Class time: live Zoom meetings held on Wednesdays, 1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen
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Virtual office hours: Wednesdays, 3:00-4:00 p.m. (by Zoom or Teams), and by appointment

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 may 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 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, “ordinary theologians,” and other disciplines of knowledge.

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. Assignments are designed to develop a variety of skills necessary for “thinking theologically.”

Course Objectives
• to survey the traditional themes of Christian theology and to engage in the historical and contemporary debates that have occupied theologians and critics (relates to MTS Program Objectives 2, 3, 4)
• to read theological texts carefully and critically (3, 4)
• to situate theological arguments in concrete communities of interpretation, attentive to persons thereby included or excluded (4, 5, 6)
• to become self-aware of one’s own contexts and commitments as a theologian (6, 7)
• to make connections between theology as a specialized discourse of church and academy,
and the faith lives of ordinary Christians (Applied Studies objective 3)

- to develop various modes of written theological communication, including those of personal reflection, integration, exposition, argumentation, research, and group discussion (1, 3)
- to develop skills in theological research (3, 8)

**Course format and access**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Waterloo has mandated that most classes this term be taught remotely/online. For this course, this will mean extensive use of LEARN (posting of course materials, narrated powerpoints, readings, links to videos, and discussion boards) as well as a weekly videoconference meeting. Videoconference meetings may be recorded and posted to LEARN for the benefit of those not present. Students with concerns about this should notify me.

Guidelines and rules for the university may change throughout the term and can be found here: [UWaterloo Coronavirus website](https://www.uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus)

Depending on public health guidelines, some in-person dimensions of the course may be possible, but none will be expected. For example, with appropriate social distancing, it may be possible for me to hold occasional in-person office hours. Perhaps a small group of students will choose to meet in-person for discussion of course readings rather than online. Information about access to the Grebel library will be updated on the [Grebel Library website](https://library.grebel.uwaterloo.ca).

*Because of the pandemic and related shut-downs, this term may be an especially difficult one for some due to health, family, financial, and other challenges. We will all need to be generous and flexible with one another, and I commit to this myself. Please find the help and support you need, and let me know if there are ways I can assist. You do not need to disclose anything to me, but do let me know if there are adaptations to this course that would be helpful.*

**Required Texts**

- All other readings are available through ATLA, UW library e-journals or posted on LEARN.

The books have also been ordered through the UW Bookstore. Students may also purchase TS texts through local or online booksellers.

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

- 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:

**Course Requirements (summary):**
1. Engaged participation & discussion board posts (value: 12%)
2. Contexts and commitments paper, due noon September 23 (value: 10%)
3. Article summary and critical reflection paper, due noon October 7 or earlier (value: 10%)
4. Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise, due noon October 21 (value: 3%)
5. Research exercise, due noon October 30 (value: 15%)
6. Ordinary theology assignment, due noon November 11 (value: 15%)
7. Research paper, due noon December 14 (value: 35%)

**Course requirements (descriptions):**

1. **Engaged participation in class and discussion board posts.** All students are expected to complete all required readings each week and engage in an informed, critical, balanced (in the sense of not speaking too little or too much) and sensitive ways with the instructor and other students. It is expected that students will join the weekly videoconference meeting, although university policy is that such participation cannot be required. If you must be absent, please let me know in advance. Students who miss two or more videoconference meetings may be expected to do additional writing.

Specific topics and readings will be engaged primarily through the LEARN discussion board. For each reading or topic to be addressed in this way, students are expected to make one substantial post in response to the prompt (a paragraph or two) and then at least one response to the post of another student. Some adjustment of discussion board expectations may be made throughout the term.

2. **Context and commitment paper,** around 4-5 pages, double-spaced, due noon September 23. 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, social, and gendered location; any substantial life-events, experiences or influences which may shape your approach to doing theology. You do not need to disclose any personal information 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 under “Content” and then “Assignments.”

3. **Article summary and critical reflection paper on one article,** 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 experiences and perspectives. 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, Jones, Williamson, Jenson, Van Dyk, Kwok (“Searching for Wisdom”; “Engendering Christ”), De La Torre, D. Williams. The paper is due by the meeting in which the article is being discussed, and by noon, October 7 at the latest.

4. Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise, due at noon, October 21. Provide full and correct information for footnotes and bibliography (list of works cited) of the following. You may choose any theological sources. The UW Library TS Subject Guide, under “Citing and Writing,” has links to quick guides for Chicago Style. Consult the Research Paper Guidelines for this course for discussion about citing sources you find online.

In your submission, you should include:

• Two different single author books.
• Two different academic journal articles.
• Two different chapters in an edited book (could be in the same book)
• One article from a popular magazine (such as Sojourners, Christianity Today, or The Canadian Mennonite)
• One article from an open access online journal (such as The Other Journal or Anabaptist Witness)

Here is the basic form to follow:

Notes [these can be in any order, and you can select a random page that you are making reference to, though it should be an actual page or to pages in the source]:


Etc.

List of Works Cited [alphabetical order]:


This exercise is worth only 3%, but after the 3rd mistake, 1/2% will be deducted for each subsequent error.

5. Research exercise, due at noon October 28. 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 proper 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 to this exercise is getting to the core of the scholarly debate on a particular topic.

In addition to the bibliography, write two pages in which you 1) identify what you take to be the core, or “state of the question,” of your topic, 2) identify several possible directions that a research paper on this topic might take, and 3) 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
- The Kingdom of God in the theology of Gustavo Gutierrez
- Believers baptism
- Theology and cognitive disability
- Emmanuel Katongole on reconciliation

- Womanist critique of feminist theology
- Creation ex nihilo
- Shelly Rambo on theology and trauma
- Jesus as theme in Muslim-Christian dialogue
- Atonement as recapitulation
- Jesus Christ as judge
- A theology of migration
- A theology of the Sabbath
- Amos Yong on Pentecostal hermeneutics
- William Cavanaugh on religious violence
- Theological critique of empire
- Palestinian liberation theology
- Open theism
- Missio dei as mission paradigm
- Theological anthropology in queer theology
- A theology of animals

6. Ordinary theology assignment (20%), 5-7 pages, due at noon November 11.

The purpose of this assignment is to engage in an intentional conversation or “interview” with someone who does not have formal academic training in theology. The conversation could be with someone you know well, or with an acquaintance. Be sure to explain the nature of the assignment and obtain the consent to the interviewee. Neither the conversation nor the written reflection on the conversation should be critical of the faith of the interviewee. Listening attentively is much more important than responding, let alone “correcting.” The conversation should aim to uncover a point of “ordinary” theological dissonance as a potential constructive resource for renewed theological thinking.

The primary prompt for the conversation or interview (about which you may want to alert your interviewee in advance) is this: Identify a point of dissonance between what you believe and what you take to be the primary or dominant theological position on the issue. It is assumed
here that the interviewee is aware of the dissonance or has a perception that dissonance may be present.

(It might be around the divinity of Jesus Christ, the “mechanics” of atonement, the theological significance of non-Christian religions, what does or does not happen at the Lord’s Supper, the belief in heaven, or hell, or a particular practice of worship. It may be a disconnect between theology/theory and practice. It may also be around an ethical issue. While a strong distinction between theology and ethics is problematic, it is the case that this course does not have a primary focus on ethics, and as you reflect on a conversation about ethics, make explicit connections to themes in theology. The essays by Williamson and McFague are two examples of how this might be done).

In your conversation, probe the dynamics of this dissonance. You may wish to ask the interviewee some of the following questions:

• Did it emerge at a particular point in time? Under what circumstances? Was there a precipitating event or experience?
• What do you (the interviewee) take to be the implications of the dissonance?
• How would you describe the “source” of the dissonance (a truth of experience, inconsistency with an understanding of the witness of Scripture, etc. There might be an expectation that the answer simply be “the Bible” – but press for specifics – the Bible as so-and-so preached it, the way my mother used to tell certain stories about Jesus, etc.)
• Does this dissonance affect other beliefs?
• Is this particular dissonance troubling for you? Why? How?
• How do you make sense of it in your own life of faith?
• What about the dominant theological position—what do you understand that to be? How have you experienced its dominant character? Why is that dominant position held in your faith community?

Don’t be too concerned about covering a series of questions. Rather, focus on having a wide-ranging conversation that probes the dissonance from a variety of perspectives.

The paper you will write will be primarily (perhaps 2/3) a description of this conversation. There should also be a more reflective part of the paper in which you add your own perspective.

• What do you think is at stake in the theological dissonance identified?
• How does the fact that an “ordinary theologian” expresses this dissonance present a challenge and an opportunity for theology? Again, the point is not to criticize the theological position of your interviewee, or seek to correct it, nor is it necessarily to simply laud the position either. Rather, wrestle with how the very fact that this position exists is an occasion for creative theologizing.
• What is the value of this exercise? What are the dangers or drawbacks?

You are welcome to draw on the readings you have already done for this course—Healy and chapters from Placher book, including those not assigned, may be especially helpful—but this is not a research paper and no additional reading is required.

7. Research paper on a theme arising from the course, around 12 pages in length, double-spaced (see separate handout in “Assignments” section for further details and advice), due at noon Monday, December 14. Key features of this assignment are: additional reading, development and defense of a particular thesis, critical engagement, effective writing. You may select the topic that you developed for the research exercise, or a different topic. A provisional statement of the thesis, how you intend to argue for the thesis, and a working bibliography is due Friday November 20, but you are welcome to submit it much earlier than that (submit by email).
Further notes about all assignments:

- All written assignments will be submitted online, through the “Dropbox” in LEARN.
- Assignment should be in PDF or MS Word formats, and not a link to Google Doc. Assignments will be returned in the same format as they were received, with comments added.
- Citation of sources must be Chicago Style (Turabian), footnote/bibliography format. See the Theological Studies subject guide on UW library website for more details.
- Use inclusive language (e.g. humankind rather than mankind) when referring to people.
- Add page numbers.
- Proofread your papers.
- Late submission of any assignment will be penalized 3% per calendar day if other arrangements have not been made.

Class schedule and required readings

There will be consistent rhythm for each week of classes. The “Content” section of LEARN is organized into 12 modules, and each module has a list of tasks, which are designed to be done in order. I will provide some introduction to the topic and readings, usually in the form of a narrated powerpoint, video, and/or written description. The weekly videoconferences will be used primarily for discussion of the readings (among the whole class as well as in smaller groups). One or two of the readings each week will be discussed on the LEARN discussion board rather than during the live meeting. The overview page for each weekly module will make it clear how all the material will be engaged. Some of this may be adjusted as the term progresses.

Week 1. Introduction to the course and to theology

**Meeting: September 9**

Week 2. Modernity; God, Trinity
Placher, “What Do We Mean by ‘God’? The Doctrine of God”

**Meeting: September 16**

Week 3. Creation and providence; Theological anthropology and sin
Placher, “Is God is Charge? Creation and Providence”
Introduction, Sallie McFague, Kathryn Tanner, 93-131.
Placher, “What’s Wrong with Us? Human Nature and Human Sin”

**Meeting: September 23**

*Context and commitment paper due*

Week 4. Research and writing seminar; new voices; Jesus Christ;

Placher, “How Does Jesus Make a Difference? The Person and Work of Jesus Christ”
Introduction, Robert W. Jenson, 183-205 (Van Dyk next week)

**Meeting: September 30**

Week 5. Jesus Christ (continued)
Leanne Van Dyk (in Placher), 205-220.


**Meeting: October 7**

Article summary and critical reflection paper due (or earlier)

[Reading week – no meeting October 14]

Week 6. Religious pluralism; Eschatology

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

Placher, “Where Are We Going? Eschatology”

**Meeting: October 21**

*Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise due*

Week 7. Church and churches


**Meeting: October 28**

*Research exercise due*

Week 8. Understanding contexts


**Meeting: November 4**

Week 9. Mission, story, decolonization

**Meeting: November 11**
*Ordinary theology assignment due*

Week 10. Supersessionism: the problem
Soulen, Part One, ix-106.

**Meeting: November 18**

*A provisional statement of the thesis, how you intend to argue for the thesis, and a working bibliography for final research paper is due November 20, by email.*

Week 11. Supersessionism: one solution
Soulen, Part Two, 109-177.

**Meeting: November 25**

Week 12. Future of theology

**Meeting: December 2**

*Final paper due at noon, Monday December 14.*
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 Academic Integrity and Ethical Behaviour.

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, academic advisory, or the Undergraduate 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

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.

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.

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.

The Writing and Communication Centre

Writing and Communication 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 the Writing and Communication Centre website.