



What Does It Mean to Be Human? THS 530 WC Theological Anthropology Fall 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.

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Credit Hours: 3

Course Term: September 7 - November 7, 2026

Course Instruction

Course Intensive Day 1	Friday, September 10th	3:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Course Intensive Day 2	Saturday, September 11th	8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Online Colloquium	Approx 3-4 weeks in	60-90 min

This course is a hybrid consisting of a teaching intensive within a 9-week online course. Interaction will be both in-person (during the teaching intensive) and virtual (via the course site in Populi during the duration of the course).

Course Description

What does it mean to be a human being created in the image of God? What is the pattern for human existence, and what is the goal? This course will examine the biblical witness concerning human being, both individually and collectively. We will construct a picture of humanity based on a synthesis of biblical teaching. We will consider the problem of sin and the human condition, as well as the various limitations that are part of human existence. In response to these considerations, we will identify principles to guide a properly missional approach to living humanly in God's economy.

Course Objectives

This course's theme and content are consistent with, and taught through the lens of, the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate a critically biblical and culturally sensitive understanding of the theological foundations of the Christian tradition, specifically in relation to questions of the human being
- Articulate a theology of human being that takes in all the varieties of human experience
- Engage sociological, psychological, and cultural resources that shed light on human experience and intersect with theological descriptions
- Identify and critique dynamics and conditions related to theological and philosophical models of the human that perpetuate injustice

The most effective learning occurs as you carefully process information through higher-order thinking skills. Your performance and evaluation in this course will be based on demonstrating your engagement and learning, not simply repeating basic facts. In all that you do in this class, you should use higher-order thinking skills, as described below:

- Comprehension: demonstrates the ability to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas,
- Application: demonstrates the ability to use learned material in new situations,
- Analysis: demonstrates the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationships between the parts.
- Synthesis: demonstrates the ability to put together the separate ideas to form a new whole, to establish new relationships, and
- Evaluation: demonstrates the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria.

Required Texts

- Anderson, Ray S. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010.
- Peterson, Ryan S. *The Imago Dei As Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016.

Recommended Text

- Toews, John E. *The Story of Original Sin*. 1st ed. The Lutterworth Press, 2013.

Schedule of Course Intensive

Friday, September 10, 2026	3:00 pm-9:30 pm
Session 1	Body, Soul, and Spirit – Biblical Descriptors of the Human Person, and What They Mean Together
Session 2	What Does It Mean to Be Created in the Image of God (and why it is more than being creatures)?
Session 3	Sin, Depravity, and Death as Part of Human Being
Saturday, September 11, 2026	8:30am-4:30pm

Session 4	God Made Them Male and Female -- Sex, Gender, and the Image of God
Session 5	Healing and Wholeness – Disability as Essential to Human Community
Session 6	Technology, Community, and Human Being – Is the Future Bright, or Just Blinding?

Note: Attending all in-person and online course sessions is required for passing the course.

Schedule of Readings

Week	Due Date	Reading	Location
0	From Eternity Past	Read your two course textbooks, completely	You should have them in your personal library, or at least borrow them from a library
1	Sept. 10-11	Course Intensive	Just listen and take good notes. Also, feel free to ask questions
2	Sept. 18	Human Nature and Original Sin	Toews, John E. <i>The Story of Original Sin</i> . 1st ed. The Lutterworth Press, 2013. Read Chapters 1-5.
		Church Fathers on Human Nature	McGrath, Alister E., 2016. <i>The Christian Theology Reader</i> . Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Read Chapters 6.1-6.11.
3		The Image of God	Jones, Beth Felker, and Barbeau, Jeffrey W., eds. 2016. <i>The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology</i> . Westmont: InterVarsity Press. Read Part One: Canon
4	Oct. 2	“Original Sin”	https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/original-sin/
		Augustine on Original Sin	Toews, John E. <i>The Story of Original Sin</i> . Read Chapter 6.
5		Sexuality and Human Being	Jones, Beth Felker, and Barbeau, Jeffrey W., eds. 2016. <i>The Image of God in an Image Driven Age</i> . Read Chapter 4.

		Sexuality and the Image of God	McGrath, Alister E. 2016. <i>The Christian Theology Reader</i> . Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Read Chapter 6.40.
6	Oct. 9	Human Beings: As We are and As the Community God Intended	Grenz, Stanley J. 2000. <i>Theology for the Community of God</i> . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Read Chapters 5-7.
7	Oct. 16	Human Being and Disability	Reynolds, Thomas E. <i>Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality</i> . Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008. Read Section 1.
8		Human Being and Technology	Sutherland, Dawn Lewis. 2025. <i>From Babel to AI: Idolatry, Transhumanism, and the Crisis of Imago Dei</i> . Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers. Read Chapters 1, 4-6.
9	Nov. 6		

Schedule of Assignments

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% of Grade	Cumulative %
1	Sept. 10-11	Course Intensive (schedule below)		
2	Sept. 18	Reflection Paper #1	10%	10%
3		Forum #1	5%	15%
4	Oct. 2	Reflection Paper #2	10%	25%
		Online Colloquium (MS Teams)		
5		Forum #2	5%	30%
6	Oct. 9	Smaller Paper	20%	50%
7	Oct. 16	Reflection Paper #3	10%	60%
8		Forum #3	5%	65%
9	Nov. 6	Larger Paper	35%	100%

Assignments and Evaluation

Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups: There are three sets of Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups, with grading based on two components for each Paper/Group set. During three weeks of the course (Weeks 2, 4, 7), you will write a 2-3 page reflection paper in response to the instructional content and the required readings. Your reflection paper should answer the questions assigned to each of the three weeks (see below). The week after your reflection paper is due, you will meet in church-based discussion groups to discuss your responses to the questions and explore other related topics. The maximum length for each reflection paper is three pages.

1. Reflection Papers (3 reflection papers x 10% = 30% of final grade): The following are the questions you should address in your three reflections:
 - Reflection Paper 1 – Flesh and Spirit – Many Christian theologians have argued that the fleshly, material dimension of human being is passing away, and that it is ultimately unimportant. Why is this type of thinking theologically problematic? How would you describe the relationship between flesh and spirit? What is the pattern upon which you base your argument?
 - Reflection Paper 2 – Sin and Death – Many Christian theologians have taught that humans are universally affected by original sin, that humans are born in sin. Some streams of the Christian tradition have even argued that original sin means that babies who die go to hell. What is original sin? What does it mean for humans to be depraved? If humans are sinful, how can God hold people accountable for their sins?
 - Reflection Paper 3 – Hope and Community – What is the greatest expression of humanity that we as humans can hope to embody on earth? What is the difference between humans as social creatures and humans as members of a community? What does living as Christians mean for us in terms of embracing people with various kinds of disabilities? With so many Christians embracing various means of achieving healing, from praying for miracles to using medical and technological methods of prolonging life, what counsel would you offer Christians around you about pursuing the “good life?”
2. Discussion Forums (3 discussion groups x 5% = 15% of final grade): For the three Discussion Forums, 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!

The assessment of participation in discussion groups involves attendance and actual participation in the group sessions (both are worth 50% of the discussion group mark). The discussion group leaders will use the following rubric to assess each group member's participation:

Excellent participation	A	The group member consistently engaged in the group conversations. The person did an excellent job listening to other group members and consistently added meaningful content to the conversations.
Great participation	A-	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.
Good participation	B+	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.
Fair participation	B	The group member did not often engage in group conversations. The person seemed out of touch with the group conversation and would rarely add relevant content.
Poor participation	B- or below	The group member rarely, if ever, engaged in the group conversations. The person seemed distant and uninterested in the group discussion and even other group members.

3. Smaller Paper (20% of final grade)

This paper should be 5-7 pages (no more!) plus bibliography and title page (I know that it is hard to keep the paper this short; that is part of the exercise). In your best articulation of theology, write a paper that explains what it means for humans to be in the image of God. Make sure you clarify your theology by telling me one or two things this does not mean. Write a brief bit telling me why this is important and what you believe Christians should do differently in light of it. Use proper Turabian formatting for your citations.

4. Larger Paper (35% of final grade)

Students will produce a research paper of not less than 12 and not more than 18 pages in length, plus bibliography and title page. 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. It should demonstrate a clear understanding of the chosen topic. It should seek to establish, by weight of evidence from the thoughtful engagement with Scripture and secondary sources, a concise thesis statement in relation to the topic under discussion. You can request further guidance from me if you require it.

Tips for Writing Good History Essays

- 1) A good essay has a good thesis statement.
 - a) Without a thesis statement, your essay is little more than a summary.
 - i) Do more than rewrite the source in your own words. Summarizing may help to show that you understand what you have read, but does not show that you are thinking about the deeper implications of what was written.
 - ii) Do more than relate your subjective impressions; writing that you liked/disliked the source

- or agreed/disagreed with the content is not a thesis.
- b) Put the thesis statement close to the beginning of the essay that the reader sees it right away.
- 2) Remember that your thesis should not just inform, but also persuade.
 - a) Your thesis statement summarizes what you want to convince the reader about the source.
 - i) Your thesis statement should indicate that you are treating the reading in historical context rather than simply the topic the reading addresses.
 - (1) I.e., write about how the source describes the persecution and martyrdom of Perpetua rather than just writing about persecution and martyrdom in early Christianity
 - ii) Your thesis should include, *but not be limited to*, an examination of the way the reading is structured.
 - (1) E.g., it is important to note that the account includes descriptions of visions, but what is special about them, and what reasons would you suggest for their inclusion?
 - iii) Your thesis should be a case which you can make generally within the context of the source document you are analyzing.
 - (1) E.g., The thesis that your theology is true because God revealed it to you cannot be defended using internal evidence.
- 3) Your thesis should come from you, not from the source you have read.
 - a) Your thesis statement should, in plain language, point to something you think is true about the reading based on your analysis of and reflection on it.
 - i) Do not make the author/editor's aim your thesis.
 - (1) E.g., "The author's intention was to glorify God and encourage Christians." If you do this, your supporting arguments will be a synopsis of the reading, and you will not be as likely to grapple with deeper issues in the text (like how did the author know what Perpetua was thinking in the arena?).
 - ii) You can never be too clear; spell out your thesis.
 - (1) E.g., "*The aim of this paper is to show* that the compiler of the account valued maleness over femaleness."
 - iii) Be bold in defense of your thesis; do not draw conclusions without backing them up, but do not hesitate to draw clear conclusions, either.
 - (1) E.g., avoid using language that gives the impression you are not sure of what you are writing. Also, do not argue against yourself!
- 4) Finish well.
 - a) Wrap up your essay with a good encapsulating summary that reminds the reader of the main points supporting your thesis.
 - i) Develop a good thesis statement.
 - ii) Be persuasive and convincing.
 - iii) Make your thesis your own.
 - iv) Finish well.
 - b) Make sure your concluding paragraph leaves no doubt about the conclusions you have drawn from your study.

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important to us, 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 Populi classroom in Week 7.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	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	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-	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skillful 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+	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	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-	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+	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	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-	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or 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 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.

Academic Notes & Policies

Artificial Intelligence

Students may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot) to assist with research for assignments in this course, provided that any assistance or content provided or created by the AI tools is appropriately identified as a source and fully cited. This includes citing the exact prompts used. Citation is not needed for simple proofreading; however, AI tools may only be used to support your work, not to produce it. AI may not be used to rewrite, augment, transform, translate, paraphrase, or increase the fluency of your original work in any way.

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

Students should consult their instructor if they have any questions about using generative AI tools.

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. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's words, ideas, or work as one's own without proper acknowledgement, whether intentional or unintentional. This includes copying text without citation, closely paraphrasing a source without attribution, submitting work written by another person (including use of AI tools, per the policy above), and resubmitting one's own previously submitted work without the instructor's permission. Students are expected to cite all sources in Turabian format as outlined below. Suspected plagiarism will be addressed and may result in a reduced or failing grade on the assignment, a failing grade in the course, or further disciplinary action, depending on the severity and circumstances of the violation.

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. This is the standard for theological education. Please consult the following manual for instructions:

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

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students may appeal a grade to the course instructor by submitting written reasons within one week of receiving the grade. Formal course grade appeals go directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Academic Dean (briancooper@mbseminary.ca), or, in the case of Dr. Cooper's courses, to Dr. T. Anderson, Academic Director (tanderson@mbseminary.ca). The result may be a higher, lower, or unchanged grade. This decision is final, and no further appeal is available.

Populi Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MB Seminary will receive a username and password to the Seminary's Learning Management System, Populi. If you have difficulty with your password or login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Church Relations and Ministry Implementation (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergencies, every effort will be made to communicate any class cancellations to your church host and contact. Please also refer to your course's classroom page in Populi.

Equity of Access

Students with a learning disability are responsible for informing the seminary and requesting accommodation before the course begins, so that necessary arrangements can be made to support their learning. Accommodation requests will be taken seriously, and every effort will be made to implement them. However, blanket extensions to due dates or other deadlines are not an appropriate request and will not be granted, and accommodations cannot be arranged retroactively once a course is underway.

For further information, please contact Dr. Brian Cooper, Academic Dean (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) or Dr. T. Anderson, Academic Director (tanderson@mbseminary.ca) for assistance.