

Conrad Grebel University College
University of Waterloo

TS 600 – THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

Fall 2024

Class time: Wednesdays, 9:00 a.m.–11:50 a.m.
Location: Room 2201

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen (he/him)
Email: jbergen@uwaterloo.ca (preferred) or phone: 519-885-0220 ext. 24234
Office: Room 2122

I expect to be on campus on during regular business hours Tuesday-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 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)

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.

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 I will also record some lectures and provide them to you in advance. I will use LEARN fairly extensively to outline the activities required before and after each class meeting.

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 support 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.

Required Texts

- William C. Placher, ed., *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).
- John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
- TS 600 Courseware Reader. This is only available from the UW Bookstore. You may buy it in store or have it shipped to you (for an additional cost).

Placher and Swinton are also available as an ebook from the UW library. Thus, you are not required to buy either of these books, though you may prefer to read in hard copy and/or have this book for future reference. Students may purchase new or used copies through the UW Bookstore, or local or online booksellers.

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, Ninth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Course Requirements (summary):

1. Engaged participation, self-evaluation due December 2 (value: 10%)
2. Contexts and commitments paper, due September 18 (value: 10%)
3. Article summary and critical reflection paper, due 9 *a.m.*, October 2 or earlier (value: 10%)
4. Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise, due October 9 (value: 5%)
5. Research exercise, due October 30 (value: 15%)
6. Position paper and presentation, due 9 *a.m.*, November 13 (value: 15%)
7. Research paper, due December 10 (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 2. 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 of 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 18. 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 strongly recommend that you structure 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 even whether you 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, 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 2 at the latest.

4. *Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise*, due October 9.

Provide full and correct information for footnotes *and* bibliography (list of works cited) of eight different *theological* sources. Complete instructions are found in the "Assignments & Resources" module in LEARN.

5. *Research exercise*, due October 30. Generate a bibliography of 10 to 12 entries, most of which will be scholarly books and articles (one or two may be "popular" books but should be indicated as such). Complete instructions are found in the "Assignments & Resources" module in LEARN.

6. *Theological position paper (3-4 pages), and presentation*, due 9 a.m., November 13.

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 only 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.

7. *Research paper on a theme arising from the course*, around 12-13 pages in length, double-spaced, due December 10. 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) by Wednesday, November 20, but you are welcome to submit it much earlier than that. Complete instructions are found in the "Assignments & Resources" module in LEARN.

Further notes about all assignments:

- All written assignments will be submitted online, through the “Dropbox” in LEARN.
- Assignments 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. You are expected (required!) to read the feedback. Since you will no longer have access to LEARN once the course is over, I encourage you to download your papers with feedback, and save them on your own computer.
- Assignment length is important—papers shouldn’t be too short or too long, not more than +/- 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.
- Assignments 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 4 – Introduction to the course and to theology

Nicholas M. Healy, “What is Systematic Theology?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009): 24-39.

Week 2 – Sept 11 – Modernity; God, Trinity

Placher, “What Do We Mean by ‘God’? The Doctrine of God”

Introduction, John B. Cobb, Jr., David S. Cunningham, 51-92.

Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, “Enlightenment” in *20th Century Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 15-23.

Week 3 – Sept 18 – Creation and providence; Theological anthropology and sin

Placher, “Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence”

Introduction, Sallie McFague, Kathryn Tanner, 93-131.

Placher, “What’s Wrong with Us? Human Nature and Human Sin”

Introduction, Serene Jones, Clark M. Williamson, 133-181.

Context and commitment paper due

Week 4 – Sept 25 – Research and writing seminar; new voices in theology;

Kwok, Pui-lan, “Searching for Wisdom: Sources of Postcolonial Feminist Theologies,” in *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 52-76.

Luis Rivera-Pagán, “God the Liberator: Theology, History, and Politics,” in *Our Own Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology*, ed. Benjamín Valentín (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 1-20.

Susannah Cornwall, “Constructive Theological Perspectives: What is Queer Theology?” in *Queer Theologies: Becoming the Queer Body of Christ*, ed. Stefanie Knauss and Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez (London: SCM Press, 2019), 22-32.

Week 5 – Oct 2 – 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.

Karl Barth, “Jesus Christ,” in *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper, 1959), 65-71.

Miguel De La Torre, “Introduction: Jesus or Jesús,” in *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 1-19, notes 179-181.

James H. Cone, “Legacies of the Cross and the Lynching Trees,” in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 152-166, notes 195-196.

Article summary and critical reflection paper due (or earlier)

Week 6 – Oct 9 – Religious pluralism; 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.

Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise due

[Reading week – no meeting October 16]

Week 7 – Oct 23 – Church and churches

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

Jeremy M. Bergen, “The Ecumenical Vocation of Anabaptist Theology,” in *Recovering from the Anabaptist Vision: New Essays in Anabaptist Identity and Theological Method*, ed.

Laura Schmidt Roberts, Paul Martens, and Myron Penner (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 103-126.

Cheryl Peterson, “The Marks of the Church as Spiritual Practices for Renewal and Revival,” in *We Believe in the Holy Spirit, Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*, ed. Chad M. Rimmer and Cheryl M. Peterson (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2021), 175-182.

https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/20210624_-_doc_63_being_lutheran_-_en.pdf

Week 8 – Oct 30 – Engaging contexts (I)

William T. Cavanaugh, “The Myth of the State as Savior,” in *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 9-52.

Jonathan Tran, “The New Black Theology: Retrieving Ancient Sources to Challenge Racism,” *The Christian Century*, February 8, 2012, 24-27. [not in reader – link provided in LEARN]

Karen Teel, “What Jesus Wouldn’t Do: A White Theologian Engages Whiteness,” in *Christology and Whiteness*, ed. George Yancy (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 19-35.

Willie James Jennings, “Can White People be Saved? Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness,” in *Can “White” People be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 29-43.

Research exercise due

Week 9 – Nov 6 – Pastoral responses to the problem of evil (I)

Swinton, 1-129.

Week 10 – Nov 13 – Pastoral responses to the problem of evil (II)

Swinton, 130-247.

Position paper due, class presentations

Week 11 – Nov 20 – Engaging contexts (II)

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.

Ray Aldred, “The Land, Treaty, and Spirituality: Communal Identity Inclusive of Land,” *Journal of NAIITS* 17 (2019): 1-17.

Medi Ann Volpe, “Irresponsible Love: Rethinking Intellectual Disability, Humanity, and the Church,” *Modern Theology* 25 (2009): 491-501.

Please “check in” with me about your final paper by November 20 at the latest. This should be done through an email in which you 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 27 – Futures of theology on a changing planet

Forrest Clingerman, “Theologies of the Climate [review essay],” *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (June 2016): 71-76.

Marion Grau, “The Revelations of Global Climate Change: A Petro-eschatology,” in *Eschatology as Imagining the End*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 45-60.

Participation/reading self-evaluation due December 2.

Research paper due December 10.

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.

Note that the submission of an assignment that was originally written for another course (either at Waterloo or another institution) constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

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 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

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](#).

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.