December 2

Leading Theological Reflection in your Ministry Context

### **A Learning Community**

This class is designed to be a learning community, a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation, constructive input and active engagement with one another, with Scripture, with ideas, and in the ongoing development and strengthening of our faith and ministries. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be challenged, deconstructed and formed, or re-formed, through our mutual learning experience.

As professors, it is our responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. We are fellow learners in the community and wish to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together. It is also our responsibility to give thoughtful evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class and through written work, so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

As a responsible member of our learning community, you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means not only that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity, but that you will come prepared to be fully engaged in and with the class. Your attendance is required as your presence is necessary for our community (i.e. class) to function at an optimal level. Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order. Late assignments will be docked at the rate of 1% for each day late. Assignments should be submitted in hard copy on standardized paper.

We welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside class time, and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with each of you at some point, if at all possible. Please feel free to make an appointment with either of us if you think this would aid your learning experience in any way.

**\*\* Statement on Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ [www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php](http://www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php).

**Gender Inclusive Language**

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

**Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructors and is prepared with currently available information. The instructors reserve the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.**