

Conrad Grebel University College
University of Waterloo

TS 600 – THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

Fall 2017

Class time: Tuesdays, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Location: CGR 2201

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen

Office: CGR 2122

Phone: 519-885-0220 ext. 24234

Email: jbergen@uwaterloo.ca

Office hours: I am in my office most days. Drop in anytime my door is open; make an appointment for any conversation of more than a few minutes.

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

Course Description

This course is an advanced introduction to the main themes in theology, with attention to the nature of theological argumentation. Topics include Trinity, creation, theological anthropology, Jesus Christ, ecclesiology, other religions, eschatology, Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, political theology, modernity/postmodernity, and the vocation of the theologian.

Overview

Theology is not simply the sum of what Christians believe, but the dynamic interactions among actual beliefs, the foundational sources of Christian faith, and ever-changing contemporary circumstances. As an advanced introduction, this course therefore attends to theology as both content and practice. Regarding content, we will survey the traditional themes of systematic theology such as revelation, God, creation, Jesus Christ, sin, salvation, church, eschatology, etc., and read several brief works of constructive theology. As a practice, theology entails learning a language and participating in various ongoing conversations about the normative character and content of the faith. Theology engages with biblical studies, church history, philosophy, practical theology, experiences in ministry, and other disciplines of knowledge. This course will also reflect renewed attention within the discipline to substantial engagements with “ordinary theology.”

In our study of additional books and articles, we give particular attention to how theological arguments are made, especially the sources, norms and methods employed, as well as the contexts from which the arguments have arisen and to which they are addressed. Classes will consist of lectures, discussions, and seminars. Assignments are designed to develop a variety of skills necessary for “thinking theologically.”

Course Objectives

- to practice what it means to think and speak theologically, especially regarding the

development of a theological argument

- to survey the traditional themes of Christian theology and to engage in the historical and contemporary debates that have occupied theologians and critics
- to read theological texts carefully and critically
- to become self-aware of one's own contexts and commitments as a theologian
- to make connections between theology as a specialized discourse of church and academy, and the faith lives of ordinary Christians
- to develop various modes of written and oral theological communication, including those of personal reflection, integration, exposition, argumentation, research, and facilitation of group discussion
- to develop skills in theological research
- to situate theological arguments in concrete communities of interpretation, attentive to persons thereby included or excluded

Required Texts

- William C. Placher, ed., *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).
- Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).
- Courseware Reader, TS 600. This includes all other required readings (articles, chapters, and documents) for the course.

Students often purchase TS texts through online sources such as Amazon or Indigo. The books have also been ordered through the UW Bookstore. The Courseware Reader is only available through the UW Bookstore.

You may wish to purchase a theological dictionary. There are many options out there, including

- Justo L. González, *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).
- Stanley Grenz et al., *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

The following book is strongly recommended (and not very expensive.) It will be of use throughout your study in the TS program:

- Kate L. Turabian, et al., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Eighth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

Course Requirements (summary):

- Attendance and engaged participation (value: 5%)
- Contexts and commitments paper, due September 26 (value: 10%)
- Article summary and critical reflection paper, due October 24 or earlier (value: 15%)
- Research exercise, due October 31 (value: 15%)
- Second reflection paper/creative project, due November 14 or earlier (value: 15%)
- Research paper, due December 11 (value: 40%)

Course requirements (description):

1. *Attendance and engaged participation in class*, including required readings and balanced involvement in class discussion. At the graduate level, attendance in all classes is expected. If

you must be absent, please let the instructor know in advance. Students who miss two or more classes will find their learning in the course may be compromised.

2. *Contexts and commitments paper*, around 4-5 pages, double-spaced. Write a personal paper in which you reflect on your own place in the religious/Christian landscape; your basic spiritual questions, convictions, and doubts; your economic and social location; any substantial life-events, experiences or influences which may shape your approach to doing theology. You do not need to disclose any personal which you are not comfortable sharing, but anything you do disclose will be held in confidence. Some examples of “context and commitment” statements, by prominent theologians, are available in the “Content” section of LEARN. Due: September 26

3. *Article summary and critical reflection paper*, 5-6 pages, double-spaced. Two-thirds of the paper should be a summary of the article. Focus on the big picture—the thesis and the argument that supports and develops the thesis. Critical reflection is not primarily a report on whether or not you “like” the paper or agree or disagree with it. Central to the task of criticism is the capacity to consider an argument from different perspectives—in the first instance, from the author’s perspective. If you do disagree with some aspect of the article, it is important that you first demonstrate a genuine understanding of the argument and author’s intentions, and that you not respond to a “straw man.” Critical engagement also imagines how an article might be read by individuals with very different perspectives and social locations. Criticism might involve analysis of what is distinctive or important in the argument, or of possible implications of the argument. It might involve explaining that the author makes a problematic claim, fails to consider relevant evidence, or fails to anticipate important objections. If you are in substantial agreement with an article, critical engagement might entail extending the argument in some way, perhaps developing implications the author did not discuss or by responding to potential objections. While I want to know what you think, and you should be mindful of your own contexts and commitments, this is not primarily an exercise of “personal” response. You are practicing the skill of entering into a scholarly conversation. Finally, it is usually better to develop one or two critical observations rather than itemize and deal superficially with many points.

The following articles may be selected: Cobb, Cunningham, McFague, Tanner, Kwok chapter 1 or 2, Jones, Williamson, Volpe, Jenson, Van Dyk, Weaver, Knitter, DiNoia, Mouw, Peters. The paper is due at the class in which the article is being discussed, and by October 24 at the latest.

4. *Research exercise*, due October 31. Generate a bibliography of 10 to 12 entries, most of which will be scholarly books and articles (one or two may be “popular” works, but should be indicated as such). Explain in a sentence or two after each entry what the text is about and why it is important to include. You do not need to summarize the content of the sources. Your sources must be listed in Chicago style. You do not need to read the sources you list, but you will need to scan them in order to assess their value. The key is this exercise is getting to the core of the scholarly debate on a particular topic. Write two pages in which you identify what you take to be the core, or “state of the question,” on your topic, and reflect on your process of research including what you may have decided to exclude.

The following are possible topics of this assignment:

- Reinhold Niebuhr’s understanding of sin
- The doctrine of the communion of saints
- God in black theology
- Atonement and violence
- Apostolicity as a mark of the church

- The “state” in Mennonite peace theology
- The Catholic-Lutheran agreement on “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”
- The Holy Spirit within the science and theology debate
- Climate change and theology
- Jürgen Moltmann on the suffering of God
- Jesus Christ in the work of Gustavo Gutierrez
- Believers baptism
- Womanist critique of feminist theology
- A theology of migration
- Christian repudiation of supersessionism
- A theology of the Sabbath
- Palestinian liberation theology
- Theological anthropology in queer theology
- A theology of animals

5. *Second reflection paper/creative project.* You have choice here. If you did not do very well on “article summary and critical reflection paper,” then you are strongly encouraged to follow the same template with a different article. In some cases, the instructor may require that you do this. If you pursue this option, indicate this explicitly in your submission. Be sure that you engage with a required reading for the course and submit the paper *prior to* or *on* the day that the reading will be discussed in class.

Alternatively, you may pursue a project that invites your critical and creative reflection on particular reading(s), themes, and/or class discussion. You are encouraged to integrate your own personal experiences, ministry experiences, questions, doubts, etc., into this assignment. This may be a paper or you may chose a different mode of expression (poetry, short story, visual art, music, etc., together with a brief [a few pages] written explanation). You may choose to focus on a particular reading, a theme or themes emerging from a set of readings, or the class discussion. While there is wide latitude here, your reflection must be somehow rooted in a required text (other than one that was the subject of your second reflection paper) and/or in class, demonstrate understanding of the issue(s) at hand, and reflect *critical* engagement. Due: November 14

6. *Research paper on a theme arising from the course*, around 12-14 pages in length, double-spaced. Key features of this assignment are: additional reading, development and defense of a particular thesis, critical engagement, effective writing. Select a topic that is *not* the one developed for the research exercise. As you move towards developing a thesis statement, bear in mind that the paper is not a general discussion of a topic (as might be found in an encyclopedia entry), but is primarily argumentative. Also bear in mind that while some of the sources that you may draw on may be biblical or historical, for example, the discipline of theology is distinct from biblical studies or history, and thus this paper should reflect that. A provisional statement of the thesis, how you intend to argue for the thesis, and a working bibliography is due Friday, November 24 (*submit by email*). Final paper is due at noon on Monday, December 11. Submit the paper in hard copy to the main office reception desk during office hours.

Further notes about assignments:

- Citation of sources **must** be Chicago Style (Turabian), footnote/bibliography format. An online version is available through the UW library website: Resources for Research /

Online reference shelf / Citation and Style Guides / Chicago Style / Chicago Manual of Style Online

- Use inclusive language (e.g. humankind rather than mankind) when referring to people.
- Add page numbers.
- Proofread your papers.
- Please note that all assignments must be submitted in hard copy. The only exception is that the provisional thesis statement and working bibliography for the final paper due November 24 should be submitted electronically.
- There is no binding rule about the number of sources to use in the research paper. It is often better to use a few sources well than to cite a dozen books and/or journal articles superficially. For the research paper you should expect to do significant reading, including both peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books, beyond the required readings discussed in class.
- My general rubric for marking research papers is as follows: 1/3 for a fair and accurate representation of your sources, 1/3 for your critical analysis, 1/3 for the quality of writing.
- Late submission of any assignment will be penalized 3% per calendar day if other arrangements have not been made.

Class schedule and required readings

Week 1. **September 12** – Introduction to the Course: Modernity and Theology
Nicholas M. Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 24-39.

Week 2. **September 19** – God, Trinity; Modernity (continued)
Placher, “What Do We Mean by ‘God’? The Doctrine of God” Introduction, John B. Cobb, Jr., David S. Cunningham, 51-92.
Philip Kennedy, “The Enlightenment,” in *A Modern Introduction to Theology: New Questions for Old Beliefs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 56-82, notes 266-268

Week 3. **September 26** – Creation, Providence
Placher, “Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence”
Introduction, Sallie McFague, Kathryn Tanner, 93-131.

Week 4. **October 3** – Research seminar; Postcolonial theology
Browse one of the following (not included in the Reader):
Atlantic School of Theology, [A Wholly Reliable Guide...](#)
St. Mary’s Seminary & University, [Guide to Academic Writing](#)
Kwok, Introduction, chapters 1-2, 1-76.

Week 5. **Thursday October 12** – Theological Anthropology, Sin
Placher, “What’s Wrong with Us? Human Nature and Human Sin”
Introduction, Serene Jones, Clark M. Williamson, 133-181.
Medi Ann Volpe, “Irresponsible Love: Rethinking Intellectual Disability, Humanity and the Church,” *Modern Theology* 25 (2009): 491-501.

Week 6. **October 17** – Jesus Christ
Placher, “How Does Jesus Make a Difference? The Person and Work of Jesus Christ”
Introduction, Robert W. Jenson, Leanne Van Dyk, 183-220.

J. Denny Weaver, "Atonement and the Gospel of Peace," in *Seeking Cultures of Peace*, ed. Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann K. Riggs (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2004), 109-123.

Week 7. **October 24** – Non-Christian Religions, Eschatology

Placher, "What About *Them*? Christians and Non-Christians"

Introduction, Paul F. Knitter, J.A. DiNoia, 297-328.

Placher, "Where Are We Going? Eschatology"

Introduction, Richard J. Mouw, Ted Peters, 329-365.

Week 8. **October 31** – Church and mission

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (Geneva: Faith and Order Commission/World Council of Churches, 2012).

Jeremy M. Bergen, "Whether, and How, a Church Ought to Repent for a Historical Wrong,"

Theology Today 73 (2016): 129-148.

William T. Cavanaugh, "Does Religion Cause Violence? Behind the common question lies a morass of unclear thinking," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 35, nos. 2 & 3 (Summer 2007).

Week 9. **November 7** – Decolonizing theology

George Tinker, "Decolonizing the Language of Lutheran Theology: Confessions, Mission, Indians and the Globalization of Hybridity," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50 (2011): 193-205.

Kwok, chapters 3-5, 77-149

Week 10. **November 14** – Reconstructing theology

Kwok, chapters 6-9, 150-230

Week 11. **November 21** – Anabaptist-Mennonite theology as contextual theology

John Howard Yoder, "A People in the World," in *The Royal Priesthood* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 65-101.

Lydia Neufeld Harder, "Postmodern Suspicion and Imagination: Therapy for Mennonite Hermeneutic Communities," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 71 (1997): 267-283.

Malinda E. Berry, "Extending the Theological Table: MCC's World Community Cookbooks as Organic Theology," in *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity*, ed. Alain Epp Weaver (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011), 284-309.

David C. Cramer et al., "Theology and Misconduct: The Case of John Howard Yoder," *The Christian Century*, August 20 2014, 20-23.

Week 12. **November 28** – Theology in the life of the church

Panel of pastors/chaplains

Final paper due at noon, December 11 (hard copy, to main reception desk)

UWaterloo Policies:

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](#) and the [Arts Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, Grebel Dean, or the Graduate Associate Dean of Arts. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

Other information for students:

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term. [AccessAbility webpage](#).

Counselling Services

Counselling Services provides free confidential counselling, in both individual and group sessions, with qualified professionals to help registered students, faculty and staff with personal concerns, educational career decisions, and strategies to studies and exams: [Counselling Services webpage](#), ext. 33528, NH Room 2080.

Accommodation for Illness

A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the “University of Waterloo Verification of Illness” form or it will not be accepted. More information can be obtained from Health Services and the form is available in pdf. [Health Services webpage](#).

The Writing Centre

Writing Centre staff offer one-on-one support in planning assignments and presentations, using and documenting research, organizing and structuring papers, and revising for clarity and coherence. Make an appointment or drop in at the Library for quick questions or feedback. To book a 50-minute appointment and to see drop-in hours, visit [Writing Centre webpage](#).