

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary  
**CHRISTIAN THOUGHT**

TS-510 (3 units)

Summer 2006

Monday – Thursday, July 10-13

Monday – Thursday, July 17-20

Monday – Tuesday, July 24-25

Class time: 5:30 – 9:30 pm

Professor: Valerie Rempel, Ph.D.

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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 the ological 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Blackwell Publishers, 1997, 2001.

McGrath, Alister E., ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*. 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Blackwell Publishers.

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

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.
5. Written assignments.
  - A. *Study Questions* – A list of study questions, chosen from those provided at the end of each McGrath chapter, is attached to this syllabus (See Attachment A). Students are expected to provide short answers for the questions chosen and to submit the answers on the last day of class, **July 25**. Students are encouraged to finish this assignment early!
  - B. *Essays* on the following topics (3-4 pages each):
    1. Nature of God – **July 13**. (See Attachment B)
    2. Reflection on a cultural text – **July 20**. (See Class Handout)
  - C. *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 August 1. 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 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 comparison to the comparable section in Grenz, as well as the appropriate chapter in McGrath. **Due Date: August 21.**
  - D. *Confessional statement and theological reflection/commentary.* Working in assigned groups you will write a 1-2 page confessional statement on an assigned topic. As a follow-up to the group assignment you will write a 6-8 page theological commentary on that statement. **Due Date: August 21.** (Additional information will be given in class.)

NOTE: 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 Essay One if submitted prior to August 21. The original essay must be handed in along with the rewritten version.

**GRADING**

Study questions	20%
Essay #1 -	15%
Essay #2 -	15%
Book review	20%
Confessional article	10%
Reflection/commentary	20%

**POLICY NOTES**

MBBS academic policies are described at [www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies](http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies). These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, 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 or Academic Dean.

Policies specific to this course:

1. 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.
2. Absences will be noted and may affect the student's final grade.

## OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

Textbook: *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

Reader: *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

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

- July 10      Introduction to the course, Syllabus review  
 Landmarks - Part I  
               “Periods, Themes, and Personalities of Christian Theology”  
               *Textbook*, chapters 1 -4
- July 11      Sources/Methods - Part II  
               “Getting Started/The Sources of Theology ”  
               *Textbook*, chapters 5 & 6  
               *Reader*, Section 2 - Panel on The Authority of Scripture  
               *Assignment Due: Essay One: Personal Experience*
- July 12      Christian Theology - Part II, Con’t  
               “Knowledge of God/Philosophy and Theology”  
               *Textbook*, chapter 7, 8  
               *Reader*, Section 1 - Panels on Patristic Debate on the Relation of Philosophy and Theology, Can God’s Existence be Proved? and Theological Language and Images
- July 13      Christian Theology - Part III  
               “Doctrine of God”  
               *Textbook*, chapter 9  
               *Reader*, Section 3 - Panel on Does God Suffer?  
               *Assignment Due* – first essay on the Nature of God
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- July 17      The Doctrine of the Trinity  
               *Textbook*, chapter 10  
               *Reader*, Section 3 - Panel on the Doctrine of the Trinity
- July 18      The Doctrine of the Person of Christ  
               *Textbook*, chapter 11  
               *Reader*, Section 4 - Panel on Patristic Christological Debates  
 Faith and History: A New Christological Agenda  
               *Textbook*, chapter 12  
               *Reader*, Section 4 - Panel on Faith & History



STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 3<sup>RD</sup> 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

- If you are working off of an older edition, please contact me for the appropriate set of questions.

**Essay One: Nature of God****Due July 13, 2006**

The theological essays are to be exercises in theological reflection. The first assignment is to write a 3 -4 page essay in which you explore some aspect of your understanding of the nature of God which has grown out of a significant life experience.

Choose an experience that will serve as the take -off point for your theological reflection. This might be an event in your life in which you felt God's presence in a particularly meaningful way, a life experience which gave you new insight into the character of God, or an experience which raised questions for you about the nature of God or God's activity in the world.\* Begin your essay by *briefly* narrating the experience and your response to it. Try to limit your narrative to one page. Then, try to identify the question or issue that is at the heart of your experience and focus your theological reflection around it. What is the issue or question you want to explore in relationship to understanding the nature of God? What have you learned about God's nature through this experience? What are the implications of this understanding of God?

As you begin your reflection, try to choose a passage of scripture that helps you think about this issue or question. It might be a passage that confirms your experience, or that seems to call it into question. Use this scripture to aid your theological reflection. The following questions are starting points:

1. How does this experience point to God's work in your life, in your faith community or in the world? Does it provide a new or different perspective on God or some aspect of the Christian life? Is it consistent with your understanding of scripture? How?
2. How do you understand the biblical passage you chose to relate to your experience or question? Does one illuminate the other? Does one challenge the other? If so, how?
3. What does this passage of scripture reveal about God? What does your experience reveal? How does the scripture passage you chose help shape your understanding about your experience? Does your experience call into question something the Bible seems to teach about God's nature? Does the scripture call into question some aspect of your understanding of the experience? How does this lead you to a new understanding of God or a deeper understanding of the biblical text?
4. What are the implications of your reflection on the nature of God? Are you left with questions? New insights? Are there possibilities for healing or renewal? Does it suggest a need for action or change on your part? If so, what might that be?

I will read and respond to this essay. You will also be invited to share the story with several other classmates.

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\* You are welcome to choose almost any experience in your life with one exception. Please do not choose your conversion experience.