

Current Issues in Theology
PhD CHTH G105 – C03 / MA TH 6ZI6

McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2010
Wed 7:00-9:00
Office: 216

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Hours: Wed 12:30-1:30 and 5:00-6:00
Tues 12:30-2:30 and by appointment

I. Description:

This course provides an opportunity to explore and develop scholarly expertise in contemporary issues in theology. To achieve that goal, course lectures and discussions cover significant topics in contemporary theology (e.g., theological hermeneutics, theology of religions, and the doctrine of the Trinity) and student projects and papers provide an opportunity to develop proficiency in a specific area of theology.

II. Course Objectives:

My goal for the course is that you will develop vocational competency as a scholarly researcher in the area of contemporary theology that will serve you in fulfilling your research program at the Divinity College and more broadly your calling as a theologian. With this in mind, the knowing, being, and doing learning objectives delineate specific objectives to facilitate the development of the vocational competency goal of the course.

A. Knowing:

1. Know key areas of contemporary theology
2. Know and be familiar with the contributions of key figures in contemporary theology
3. Begin to acquire specialist command of a specific area of theology related to your area of research

B. Being:

1. Become a critical and constructive theological leader
2. Appreciate the value of current theological movements for the church and your life
3. Be a respectable, respectful, and significant theologian

C. Doing:

1. Develop the ability to present informative lectures and facilitate student discussions

2. Research and present original research on a substantial topic in contemporary theology
3. Hone critical reading skills in primary literature
4. Develop the ability to interact with secondary scholarship in light of primary texts
5. Gain practice in presenting academic papers
6. Gain practice in moderating academic presentations and discussions

III. Required Text(s):

1. David Ford with Rachel Muirs, *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
2. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

Assignment	Percent	Due Date
A. Primary Text Analysis and Presentation	10%	Day of presentation
B. Lecture and Discussion	30%	Day of presentation
C. Response and Facilitation	10%	Day of presentation
D. Thesis Paper and Presentation	50%	Paper due one week after presentation
1. Presentation (15%)		
2. Paper (35%)		
E. Participation:	X	Every class session
	Total: 100%	

V. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- Electronic copies in MS Word preferred; alternatively, **all** hard copies should be **stapled** and submitted with a **cover sheet**. If you are unable to be in class on the due date because of a foreknown absence; please submit an electronic copy on the due date or a hard copy before the due date.

- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.
- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form attached to the syllabus
- All papers & assignments should conform to the MacDiv Style Guide

A. Primary Text Analysis and Presentation (due day of scheduled presentation):

1. Purpose:

- Sharpen your skills in the close reading and interpretation of primary texts.

2. Description:

a. Select a significant primary text—e.g., Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*.

b. Present an analysis of and lead a discussion on the primary text(s).

The presentation identifies the thesis, logic, arguments, key Scriptures, philosophical assumptions, historical context, etc. and discusses significant secondary scholarship on the piece (if available).

Sample outline:

- 1). Theological and historical context of and influences on the writing
- 2). Thesis
- 3). Outline of the content
- 4). Critical analysis—does the content support the thesis, is the content consistent, advance a new perspective, etc.? Interaction with secondary interpretations and literature can occur here.
- 5). Statement of the texts contribution to its topic and your research

3. Mechanics:

a. Class presentation and discussion: approximately twenty to thirty minutes.

b. Handouts are usually helpful.

c. Written submission: 2-3 page outline of the analysis that includes a bibliography with critical edition(s) and key secondary literature on the writing(s) and figure.

B. Lecture & Discussion: (due day of scheduled presentation):

1. Purpose:

- Provide students experience with developing and presenting lectures.

2. Description:

- Each student presents a lecture on a topic in contemporary theology. I encourage students to use this assignment to investigate an area that will promote your research program (e.g., prepare for doctoral comprehensive exams and MT thesis/PhD dissertation topics).
- Provide a primary text selection for the class to read in preparation for the lecture

3. Lecture expectations:

a. Lecture content:

The lectures should present and discuss the following . . .

- Key primary texts on the topic
- The primary content points of the topic
- Significant secondary literature on the topic, paying particular care to introduce and interact with diverse approaches to the topic
- Lecture handouts/outlines are helpful, but not required
- Time: the lecture and discussion will take the first fifty minute period of the course followed by the scheduled primary text presentation

b. Lecture evaluation:

Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following . . .

- Please submit to the professor a copy (electronic or hard copy) of your lecture notes and bibliography used to develop the lecture the day before you are scheduled to present in class.
- Does the lecture accurately discuss central texts on the topic?
- Does the lecture accurately present the content of the topic on or related to the topic?
- Does the lecture discuss the key secondary literature on the topic?
- Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation of the content and secondary scholarship?
- Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it

have value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry? Does your research uncover something new and thus add a new insight to the topic?

- Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?

C. Respond to Presentation and Facilitate Discussion (due day of presentation):

1. Purpose:

- Offer the student experience in responding to and moderating academic presentations and discussions, such as one might do at an academic society meeting.

2. Description:

- Each student *prepares a critique* and *facilitates a discussion* of a thesis paper presentation.

a. The critique:

1) Remember to be charitable; it is not only Christian, but since academia is a small guild, it is also self-preservation.

2) Critical (includes highlighting and discussing problems *and* strengths):

The critique should explore the following sorts of issues:

- Does the paper have a thesis?
- Does the content develop and support the thesis?
- Does it use appropriate sources?
- Does it interact with the relevant secondary literature?

b. The discussion:

You should keep the presentation to time limit and effectively manage student discussion (do not let one person dominate the interaction; move on to a new issue if discussion begins to go off on tangents and run down rabbit trails). Be sure to elicit comments from all people present. You might want to have some prepared questions and discussion prompts to facilitate the initial discussion.

3. Mechanics:

a. Each student paper presentations will take approximately fifty minutes (one segment of a class session).

b. The presentation and discussion typically includes the following items:

1). Presenter presents the paper: approximately thirty minutes.

2). Response: approximately fifteen minutes.

You can go through point by point as a monologue or start by raising and offering your thoughts on the paper's primary contributions and arguments and invite discussion based on your remarks and interaction with the paper and then so forth through the rest of the points you have identified.

3). Class discussion of the paper and response: approximately five to ten minutes.

c. A written submission/outline is not required, but is encouraged as it may be beneficial to other students in the course.

D. Thesis Paper and Presentation (final paper due one week after class presentation):

1. Purpose:

- Provide students with experience in writing article length theological papers and to gain experience in presenting research in an oral form similar to that performed at academic conferences.

2. Description:

- Each student *writes* and *presents* a thesis paper on a topic related to the topic of the course. I encourage you to investigate the issue from the perspective of your discipline and area(s) of research interest.
- Students are encouraged to use the class as an opportunity to work on papers they can 1) present at academic societies and/or submit to journals for publication, 2) use in preparation for comprehensive exams, and 3) use for dissertation preparation.

3. Mechanics:

- Provide a copy of the paper (rough, but not incoherent draft) to students and professor *one week before presentation*
- Submit final copy of the paper *one week after class presentation*.
- Length: 18–22 pages (about 6,500–7,500 words; journal length).
- Style: conform to MacDiv Style Guide (please use footnotes and include a bibliography of sources cited in the paper).

4. Possible thesis paper topics and areas:

- Theological Hermeneutics: Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer
- Radical Orthodoxy: James K. A. Smith and Katherine Pickstock
- Pentecostalism
- Theology and Science
- Theological Anthropology
- Trinity

- Atonement theology
- Open Theism

VI. Course Outline (*tentative*):

Week	Date	Topic	Primary Text Presentations	Presenter
1	9/15	<p>Introduction to the Course</p> <p>PART ONE: LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY</p> <p>Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method</p> <p>Reading (copies will be distributed first day of class for the readings listed below, except for course textbooks):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vanhoozer, <i>Postmodern Theology</i>, chs. 1, 3, 9, and 10 • Vanhoozer, "Introduction," in <i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i> • Charles Hodge, <i>Systematic Theology</i>, vol. 1:1–20 • Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology</i>, 21–26 • John Macquarrie, <i>Principles of Christian Theology</i>, 4–17 • David Tracy, <i>Blessed Rage for Order</i>, 24–34 • George Lindbeck, <i>The Nature of Doctrine</i>, 15–19, 32–35, & 112–19 • Kevin Vanhoozer, <i>The Drama of Doctrine</i>, 4–25 		Studebaker
2	9/22	Lecture & Discussion: Theological Hermeneutics and Method (continued)		Studebaker
3	9/29	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Trinity</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review an introduction to the Trinity—e.g., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, <i>The Trinity: Global Perspectives</i> (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). 		Studebaker
4	10/6	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Trinity (continued)</p> <p>Readings: TBD</p>		Studebaker
5	10/13	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Theology of Religions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: TBD 		Studebaker

6	10/20	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics ●Reading: TBD	1. _____	1. _____
7	10/27	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics	2. _____	2. _____
8	11/3	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics ●Reading: TBD	3. _____	3. _____
9	11/10	Lecture & Discussion: Student Topics	4. _____	4. _____
10	11/17	PART TWO: STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS ● Paper 1 _____ Respondent _____ ● Paper 2 _____ Respondent _____		
11	11/24	● Paper 3 _____ Respondent _____ ● Paper 4 _____ Respondent _____		
12	12/1	CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT		
13	12/6-10	Finals Week		

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 218, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact 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. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. 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.

C. 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.

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus.
- C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late, the grade will be reduced to 85).
- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.
- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

Please Note: 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.