



MB Seminary Course Syllabus

Course Number: THS 391 WPG

Course Name: Contemporary Theological Issues

Semester and Year: Spring 2026

The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructor: Brian Cooper, PhD

Contact Information: briancooper@mbseminary.ca

Semester Hours: 3

Course Term: April 6 – June 6, 2026

Instruction: April 10 (6:30 pm - 9:30 pm), April 11 (8:30 am – 4:30 pm) at Eastview Community Church

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.

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 site in Populi. They will provide the basis for forum interactions.

Course Instructional Content

Course Intensive (Eastview)	
Friday, April 10, 2026	6:30 – 9:30 pm
Session 1	Course Introductions – Course, People, Theology
Session 2	Getting Started in Theology and Scripture
Session 3	Theological Hermeneutics (Ew! What is that?)
Saturday, April 11, 2026	8:30 – 4:30 pm
Session 4	Isms – Secularism, Fundamentalism, Postmodernism – Oh my!
Session 5	Patriarchy, Gender, and Sexuality (Fun!)
Session 6	Science, Money, and Colonialism (Boo!)
Session 7	Nationalism, Race, and ... Church Growth?!
Session 8	North American Theologies – New Calvinism, Prosperity Theology, and Environmentalism
Session 9	Third World Theologies – Liberation Theologies, Other Contextual Christologies, and responses to North American theologies

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 Populi 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:

Date	Online Reading	Assignments	% Final Grade	Cumulative %
April 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watkin 	Pre-reading Due (textbook)	10%	10%
April 12-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childs • Cooper • Cooper 	Forum #1	5%	15%
April 19-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butler (x2) • Felker Jones • Evans 	Reflection #1	5%	20%
April 26- May 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dawkins/Gould • Keller 	Reflection #2	5%	25%
May 3-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joy • Foerst • Graham 	Short Essay (due May 9)	25%	50%
May 10-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George • Danvers Statement • Nashville Statement 	Forum #2	5%	55%
May 17-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm Reduction Readings 	Reflection #3	5%	60%
May 24-30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McGavran • Glasser • Lausanne 	Forum #3	5%	65%
May 31- June 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gutierrez • Gutierrez • Penner • Smith • Keller/Inazu 	Finish Research Essay (due June 6)	35%	100%

NOTE: Online Readings are identified in this table by author

Course Pre-Reading Requirement (10% of the final grade)

Due to the condensed nature of this course, please have the following read before the course teaching weekend begins on April 10, 2026:

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 complete the weekly readings and integrate ideas from them and the textbook into the forum discussions and other assignments.

Online Forum Participation (15% 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!

Short Reflections (15% of the final grade – 5% each)

You are going to write three SHORT papers (500-750 words – no more) addressing topics related to assigned readings for a particular week. Your goal is to write something that could serve as a brief white paper giving guidance on the ethical issue in question to interested believers and church leaders. Make sure that you consider all of the relevant information about the topic, and frame your response as a robust theological argument that brings your theological convictions to life in practical implementation. Don't feel that you need to say everything about the topic under consideration. Just show an awareness of the major issues.

There are three reflections that are part of this course. Here are the three prompts to give you guidance about what to write:

1. Why were the article and book by Butler controversial enough to provoke the strong responses that they evoked?
2. How can Christians bring together scientific evidence and theological commitments derived from Scripture in a harmonious way?
3. What responsibilities do Christians have in respect to preventing overdose deaths? What does the data tell you about the success of supervised injection sites?

Short Essay (25% 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 of your choice within the scope of the course. 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 approximately 5 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 Populi web site for this course, on the following date: **Due May 9, 2026.**

Major Research Essay (35% of the final grade)

Students will produce a research paper of not less than 10 and not more than 12 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 June 6, 2026.

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."

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.

Assignment Assessment

When I assess written assignments and presentations, I tend to look for the following:

- Appropriateness – The content matches the requirements of the assignments.
- Substantiveness – The content reveals deeper level thinking. This may take the form of critiquing existing ideas and proposing new ones. It may involve applying ideas from the readings and class discussions in deeply personal ways. It could also include a novel integration of ideas from various sources. As you think about substantiveness, I would also ask you to go beyond “left brain” thinking that focuses on systematic and logical thinking. Add “right brain” analysis that views concepts in intuitive and more holistic ways. This may involve viewing assignment topics from creative vantage points by using word pictures, analogies, metaphors, pictures, diagrams, drama, poetry, music, and other creative devices that can often enrich conceptual meaning and make it more personal. In order to get an A on an assignment, **you really need to present your ideas in an integrative and creative way**. Go beyond the stated expectations of an assignment (not in terms of length ☺). Surprise me with a novel combination and/or expression of ideas.
- Coherence – The content flows in a consistent and meaningful way.
- Engaging – The writing style does not distract from the content (e.g. grammatical mistakes), but rather engages the reader’s attention. By the way, I love creative title pages that introduce a theme or multiple themes from your assignment in an engaging way.

Academic Notes & Policies

Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI, when properly cited, may support a student's work, but it may not be used to transform it. Therefore,

Where students make use of generative artificial intelligence tools to **research** any course-related work, the generated material must be clearly and correctly indicated and cited using the Chicago/Turabian referencing style for generative AI. Additionally, students must also cite the exact prompts used.

Citation is not required to document the use of simple proofreading. However, generative **AI tools may not be used to translate, paraphrase, or increase the fluency of a student's original work**. Therefore, if the AI tool's results **produce material changes to your wording, structure, phrasing, language, or style**, you are in contravention of this policy.

Failure to clearly indicate and reference AI-generated material or any use of AI paraphrasing tools that alter syntax, originality and/or clarity will be considered a violation of academic integrity and reported as academic fraud.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and are expected to adhere to the principles of sound academic scholarship at MB Seminary .

Web Support-Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MBS will receive a MBS-Populi username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application. If you have any difficulty with your password or your login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Ministry Support, (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to your church host and contact.

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers.

Consider the [Purdue Owl](#) website for information or,

Turabian, Kate, L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations, 9th ed.*
Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at MBS.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the MB Seminary Director of Student Development (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) of that fact **before the beginning of a course** so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. To repeat: To ensure that instructors know to accommodate a student who has a learning access issue, the student must inform the Director of Student Development of a disability before the beginning of the class. After that is too late.