Conrad Grebel University College
University of Waterloo

TS 600 – THINKING THEOLOGICALLY
Fall 2023

Class time: Thursdays, 9:00 a.m.–11:50 a.m.

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen (he/him)
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Office: Room 2122
I expect to be on campus on during regular business hours Wednesday-Friday and am available to meet in-person on those days. If my door is open or ajar, feel free to see me without an appointment. However, if you need more than a few minutes, it is best to make an appointment. I am available for zoom or phone conversations on Monday and Tuesday as well.

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.

This acknowledgement calls for an understanding of the history of this particular place, the dispossession of land, and policies that sought to destroy Indigenous cultures and communities. Engaging with Indigenous theological perspectives, and exploring how colonialism was justified theologically, as we will do in the course, are some aspects of this ongoing work.

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, access, and culture

In this course, we want to make the most of the fact that we will be together in person. Class time will be used primarily for large and small group discussions of the readings and other interactive activities. I will occasionally lecture in class though some lectures may be recorded and provided to you in advance. I will use LEARN fairly extensively to outline the activities required before and after each class meeting.

Though the Covid-19 pandemic is no longer regarded as a global emergency, it remains an unpredictable reality. We will need to adjust to any guidelines or regulations determined by the university. It is possible that there will be more absences from class for illness than would have been the case pre-pandemic. And of course there is a chance that we may need to switch to an online format in which case we will have weekly zoom meetings. Some students or instructors may choose to mask regularly or occasionally. We will all need to be generous and flexible with one another, and I commit to this myself.

The perspectives that each person brings because of their race, ethnic identity, class, age, gender, sex, religious commitments, ability, culture, and origins (and other dimensions) all contribute to the rich theological dialogue we seek to foster. We are committed to examining issues of power, privilege, oppression, and abuse in our program, and to seek peace and justice within the classroom and beyond. Since the church has long discriminated against LGBTQ+ people, I seek to the advance the public, intentional and explicit welcoming of people with diverse genders and sexual orientations. The MTS program strives to create leaders who will advocate for justice and inclusion of all God’s people in the church and our world. This is difficult work to which I invite your commitment.

This course seeks to develop skills in theological communication, including various forms of writing. For this reason, the use of Generative AI to complete assignments is not permitted. A further statement of this policy is found at the end of this document.

Required Texts

- William C. Placher, ed., Essentials of Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003). This is also available as an ebook from the UW library. However, those who prefer to read a hard copy and/or wish to have such a book for reference in the future are advised to purchase it.
• TS 600 Courseware Reader. This is only available from the UW Bookstore. It must be ordered online and then either picked up in-store or shipped to you. These books have also been ordered through the UW Bookstore. Students may also purchase the Placher and Swinton books 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, self-evaluation due December 4 (value: 10%)
2. Contexts and commitments paper, due September 21 (value: 10%)
3. Article summary and critical reflection paper, due 9 a.m., October 5 or earlier (value: 10%)
4. Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise, due October 19 (value: 5%)
5. Research exercise, due November 2 (value: 15%)
6. Position paper and presentation, due 9 a.m., November 16 (value: 15%)
7. Research paper, due December 11 (value: 35%)

**Course requirements** (descriptions):
1. **Engaged participation in class.** All students are expected to attend every class session, complete all required readings on schedule and engage in informed, critical, balanced (in the sense of not speaking too little or too much) and sensitive ways with the instructor and other students. If you must be absent, please let me know in advance. Students who miss two or more classes, for whatever reason, may be expected to do additional writing.

Students will complete a participation and reading self-evaluation, including a score out of 10, to be submitted on LEARN by December 4. I will normally accept a student’s proposed marks but reserve the right to adjust up or down. The score should be primarily based on engaged completion of all required reading in advance the class in which the texts would be discussed. You will want to include a short explanation of how you assessed your participation in the class.

2. **Context and commitment paper,** around 5-6 pages, double-spaced, due September 21. Write a personal paper in which you reflect on your own place in the religious/Christian landscape. Include a discussion of your basic spiritual questions, convictions, and doubts; your economic, social, racial/ethnic, and gendered location; any 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.” The mark for the assignment will be based on critical engagement and quality of writing.
3. Article summary and critical reflection paper on one article, 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. One-third should be critical reflection. (I recommend structuring your paper this way—first summary and then reflection—and make the distinction clear.) 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, Kwok, Jenson, Van Dyk, De La Torre, Cone. Note that the chapters by De La Torre and Cone are from books by these authors and were not designed to stand fully on their own. The paper is due by 9 a.m. on the day the article is being discussed, and by October 5 at the latest.

4. Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise, due October 19.
Provide full and correct information for footnotes and bibliography (list of works cited) of eight different 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 edited books.
• One article from a popular magazine (such as Sojourners, Christian Century, or The Canadian Mennonite)
• One article from an open access online journal (such as Open Theology, The Other Journal, or Anabaptist Witness)
Do not use a book, article, or chapter, that is required reading in this or another course. Rather, search out books, articles, and chapters on your own. 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 to an actual page or pages in the source]:


List of Works Cited [alphabetical order]:

Crisp, Oliver D. “Moral Exemplarism and Atonement.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73, no. 2 (2020): 137-149.


This exercise is worth only 5%, but after the 2nd mistake, 1/2% will be deducted for each subsequent error.

5. Research exercise, due November 2. 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). You may need to find and briefly scan twice as many or more resources in order to determine which are the most important. 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. 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.

In addition to the bibliography, write 2-3 pages in which you 1) briefly describe how you went about locating resources, 2) reflect on your process of research including what you may have decided to exclude, any barriers or problems you encountered, etc., 3) identify what you take to be the core, or “state of the question,” of your topic, and 4) identify several possible directions that a research paper on this topic might take. You will see in the “Assignments and resources” section of LEARN an example of this assignment.

The following are possible topics of this assignment (others are possible but you must check with me):

- Reinhold Niebuhr’s understanding of sin
- The doctrine of the communion of saints
- God in Black theology
- Marcella Althaus-Reid on queer theology
- Apostolicity as a mark of the church
- The “state” in Mennonite peace theology
- Gendered language for God
- 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
- Mary (mother of Jesus) in Protestant theology
- Collective forgiveness
- Sallie McFague on metaphorical language for God
- Original sin and evolution
- Jürgen Moltmann on the suffering of God
- Gustavo Gutiérrez on method in liberation theology
- Believers baptism
- Theology and cognitive disability
- Theologies of social/political reconciliation
- Womanist critique of feminist theology
• Creation ex nihilo
• Shelly Rambo on theology and trauma
• Jesus as theme in Muslim-Christian dialogue
• Theology and mental illness
• Christus victor model of atonement
• The “three offices” of Jesus Christ
• A theology of migration
• A theology of the Sabbath
• Gender variance and theology
• Amos Yong on Pentecostal hermeneutics
• William Cavanaugh on religious violence
• Theological critique of empire
• Theology and memory
• Theology and the visual arts
• Dalit liberation theology
• Gavin D’Costa on Christianity and other religions
• Open theism
• Ecumenical eucharist
• Missio dei as mission paradigm
• Theological anthropology in queer theology
• A theology of animals
• Theology of martyrdom
• Theology and digital culture
• Models of ecumenical unity
• Messianic Judaism
• The “role” of heaven within eschatology
• The imago dei and theological anthropology
• Nonviolent atonement
• Supersessionism
• Method in comparative theology
• Universal salvation
• Robert Jenson on God as story

6. Theological position paper (3-4 pages), and presentation, due 9 a.m., November 16.
Stake a theological claim in response to John Swinton’s book, Raging with Compassion. You may want to endorse something Swinton says, object to something he says, or develop an idea of his in particular direction. Two things are especially important here. First, take a position. Feel free to be bold or provocative, as long as you can support your position. Second, while you do not need to summarize Swinton (assume your reader and audience have read the book), your own position should still reflect an understanding of his text. You should not develop a position that is loosely inspired by a theme he touches on. You should be taking a position on Swinton’s particular argument. If you endorse something that Swinton says, you need to do more than just rehearse the arguments he already makes. Extend his claim in some way. This assignment assumes that you have read this entire book but does not require that you do any additional research.

This assignment consists of both a written paper and an in-class presentation (7-8 minutes) based on your paper, followed by a class discussion of your ideas.
Research paper on a theme arising from the course, around 12-13 pages in length, double-spaced (see separate handout in “Assignments” section for further details and advice), due Monday, December 11. 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 (by email) Thursday November 23, but you are welcome to submit it much earlier than that.

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.
- Assignment length is important—papers shouldn’t be too short or too long. It’s fine if it is +/- 15% of the page length guidelines. Check with me before submitting a paper that is longer than this.
- 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. This is a requirement, not a suggestion.
- Add page numbers.
- Proofread your papers.
- Papers are due by midnight on the due date except for the article summary and the position paper. These are due by 9 a.m. (before class), on the date specified.
- Late submission of any assignment will be penalized 3% per calendar day if other arrangements have not been made.

Weekly outline and required readings
Week 1 — Sept 7 — Introduction to the course and to theology

Week 2 — Sept 14 — Modernity; God, Trinity

Week 3 — Sept 21 — 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”

Context and commitment paper due

Week 4 — Sept 28 — Research and writing seminar; new voices in theology;
Luis Rivera-Pagán, “God the Liberator: Theology, History, and Politics,” in Our Own Voices:


**Week 5 – Oct 5 – 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.


*Article summary and critical reflection paper due (or earlier)*

[Reading week – no meeting October 12]

**Week 6 – Oct 19 – Religious pluralism; Eschatology**


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

Placher, “Where Are We Going? Eschatology”


*Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise due*

**Week 7 – Oct 26 – Church and churches**


**Week 8 – Nov 2 – Engaging contexts (I)**


*Research exercise due*
Week 9 – Nov 9 – Pastoral responses to the problem of evil (I)
Swinton, 1-129.

Week 10 – Nov 16 – Pastoral responses to the problem of evil (II)
Swinton, 130-247.
Position paper due, class presentations

Week 11 – Nov 23 – Engaging contexts (II)

Please “check in” with me about your final paper by November 23 at the latest. This should be done through an email which might indicate a provisional statement of the thesis, how you intend to argue for the thesis, and a working bibliography for the research paper. If you have less than this, that’s fine. Just tell me what you have.

Week 12 – Nov 30 – Futures of theology on a warming planet

Participation/reading self-evaluation due December 4.
Research paper due December 11

UWaterloo Policies:
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 Office of Academic Integrity webpage for more information.

Discipline
A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence and to take responsibility for his/her actions. Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information. 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 advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. 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.

Generative Artificial Intelligence
This course includes the independent development and practice of specific skills, such as various modes of theological written communication. Therefore, the use of Generative artificial
intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text, images, music, or code, like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, is not permitted in this class. Unauthorized use in this course, such as running course materials through GenAI or using GenAI to complete a course assessment is considered a violation of Policy 71 (plagiarism or unauthorized aids or assistance). Work produced with the assistance of AI tools does not represent the author's original work and is therefore in violation of the fundamental values of academic integrity including honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and courage.

You should be prepared to show your work. To demonstrate your learning, you should keep your rough notes, including research notes, brainstorming, and drafting notes. You may be asked to submit these notes along with earlier drafts of their work, either through saved drafts or saved versions of a document. If the use of GenAI is suspected where not permitted, you may be asked to meet with your instructor or TA to provide explanations to support the submitted material as being your original work. Through this process, if you have not sufficiently supported your work, academic misconduct allegations may be brought to the Associate Dean.

Grievance
A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their 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.

Note for Students with Disabilities
AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Other information
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.

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.