

ASSOCIATED CANADIAN THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS OF TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Graduate Course Syllabus

Course Number: THS 701 OL

Course Name: Issues in Contemporary Theology

Semester and Year: SP23

Instructor: Rev. Brian Cooper, PhD (your humble servant)

Contact Information: briancooper@mbseminary.ca

Course Instruction: Feb 27 – Apr 22, 2023

Course Description

A course exploring a selection of current theological issues. We will reflect briefly on principles that help us to engage theological problems effectively, and on the landscape of contemporary Christian theological debate. We will then examine a number of major issues under discussion today. Several strategic issues will be chosen and examined by the instructor.

Please note that unlike other ACTS World Campus courses, this course will feature both asynchronous (e.g. forum) interaction and synchronous (e.g., colloquium) interaction – meaning both written and real-time engagement.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to:

- Articulate a foundational knowledge of major issues, themes, and traditions in Christian theology
- Describe, compare, contrast, and apply the various methods, norms, and sources used in theological decision-making
- Identify and articulate their own methodological presuppositions (biblical, theological, historical) for theological decision-making
- Apply these principles and techniques through theological reflection and collaborative problem-solving in the context of the student's ministry setting

Required Texts and Materials

Required:

Watkin, Christopher. *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022.

There will also be required readings posted on the course Moodle site. They will provide the basis for forum and colloquium interactions.

Course Instructional Content

You are required to watch, listen to, and/or read the course instructional content and interact about the content in the online forums. The full instructional script along with links to the videos and audio podcasts will be posted in the Moodle online classroom.

Course Assignments

Assignments are due by midnight (your time) on the day they are due. I would ask that you submit your assignments in the online Moodle classroom. When you go to there, you will see assignment folders where you can submit assignments. Once I have marked your assignment, I send you an email with your grade. You can also review the comments I made on the assignment (you will receive an automatic notification whenever I make comments on assignments). Please note that I may deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each day that it is late. I will consider extensions in exceptional circumstances. For the rare occasions when I allow a student to rewrite an assignment, I reserve the right to deduct from the assignment's value before assigning a grade to the rewritten assignment.

Here is an overview of all the assignments followed by a detailed description of them:

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% Final Grade	Cumulative %
	Feb 27	Pre-reading Due (textbook)		
1	Feb 27-Mar 4	Forum #1	5%	5%
2	Mar 6-11	Colloquium #1	5%	10%
3	Mar 13-18	Forum #2	5%	15%
3	Mar 18	Short Essay due	30%	45%
4	Mar 20-25	Forum #3	5%	50%
5	Mar 27-April 1	Colloquium #2	5%	55%

6	Apr 3-8	Forum #4	5%	60%
7	Apr 10-15			
7	Apr 15	Course Evaluation (required)	0%	60%
8	Apr 17-22			
8	Apr 22	Research Essay due	40%	100%

Course Pre-Reading Requirement

Due to the condensed nature of this course, please have the following read before the course begins on Feb. 27, 2022:

Watkin, Christopher. *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022.

You will be expected to integrate ideas from textbook and other readings into the forum discussions and other assignments.

Online Forum Participation (20% of the final grade, 5% each)

This course has four online forum weeks where you will have an opportunity to interact with others in the class around key questions, assignments and/or additional lecture material. These discussions are designed to foster creative discussion and growth in theological understanding and acumen. You should plan to invest approximately four hours into each forum week. Each forum is worth 5% of your final grade.

Students are expected to contribute to the forum discussions by posting a minimum of three conversational and two substantive contributions per forum week. Please make sure that you spread out your contributions over at least three days during the designated forum weeks so that you engage in the forum conversations at different points.

By conversational contributions, I mean simply joining the flow of discussion with shorter responses (e.g. questions, affirmations, quick thoughts about what someone has said).

By substantive responses, I mean responses that show a deep processing of relevant ideas (this usually takes 200-300 words). We have a tremendous opportunity to build upon one another's knowledge, insights, and experience. Our goal is to collaborate in the forum. At times, we will respectfully challenge each other. We anticipate that this will be a rich time of dialogue. To create a safe environment for this to take place, we must build a supportive subculture that encourages one another. Disagreeing and challenging can be stimulating if done in an edifying manner.

Substantive participation may include (among other things):

- Providing and developing a new thought, idea, or perspective.
- Citing an experience or example of what we are learning and showing how it applies.
- Adding a new twist on a perspective.

- Critically reflecting on an idea/concept.
- Questioning or challenging a principle/perspective and giving reasons for your questioning.
- Integrating Scripture and other sources in a meaningful way

What Substantive Participation is NOT:

- Very basic comments such as “I agree” or “I disagree.”
- Restating what someone has said (*unless there is a direct purpose in doing so*).
- Disrespectfully disagreeing.
- Pat answers that are not thought-provoking.

Below are examples of how to stimulate your own and others’ thinking:

- What would happen if...
- Other times it may be helpful to...
- It is my understanding...what is your experience with this?
- You might approach this from...
- Is it possible that...
- Would you consider...
- Maybe...
- Possibly...
- Sometimes...
- I'm wondering if...
- Do you think...

Have fun!

Note: You can use any of your forum posts in other papers for this course. I would also encourage you to view the posts of others as resources that you can cite in your papers. Everyone brings a wealth of insights into the class!

Colloquium Participation (10% of the final grade, 5% each)

A colloquium is an academic discussion – academic in the sense of being intellectually rigorous, not in the sense of being theoretical or irrelevant. We will have two colloquia during the course, each of approximately 90-120 minutes. The dates, times, and duration will be finalized later. Each student will be expected to make a contribution to the conversations, which will be on the following topics:

Colloquium #1 – Read the posted article on biblical theology and come prepared to discuss biblical versus systematic constructions of theology. Also, come prepared to discuss the following statement: “There is no such thing as biblical theology; there is only systematic theology.”

Colloquium #2 – Come prepared to talk about differences in theological methodology that you have discovered in your research, either based on the work you have done for your short essay or for your major essay.

Short Essay (30% of the final grade)

The purpose of this assignment is to give the student an opportunity for an extended engagement with one contemporary theological issue, either from the course lectures or one chosen by the student. The essay should highlight the theological issue at play, and should describe what theological methodological issues

contribute to the controversy. The student should then attempt to outline a methodological approach to resolving the issue. It should be 6-8 pages in length (no longer) and typed using 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced on 8.5x 11 paper. It should be submitted in the drop box marked "Short Essay" on the Moodle web site for this course, on the following date: **Due March 18, 2022.**

Major Research Essay (40% of the final grade)

Students will produce a research paper of not less than 15 and not more than 20 pages in length. It is to be typed using 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. All supporting documentation and bibliography should be done in accordance with Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 9th ed. The paper should demonstrate a clear understanding of the topic under discussion. It should also seek to establish, by weight of evidence from the Scriptures and secondary sources, a thesis statement in relation to the topic under discussion. You can request further guidance from me if you require it.

More specifically, I am looking for a paper that addresses not only points of agreement and disagreement in the context of a specific issue, but also examination of the issues of historical context and theological methodology that affect one's treatment of that issue. Papers should consider the differing theological methods, norms, and sources that have created disagreement about the issue in question. Your thesis should make a case for why your proposed theological approach to resolving the issue is preferable.

Due April 22, 2022.

Advice from Alan L. Hayes about Writing an Essay with a Thesis Statement

1. The essay should be in the style of an academic exposition. Your major essay is the statement, development, and argument of a thesis.

2 The essay should include, usually in the introductory paragraph, a clear statement of a thesis. The thesis statement makes the main point of your essay. It differs from the statement of a theme (which states a topic to be discussed but not what will be said about it). It also differs from a summary (which summarizes the document but doesn't have a point to make about it). You can test whether an introductory statement is a thesis statement by seeing whether it can be preceded by the clause, "This essay aims to demonstrate that...".

The thesis statement should be substantial, not truistic (incapable of being shown false) or trivial. To the question, "Can a valid argument be made against this thesis statement?" the answer should be "yes".

Example of a statement of a theme (not what is wanted): "In this paper we will consider Luther's 'Open Letter to the German Nobility' and explore his criticisms of the Church in his day."

Example of a summary: "In Luther's 'Open Letter to the German Nobility' he begins by showing three reasons why supporters of the papacy think the lay nobility shouldn't discuss theology. He shows that these reasons are wrong. One is the distinction between spirituality and temporality. Another is that only popes can call councils. A third is the monopoly of the clergy over the interpretation of Scripture. Then he discusses several things that he thinks need changing. First, etc., etc."

Example of a thesis statement: "[This paper aims to demonstrate that] In his 'Open Letter to the German Nobility', Luther strategically identifies the Reformation with the goals of the German princes: to care for the people, to restrain the power of the Church, and to build a respectable German national identity."

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Moodle classroom in Week 8.

Grading System

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	97-100	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	93-96.99	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	90-92.99	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skilful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	87-89.99	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	83-86.99	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	80-82.99	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	77-79.99	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.

C	73-76.99	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	70-72.99	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision <i>or</i> references and resources not taken fully into account <i>or</i> examples are basic or not completely convincing <i>or</i> barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below 70	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made with the ACTS Office.

Course Policies

ADD/DROP POLICY

All ACTS World Campus courses are open for registration until the first day of class. Once the class has begun, students wishing to drop or withdraw from the class must follow course add/drop instructions on the [student forms page](#) on the ACTS Seminaries webpage. **Tuition (excluding fees) refund rates are as follows:**

Weeks 1-2 - 100%

Week 3 - 60%

Week 4 - 50%

Week 5 - 40%

Weeks 6-8 - 0%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM AT TWU

One of the core values of Trinity Western University is the integration of academic excellence with high standards of personal, moral, and spiritual integrity. The University considers it a serious offence when an individual attempts to gain unearned academic credit. It is the student's responsibility to be informed about what constitutes academic misconduct. For details on this, and on identifying and avoiding plagiarism go to the [University Homepage > Academics > Academic Calendar](#) (p. 47).

<https://prezi.com/od62fxnkbnmxh/plagiarism-how-to-get-it-out-of-your-life/> (Prezi presentation)

<http://bit.ly/1p00KX3> (Google Slide presentation offering more comprehensive information)

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

Students with a disability who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Equity of Access Office upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All disabilities must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and include the educational impact of the disability along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Equity of Access Office on their website at: <http://www.twu.ca/student-life/student-success/disabilities-and-equity-access>.

HOSPITALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

TWU is committed to an ethic of inclusion centred on the principles of Christian hospitality, reciprocity and reconciliation. We seek to cultivate generous learning spaces that are based on respect for differences and are open to diverse views, opinions, and identities that are thoughtfully expressed in a collegial manner. We welcome and value all voices, including those from under- represented groups or those who have been marginalized.

The following policies are optional but recommended, to allow you to efficiently respond to student challenges to the syllabus. *Click on these fields and press delete if you do not wish to use them:*

CAMPUS CLOSURE AND CLASS CANCELLATION POLICY

In the event of extreme weather conditions or other emergency situations go to the <https://www.twu.ca/campus-notification>.

COURSE GRADE APPEALS

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made with the ACTS Office.

PAPER FORMATTING

The preferred manner for citations is the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format. For information and accuracy you may wish to reference the following style guide: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Students may find the following website helpful: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Trinity Western University, Langley campus is located on the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the Stó:lō people.