

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

TS-510 (2-3 units)
Spring 2007 (January 8 – April 27)
Wednesdays 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the study of Christian thought as well as the nature and task of theology in relationship to the use of Scripture, to the major themes of the Christian faith, and to a confessional understanding of theology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To identify critical themes and key individuals/movements in the history of Christian thought.
2. To explore the interplay of culture and the world of ideas in the shaping of the Christian tradition.
3. To develop skills in theological reflection on personal, social and philosophical issues.

RELATED DEGREE OBJECTIVES

Within the larger curriculum goals of the Seminary this course should facilitate growth in the following areas:

1. The ability to reflect theologically on the Biblical text.
2. An understanding of the various ways in which the Church has conceptualized the nature and task of theology.
3. Self-awareness in the practice of theological reflection and the development of a considered theological confession.
4. Recognition of the relationship between what is believed and what is practiced

TEXTS FOR THE COURSE

Required texts:

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 2nd or 3rd ed. Blackwell Publishers, 1997, 2001.

McGrath, Alister E., ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*. 1st or 2nd ed. Blackwell Publishers. 1995, 2001.

Grenz, Stanley, J. *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*. Baker Books, 1996.

NATURE OF THE COURSE

Our goal in this course is both to understand the development of Christian thought over the last 2000 years, and to develop practical skills in theological reflection. McGrath's *Christian Theology: An Introduction* will provide the framework for our study of theology, its history, sources and methods, as well as its basic doctrines. *The Christian Theology Reader* will be used as a source book providing critical examples of how men and women of the church have thought theologically. Grenz's book, *Created for Community*, will be used as a case study for a systematic approach to theology. The assignments in this class have been designed to help

students develop practical skills in theological reflection. The course will rely on these assignments, regular discussions sessions, lectures and reading assignments to explore the nature of the theological task as well as the art of theological reflection.

REQUIREMENTS

All Students

1. **Lectures.** Lectures will be regularly given on topics related to our study. Attendance is expected.
2. **Readings.** Students are expected to read the assigned texts in a timely fashion.
3. **Discussions.** Regular discussion periods will be used to examine assigned topics and questions that arise. Successful completion of the course will require participation and adequate preparation for the sessions by careful reading and consideration of the assigned texts.
4. **Theological exercises.** Students will be expected to participate fully in a variety of exercises designed to stimulate discussion and the development of basic skills in theological reflection.

Two-Unit Students

Written Assignments

1. **Study questions.** A list of study questions chosen from those provided at the end of each chapter in the McGrath textbook is attached. Students are expected to provide short answers for the questions chosen and to submit the answers after the text has been read, but **no later than April 27**. Students are encouraged to finish this assignment early!
2. **Essay/reflection** on the nature of God (3-4 pages) – **January 24**. (See class handout for further information)
3. **Book review.** Students will write a 2-3 page review of *Created for Community*. The review should identify the organizing principle of Grenz's work and the way that idea shapes his work. **Due Date: March 14**.
4. **Confessional statement.** Working in assigned groups you will write a 1-2 page confessional statement on an assigned topic. **Due Date: April 27**. (See class handout for further information.)
5. **Theological reflection/commentary.** As a follow-up to the group assignment you will write a 5-6 page theological commentary on that statement. **Due Date: April 27**. (See class handout for further information.)

GRADING – 2 units

Study questions	25%
Essay	20%
Book review	20%
Confessional article	10%
Reflection/commentary	25%

Three-Unit Students

Written assignments

1. **Study Questions** – A list of study questions chosen from those provided at the end of each chapter in the McGrath textbook is attached. Students are expected to provide short answers for the questions chosen and to submit the answers after the text has been read, but **no later than April 27**. Students are encouraged to finish this assignment early!

2. **Essays/reflection pieces** on the following topics with details to be distributed in class:
 - a. Nature of God (3-4 –pages)– **January 24.**
 - a. Reflection on a cultural text (3-4 pages) - **February 14.**
 - b. Reflection on a biblical text (7-8 pages) - **April 4.**
3. **Comparative book review** - Students will choose a one-volume theological work on a subject of personal interest and submit the title to the professor for approval by **February 21.** A bibliographic guide will be distributed in class. Students will write a 5-6 page review of the book reflecting the student’s close reading of the text as well as the student’s personal interaction with the material. The review should include a comparison of the chosen author’s approach to that of Grenz in *Created for Community*, as well as a close evaluation of at least one doctrinal theme or category in relation to the comparable section in Grenz and the appropriate chapter/section in McGrath. **Due Date: March 14.**
4. **Confessional statement.** Working in assigned groups you will write a 1-2 page confessional statement on an assigned topic. **Due Date: April 27.** (See class handout for further information.)
5. **Theological reflection/commentary.** As a follow-up to the group assignment you will write a 7-8 page theological commentary on that statement. **Due Date: April 27.** (See class handout for further information.)

GRADING – 3 units

Study Questions	15%
Essay One	10%
Essay Two	10%
Essay Three	15%
Book Review	20%
Confessional Statement	10%
Theological Commentary	20%

POLICY NOTES

Grading. Papers will be graded on clarity of thought, comprehensiveness and originality. Plagiarism is unacceptable and work deemed as such will be given a grade of F. I will accept and grade a rewrite of the essay on the nature of God essay at any time throughout the semester. The original essay must be handed in along with the rewritten version. **Absences/class participation** will be noted and may affect the student’s final grade. **Late work.** Percentage points will be deducted for work turned in late. “Late” is defined as any time after I have graded the class assignment

Academic Policies. MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodation for disabilities, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to the professor or consult the Registrar.

OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE – Two and Three Units

Textbook: *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition

Reader: *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2nd Edition

NOTE: Please contact me for alternative schedule if you are working with the 1st and 2nd editions of the McGrath textbooks.

January 10	Introduction to the course and syllabus review
January 17	Landmarks - Part I “Periods, Themes, and Personalities of Christian Theology” <i>Textbook</i> , chapters 1-4
January 24	Sources/Methods - Part II “Getting Started/The Sources of Theology” <i>Textbook</i> , chapters 5 & 6 <i>Reader</i> , Section 2 - <u>Panel on The Authority of Scripture</u> <i>Assignment Due- Essay One: Reflection on the Nature of God</i>
January 31	Christian Theology - Part II, Con’t “Knowledge of God/Philosophy and Theology” <i>Textbook</i> , chapter 7, 8 <i>Reader</i> , Section 1 - <u>Panels on Patristic Debate on the Relation of Philosophy and Theology, Can God’s Existence be Proved? and Theological Language and Images</u>
February 7	Christian Theology - Part III “Doctrine of God” <i>Textbook</i> , chapter 9 <i>Reader</i> , Section 3 - <u>Panel on Does God Suffer?</u>
February 14	The Doctrine of the Trinity <i>Textbook</i> , chapter 10 <i>Reader</i> , Section 3 - <u>Panel on the Doctrine of the Trinity</u> <i>Assignment Due (3 unit) - Essay Two: Reflection on a Cultural Text</i>
February 21	The Doctrine of the Person of Christ <i>Textbook</i> , chapter 11 <i>Reader</i> , Section 4 - <u>Panel on Patristic Christological Debates</u> <i>Book review <u>title due</u></i>
February 28	Faith and History: A New Christological Agenda <i>Textbook</i> , chapter 12 <i>Reader</i> , Section 4 - <u>Panel on Faith & History</u>
March 7	NO CLASS – Module Week

- March 14** The Doctrine of Salvation in Christ
Textbook, chapter 13
Reader, Section 5 - Panel on Models of Atonement
Assignment Due: Book Review
- March 21** The Doctrines of Human Nature, Sin and Grace
Textbook, chapter 14
Reader, Section 6 - Panels regarding the Pelagian Controversy, and The Debate over Predestination
- March 28** **No Class**
- April 4** The Doctrine of the Church
Textbook, chapter 15
Reader, Section 7 - Panels on What Does it Mean to Say that the Church is “Catholic,” and How Does the Church Relate to the State?
Assignment Due: Essay Three: Reflection on a biblical text.
- April 11** The Doctrine of the Sacraments
Textbook, chapter 16
Reader, Section 8 - Panel on How is the “Real Presence” to be Understood?
- April 18** Christianity and World Religions
Textbook, chapter 17
Reader, Section 9 - Panel on Christian Approaches to Other Religions
- April 25** Last Things: The Christian Hope
Textbook, chapter 18
Reader, Section 10 - Panels on The Christian Hope, and The Nature of the Resurrection Body
- April 27** ***Theological Commentary due in my mailbox by 5:00 p.m.***
Study Questions Due

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 3RD EDITION TEXTBOOK

- Chap. 1-4 1) The English historian Thomas Carlyle once suggested that history was basically the biography of great individuals. On the basis of your reading of these first chapters, who do you think was the most significant person in relation to the shaping of Christian theology? Why?
- 2) What is meant by the following: ad fontes, Humanism, ontological argument, scholasticism?
- Chap. 5 Question 3
- Chap. 6 Question 1
- Chap. 7 Question 2
- Chap. 8 No Question
- Chap. 9 Questions 3 and 6
- Chap. 10 Questions 1 and 6
- Chap. 11 Question 2 and 4
- Chap. 12 Question 3
- Chap. 13 Questions 1, 4, and 5
- Chap. 14 Questions 1 and 3
- Chap. 15 Questions 3 and 4
- Chap. 16 Question 6
- Chap. 17 Questions 2, 4, and 5
- Chap. 18 Questions 2 and 3