

MS 3AO3
Theological Reflection in Ministry
(Substitute for Creating Learning Communities)

Instructors:

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Term: Fall 2009 (Term 1)

Room: TBA

Time: Mondays 1:30 – 3:20 p.m.

Class commences: September 14

No class: October 12 (Thanksgiving)

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. Robert Kinast, *What Are They Saying about Theological Reflection?* (Paulist, 2000).

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.
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 Participation

This part of the class mark consists of four main components:

a. Class Discussion Based on the Textbook, *How to Think Theologically*. Students will be expected to have read the book in preparation for this discussion, and be prepared to engage fully in the group discussion.

Due: To be confirmed on the first day of class.

b. Class Discussion on Personal Embedded Theology. Students will be given a take-home exercise to prepare for this class discussion. Students will come prepared to fully participate in identifying their own embedded theology as it pertains to the questions provided in the exercise.

Due: To be confirmed on the first day of class.

c. Case Study for Class Discussion. Students will be given a take-home case study to prepare for an in-class discussion, and will come to class prepared to participate. The case study will provide opportunity not only to reflect on embedded theology, but to explore the possibilities that lie within deliberative theology. Guidelines for preparing for this discussion will be provided with the case study so as to aid your preparation for the discussion.

Due: To be confirmed on the first day of class.

d. General Active Participation. Since theological reflection is best done in community, this class places an emphasis on class interaction and is designed to allow for a high level of student participation. Thus, a portion of the overall grade will be determined by the level and quality of engagement on the part of each student.

Class Participation will constitute 30% of the final course grade.

2. Book Response. Robert Kinast, *What Are They Saying about Theological Reflection?*

Students will respond to and interact with this required textbook and the various methods of theological reflection that are outlined in it. This response should demonstrate an understanding of the various approaches that the book offers and provide an evaluation of their usefulness for personal theological reflection and their application to ministry in the church. Students should provide insights on what they consider to be strengths of the book as well as content that they do not find helpful.

This assignment should be 1000-1500 words in length and will constitute 20% of the course grade. It is due on October 19.

3. Theological Reflection on Scripture. Students will choose one biblical passage from a selection of passages that will be provided for this exercise on the first day of class. Students will be expected to engage with the passage in a way that employs the various resources that aid theological reflection (as

discussed in class). Close attention to the passage, depth of thought and insight, and consideration of the practical outworkings of these insights will be key to this assignment. The student will essentially provide a commentary on the passage that demonstrates a genuine engagement with the passage and makes use of key resources for theological reflection as discussed in class sessions. 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.

This assignment should be 1500-2000 words in length and will constitute 20% of the course grade. It is due on November 16.

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.

This assignment should be 3000-3500 words in length and will constitute 30% of the course grade. It is due on the last day of class, November 30.

Penalties: Late papers will be decreased by ½ mark per day.

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**Topics to be covered (a class schedule will be provided on the first day of class):**

- The Importance of Reflection on Experience
- What /s Theological Reflection?
- Resources for Theological Reflection
- Embedded Theology and Deliberative Theology
- Models of Theological Reflection
- Reflecting Theologically on Scripture
- Using Imagination in Theological Reflection
- The Arts and Theological Reflection
- Preaching and Theological Reflection
- Thinking about Ministry Theologically
- Leading Theological Reflection in Your Ministry Context

A core value of our class is that it is a “learning community,” designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and 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 come to position ourselves as fellow learners in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together. Further, it is our responsibility to give good 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 that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your attendance is required as your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level. Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order. All late assignments will be docked at the rate of ½ mark for each day late (including weekends). Assignments should be submitted in hard copy on standardized paper.

We are not only available, but also welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside class time. Either of us would love 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.**