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

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Bergen
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Virtual office hours: Thursdays, 2:30-3:00 p.m. (immediately following the class meeting), and by appointment. I expect to be on campus on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and am available to meet in-person on those days. It is best to make an 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 recommended a mix of in-person and online courses. This course is fully online. That 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. All students who enroll this course are expected to have reliable high-speed internet (which I understand may nevertheless be subject to outtages), and to attend all virtual class meetings. Videoconference meetings will be recorded (audio only) and posted to LEARN for the benefit of those not present.

All UWaterloo rules and guidelines apply to MTS courses and MTS students. These may change throughout the term from the university may change throughout the term and can be found here: UWaterloo Coronavirus website
Information about access to the Grebel library will be updated on the Grebel Library website.

Because this course is designed to be fully online, it should be possible for students to complete it without ever visiting campus. However, there a good reasons and benefits to visiting the library in person.

Because of the pandemic and related restrictions, this term may be a 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 or if there are particular adaptations to this course that would be helpful.

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 may be purchased online and shipped directly to you.

The books have also been ordered through the UW Bookstore. Students may also purchase the Placher and Soulen 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 & 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 28 (value: 15%)
6. Ordinary theology assignment, due noon November 11 (value: 15%)
7. Research paper, due noon December 13 (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. If you must be absent, please let me know in advance. Students who miss two or more videoconference meetings, for whatever reason, 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 5-6 pages, double-spaced, due noon September 23. 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, Jenson, Van Dyk, Kwok (“Searching for Wisdom”; “Engendering Christ”), De La Torre, Ziegler, Williams. The paper is due by the class 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.
- 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)

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]:


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). 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.

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
- Marcella Althaus-Reid on queer 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
- Original sin and evolution
- Jürgen Moltmann on the suffering of God
- Gustavo Gutierrez on method in liberation theology
- 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
- Theology and mental illness
- 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
- Dalit liberation theology
- Open theism
- Missio dei as mission paradigm
- Theological anthropology in queer theology
- N.T. Wright on the relationship of heaven and resurrection
- A theology of animals
- Theology and digital culture
- Messianic Jews
- Robert Jenson on God as story
6. **Ordinary theology assignment** (20%), 6-7 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 (around 1/3) of the paper in which you add your own perspective. For this part, consider the some of the following:

- 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 it or accept it at face value. 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 12-13 pages in length, double-spaced (see separate handout in “Assignments” section for further details and advice), due at noon Monday, December 13. 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 19, 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**Weekly outline and required readings**

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

Meeting: October 21
Chicago style notes/bibliography exercise due

Week 7. Church and churches

Meeting: October 28
Research exercise due
Week 8. Engaging contexts

Meeting: November 4

Week 9. Engaging 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 19, by email.

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

Meeting: November 25

Week 12. Futures of theology

Meeting: December 2

Research paper due December 13.
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.