Convictions and Discipleship
THS 510 CB

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
Associate Professor of Theology
Email: briancooper@mbseminary.ca

Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: None
Course Term: October 5, 2026 – December 5, 2026
Instruction: October 23 (6:30 pm - 9:30 pm), October 24 (8:30 am – 4:30 pm) at Cariboo Bethel Church

Course Description

If being a Christian is about personally confessing Jesus as Lord, what does it mean to be a community of disciples living the mission of the church in the world? Why do Mennonite Brethren emphasize community so strongly? This course will focus on the key elements of visible discipleship as articulated in the Confession of Faith, drawing upon the principle of letting biblical conceptual language about discipleship shape the theological reflection of the believing community in discerning ethical and missional outcomes.

Objectives

By the end of this course, each student should:

1) Embrace the core commitments of the Mennonite Brethren Church in personal practice and ministry in the context of Christian community (Character).

2) Articulate an understanding of Mennonite Brethren convictions about the Church, as well as the biblical teachings and methodologies from which they arise (Content).

3) Assess the contextual nature of Mennonite Brethren confession and describe how that informs an incarnational awareness of the Christian community in contemporary society (Cultural Analysis).

4) Demonstrate the skills to faithfully embody and bring Mennonite Brethren convictions to life in the contemporary world (Professional Capacities).

Required Texts and Materials

There will be no required textbooks for this course. All of the required reading will come from materials that will be linked to the course web site.

The focus of the course will be articles 1-6, 8-9, 18 from the *Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith*. Please note that we will be using the newly updated 2020 version.

If students are looking for recommended theological reference books to add to their personal libraries, here are some suggestions:

McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. This dictionary will help clarify terms that students are likely to encounter while doing reading and research.

Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999. Olson's approach traces theological developments in their historical context and gives a very helpful survey of the major currents in Christian theology.

I also recommend owning a good one-volume systematic theology. Here are a few suggestions:

Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology* (3rd ed). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

Grenz, Stanley, J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

I also highly recommend the seven-volume Christian Foundations series by Donald G. Bloesch.

Teaching Weekend (Cariboo Bethel Church)	
Friday, October 23, 2026	6:30 – 9:30 pm
Session 1	Course Introduction How Theology Works
Session 2	God and Revelation
Session 3	Creation – Thinking Integratively Humanity – In the Image of God
Saturday, October 24, 2026	8:30 – 4:30 pm
Session 4	Salvation – from What to What?

Session 5	The Church – What is It? Community Hermeneutic -- What is it Good For?
Session 6	Life Together – Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Light of the Last Things

Intensive Schedule

Note: Attending all sessions of the course intensive is a requirement for passing the course.

Course Assignments

The assignments for this course are listed below. Please double-space all written assignments and use proper formatting (Chicago or Turabian).

Assignments are due by 11:59 pm (your time) on the day they are due. I would ask that you submit your assignments in Populi. Once I have marked your assignment, I will put it in your grade book in Populi where you can check your grade and review the comments I made on the assignment (you will receive an automatic notification whenever I put a graded assignment in your grade book). Please note that I reserve the right to deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each week that it is late (assignments submitted more than two weeks beyond the due date will not be accepted). If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, I will grant one extension of up to one week for one assignment during the course (without penalty) when you inform me of your need for an extension before the due date for that particular assignment. I will also consider extensions in exceptional circumstances such as a medical emergency (when a doctor's note accompanies the request).

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

Overview of Course Work

Week	Due Date	Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Cumulative Percentage
Week 1	Oct. 10	Project #1: Defining God	5%	5%
Week 2	Oct. 17	Project #2: The Truth about Scripture	15%	20%
Week 3	Oct. 24	Project #3: Binding Up the Broken	15%	35%
Week 4	Oct. 31	Colloquium		
Week 5	Nov. 7	Project #4: Atonement Implications	15%	50%
Week 6	Nov. 14	Capstone Assignment Group Discussion #1 (date to be determined by group leader)		
Week 7	Nov. 21	Project #5: Being the Church Together	15%	65%
Week 9	Nov. 28	Capstone Assignment Group Discussion #2 (date to be determined by group leader)	5% (for all three)	70%
Week 9	Dec. 5	Capstone Assignment	30%	100%

Theological Construction Projects (65% of the final grade)

During five weeks of the course, you will have to submit theological construction projects based on the course themes. Unless otherwise noted, the maximum length for each construction project is 1,500 words.

Week 1 -- Project #1: Defining God (5%)

Pretend you are writing material for a class for people exploring Christianity who have no church background or knowledge of the bible. In no more than 300 words, draft a definition of God that identifies who God is, what God is like, what God does, and how these affect humans. You may cite or allude to Scripture but be aware that your readers will not likely be aware of the significance of Scripture in your definition.

Week 2 -- Project #2: The Truth about Scripture (15%)

You have read about the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture, among other things. Christians are called to read Scripture and rely on it to discover truth, but *how* does Scripture work? (Hint: Why is so much of the Bible made up of narratives?) How are Christians called to understand biblical texts to be conduits of God's self-revelation? How do Christians integrate what they learn from Scripture with what they glean from science and other forms of knowledge?

Week 3 -- Project #3: Binding Up the Broken (15%)

One of the issues congregations have struggled with is accommodating special needs within the congregation. It has been fairly easy to understand the need to care for the elderly which has resulted in numerous retirement communities and nursing facilities designed for those coming to the end of their lives. After all, most of us will have the experience of caring for older parents or grandparents and we anticipate needing that kind of care ourselves. It has been more difficult to know how to deal with physical or mental disabilities, especially if those needs have not been present in our own family situations. Your exercise this week is a two-part exercise.

First, how does your congregation's meeting space and practice accommodate people with physical and mental disabilities? How would you suggest working to meaningfully include individuals with physical and/or disabilities in the life of your church – e.g., so that he or she could read scripture or serve communion? Is there a process about accommodating special needs within the Sunday School program, or in the ordinances of baptism and communion? Describe how your space either is or is not accessible and what would need to happen in order to make it that way.

Second, if your congregation does not have a guiding document about accommodating special needs (and many do not!), draft one. Again, think about the needs within a congregation. What might be a position on accommodating children on the autism spectrum? What will govern your congregation's decision about participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper? What other issues might be addressed in such a statement? How would you support the statement theologically?

Week 5 -- Project #4: Atonement Implications (15%)

The contemporary hymn "In Christ Alone," written in 2001, has been the topic of controversy because of the lyrics of verse two that read "Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied…." A proposal to amend the latter portion to "the love of God was magnified" to allow its inclusion in a denominational hymnbook was rejected by the songwriters.

If you were forced to use this song using a reference to either love or wrath at this place in verse two, how would you choose? Defend your answer theologically, giving attention to the fact that both love and wrath are biblical terms used in relation to the atonement.

Week 7 – Project #5: Being the Church Together (15%)

Write a document that could be used in a newcomers or membership class. Your document should cover (but not necessarily be limited to) conversion, catechism, baptism, membership,

the Lord's Supper, and what it means to be part of a church fellowship. Give special attention to the theological reasons behind these church practices and also underlying theological discernment and decision-making.

Discussion Groups (5% of the final grade)

The discussion groups will serve two purposes. First, they will address questions and provide a forum for students to process what they are learning in the class. Second, they are community hermeneutic working groups leading to the completion of the capstone project.

Capstone Assignment (30% of final grade)

Your capstone assignment is going to accomplish several elements. You are asked to write a theology of church that encompasses the local congregation, the fellowship of congregations in an area, and a theology of denominations. Tell me why each is important and how they relate to one another.

The theological work you do in the course should contribute to your work in this final project. Here's the interesting part. This is a group project, not an individual one. You will work on this project in groups and use the group discussion times as times to collaborate, discuss, and strategize the project. Each group will submit only one paper, and, assuming each makes a comparable contribution, each member of the group can expect to receive the same grade for this assignment. The maximum length for each capstone project is 3,000 words.

Course Evaluation

Because your feedback is very important to me, I have made the course evaluation a required part of the course. You will find the course evaluation in Populi.

Grading Scale

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 *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 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.

Tips for Writing Good 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, for example, 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.

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.