

**DS624 “Thinking the Faith”- Theology and Doctrine in the United Church of Canada**  
**UNITED CHURCH DENOMINATIONAL STUDIES**      **1.0 credit**

Instructor: Janet Gear  
Fall 2009

**Purpose**

The goal of this course is preparation for learned and able leadership in the United Church of Canada. Within the context of external and internal challenges to the church, the class will provide an arena both to acquire and practice the ability to reflect theologically on the church’s statements of faith (the Doctrine section of the “Basis of Union,” “A Statement of Faith,” a “New Creed,” and “A Song of Faith”) and other doctrinally-based statements and reports. It will provide the forum for articulation of a collective understanding of the purpose of the church and the practice of its ministries.

Using pressing issues within the church as a starting place, we will reflect together on the theological resources from which to draw in considering institutional and pastoral life of the church and its public witness.

This is a required course for United Church MDiv, DipCS, and Admissions students.

**Learning Outcomes**

**Competencies are approved when you are able to demonstrate . . .**

- an ability to articulate and discuss the way in which United Church doctrinal statements relate to the life and work of the church, both historically and currently
- an ability to summarize and critique the application of theology to church policy and mission (commissioned reports)
- an ability to construct theologically and doctrinally-based arguments (both orally and in writing) in relation to church polity and practice
- an ability to speak extemporaneously on topics concerning the church’s understanding of various theological topics (authority and interpretation of scripture, the role of Christ, reconciliation, justice, grace, suffering, evil)
- an ability to critically and constructively examine doctrine in light of emergent trends in Christian life and practice

**Format**

This 1.0 credit class will meet for a ten hour intensive over two days during fall semester. The course is taught as a seminar with instructional input, including guest lecturers. Participation is through active listening, collegial group work, in-class discussions and presentations. Preparation for the course includes pre-reading and four 1-2 page writing assignments (200-500 words) [see syllabus]. A final paper/project (8-10 pages) will be due by the end of the term.

**Prerequisites:** Course in Theology or equivalent (Diploma students 500 level; MDiv students normally 600 level)

**Expectations of the student**

- 100% attendance of the class
- appropriate preparation for participation in class activities and discussion
- pre-reading and writing and post-reading and writing assignments as detailed in syllabus

**Required Reading**

- Schweitzer, Don and Derek Simon (eds.) Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity , chapters 1, 2, 10 and epilogue + two other chapters from Parts II and III
- On-line reports, articles and other documents related to UCC doctrine and theology (see course schedule)
- Recommended texts/articles will be provided or placed on reserve. See course schedule and bibliography.

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**Class Schedule**

**24 September Part One: Introduction**

Introduction of class participants; introduction to the course and its objectives, review of syllabus, discussion of students’ and instructor’s expectations.

**Part Two: Practicing Theology**

Sharing responses to assignment #1

*Assignment #1 Due: September 24*

*Prepare to read and submit a 1-2 page response (preface with your selection of article/phrase in full) to the following question:*

*In your reading of the Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union, the 1940 Statement of Faith, A New Creed, and A Song of Faith, find the article/ phrase that most clearly states the core of your faith and give an illustration of how this belief is manifest (i.e. how is this belief incarnate in your life/community).*

*Assigned Reading:*

- The United Church of Canada, “Basis of Union, Doctrine” (1925; *Manual* Sections 2.0–2.20) [www.united-church.ca/ucc/basisofunion/home.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/ucc/basisofunion/home.shtm)
- The United Church of Canada, “Statement of Faith” (1940) [www.united-church.ca/ucc/faithstatement.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/ucc/faithstatement.shtm) >DS 320
- The United Church of Canada, “A New Creed” (1968, amended 1980 and 1994) [www.united-church.ca/ucc/newcreed/home.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/ucc/newcreed/home.shtm)
- The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith” (2006) <http://www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/statements/sof.rtf>

**25 September Part Three: Doctrine and Theology in the Church**

Lecture, discussion of readings and assignment.

*Assigned Reading:*

- Schweitzer, Don and Derek Simon (eds.) Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity, chapters 1, 2
- Young, John. “Sacred Cow or White Elephant?: The Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union” *Touchstone* 16/2 (1998): 29–46. <http://touchstonejournal.ca/>

*Recommended Reading:*

- Wells, Harold. “The Making of the United Church Mind—No. 2,” *Touchstone* 18 (January 1990): 17–29.
- Short, Peter, “Dear George” in *Outside Eden*, pp.74-83
- Clifford, N.K., “The United Church of Canada and Doctrinal Confession” in *Touchstone* May 1984 pp. 7-21

*Assignment #2 Due: September 25*

*Prepare to read and submit a 1-2 page response to the following question:*

*What is at stake in the United Church being “non-creedal”? What does that mean? How did it come to be that a church in the Reformed tradition became non-creedal? How would a participant in the United Church experience this? Does this mean we have no theology? Does “essential agreement” mean “agreement for the most part?” If not, what does it mean?*

## 25 September Part IV: Focus on Christology

An intensive role-play to uncover issues and pool collective knowledge and understanding of United Church approaches to and applications of belief in Christ in a broken world and pluralistic context.

*Assignment #3 Due: September 25*

*1- 2 pages to be submitted in class: In response to a fictitious headline “United Church: Christ not ‘literally risen’; church not ‘really’ Christian,” prepare your notes (do not write an essay; substantive point-form for reference is better) for a mock interview with the CBC. Prepare to cite doctrine and reports. Anticipate questions about Christian beliefs in a time of conflict in Jewish and Muslim states and about Residential Schools. Anticipate revisiting interpretations of the cross and resurrection and Christology in general. There will be a mock interview during class.*

### *Assigned Reading:*

- *Basis of Union* (1925), Articles VI-VII and X-XII, “Of the Grace of God,” “Of the Lord Jesus Christ,” “Of Faith and Repentance,” and “Of Justification and Sonship,” and “Of Sanctification”
- *Statement of Faith* (1940), Articles II and VI: “Jesus Christ” and “Redemption”
- *A New Creed* (1994)
- “A Song of Faith” (2006)
- Schweitzer, Don and Derek Simon (eds.) *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, chapter 10
- The United Church of Canada, Inter-church and Inter-faith Committee, “Mending the World: An Ecumenical Vision for Healing and Reconciliation” (36<sup>th</sup> General Council, 1997; *ROP* pp. 195–227) <[www.united-church.ca/mtw/home.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/mtw/home.shtm)>
- Thorpe, Brian “Transformation in the Encounter: Reflections on a Dispute Resolution Process” *Touchstone* May 2006 pp. 17-25 <http://touchstonejournal.ca/>
- The United Church of Canada, 31<sup>st</sup> General Council, “Apology to Native Congregations/Apology to First Nations” (1986, *ROP* pp. 83–85, 94, 230–44, 666) <[www.united-church.ca/healing/1986.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/healing/1986.shtm)>
- The United Church of Canada, Moderator, “Apology to Former Students of United Church Indian Residential Schools, and to Their Families and Communities” (1998) <<http://www.united-church.ca/residentialschools/1998/1027.shtm>>

*Choose one to read; be familiar with both:*

- The United Church of Canada, Interchurch and Interfaith Committee, “Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church–Jewish Relations Today” (37<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2000; *ROP* pp. 108–09, 308–21, 1073– 1074, 1156–1157) <<http://www.united-church.ca/bfw/home.shtm>>
- The United Church of Canada, Interchurch and Interfaith Committee, “That We May Know Each Other: Toward a United Church of Canada Understanding of the Relationship between Christianity and Islam in the Canadian Context” (38<sup>th</sup> General Council 2003; *ROP* pp. TBA) <<http://www.united-church.ca/twmkeo/home.shtm>>

### *Recommended Reading:*

- The United Church of Canada, Committee on Theology and Faith, “Reconciling and Making New: Report of the Committee on Theology and Faith” (37<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2000; *ROP* pp. 174–175, 188–192, 383–405, 1177–1179). [on reserve]
- The United Church of Canada, General Council, “That All May be One: Policy Statement on Anti-Racism” (37<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2000; *ROP* 112–118, 712–726) [www.united-church.ca/jpc/antiracism/pdf/one.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/jpc/antiracism/pdf/one.pdf)
- WCC Faith and Order, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* pp. 11-21, 32-54
- The United Church of Canada, Division of Mission in Canada, Committee on Christian Faith and David Lochhead, “The Lordship of Jesus” (27<sup>th</sup> General Council, 1977; *ROP* pp. 419–447) [on reserve]
- WCC Faith and Order, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* pp. 11-21, 32-54

**25 September**      **Part V: Discerning Mission**  
Discussion arising from assignment.

*Assignment #4 Due 25 September:*

*Prepare to share and submit a 1-2 page reflection on the following statement “a secular, rights-based, multicultural utopia, for all its strengths, is not our Gospel.” – Peter Short, Outside Eden, p. 78. How DOES the United Church determine its work? What role does the Scripture play in that discernment? How do we know we are doing God’s mission and not something “secular?” Is there a difference?*

*Assigned Reading:*

- The United Church of Canada, Committee on Theology and Faith, “The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture” (34<sup>th</sup> General Council, 1992; *ROP* pp. 104–109, 215–271, 584–588) <http://www.united-church.ca/files/history/overview/ais.pdf>
- wondercafé and Emerging Spirit websites [www.emergingspirit.ca](http://www.emergingspirit.ca)

*Familiarize yourself with:*

- The United Church of Canada, Division of World Outreach, “To Seek Justice and Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God’s People” (37<sup>th</sup> General Council, 2000; *ROP* pp. 184–185, 197–200, 784–857, 1182–1184) <<http://www.united-church.ca/tsj/pdf/complete.pdf>>
- The United Church of Canada, General Council, “A Transformative Vision” GC39 2006, <[http://www.unitedchurch.ca/files/organization/gc39/workbook1\\_commissions.pdf](http://www.unitedchurch.ca/files/organization/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf)>

*Read 10 pages from:*

- United Church of Canada “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire” Report to 39<sup>th</sup> General Council <<http://www.united-church.ca/gc39/pdf/workbook1/commissions.pdf>> 155-216

*Recommended Reading:*

- United Church of Canada *Gift*, “Dilemma and Promise: A Report and Affirmations on Human Sexuality” in Huntly, Allison, *Daring to Be United*, pp 163-169
- United Church of Canada, “Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality: A New Statement of The United Church of Canada by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council 1988,” in Huntly, Allison, *Daring to Be United*, pp 170-174.

**25 September**      **Part VI: Final Reflections**  
Final lecture and discussion; course evaluations

*Final Assignment Due: 11 December:*

*Either A) Design an educational programme (3 sessions) based on one of the doctrinal texts studied in class (BoU, SoF 1940, NC, ASoF) for YAYA or adult participants in your community/congregation. Provide an over-view of the learning goals and over-all design of the programme, a statement about the context, a bibliography, and the copies of all prepared hand-outs or power-points for one of the sessions. If you have offered all or part of the programme by December, provide evaluative reflections. This should NOT be a programme designed prior to this course or based on a published curriculum; original work only, integrating learning from this class.*

*Or B) Write an 6-8 page paper with bibliography, expanding on any one of the short assignments for this class. Research to include relevant “recommended readings” and beyond.*

*Or C) Discuss with instructor a proposal of your choice to demonstrate competencies outlined in the learning outcomes section of the syllabus.*

**Important Note for All Assignments:** Make sure to *give reasons* for your convictions and arguments and *back them up* with material from class readings and discussions, and from your own experience, research and reflection. Include documentation as appropriate, using any standard format that clearly indicates author, title, publisher, and date of sources used. Observe all VST academic regulations and policies, and note the VST criteria for evaluation of assignments; this information is found in the current *Supplementary Calendar*.

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- The United Church of Canada, “A New Creed” (1968, amended 1980 and 1994) [www.united-church.ca/ucc/newcreed/home.shtm](http://www.united-church.ca/ucc/newcreed/home.shtm)
- The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith” (2006) <http://www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/statements/sof.rtf>
- Young, John. “Sacred Cow or White Elephant?: The Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union” *Touchstone* 16/2 (1998): 29–46. <http://touchstonejournal.ca/>
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- United Church of Canada “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire” Report to 39<sup>th</sup> General Council <http://www.united-church.ca/gc39/pdf/workbook1/commissions.pdf> 155-216
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- Wondercafe and Emerging Spirit websites <http://www.emergingspirit.ca/>

Contact the VST library for information on how to access the following *recommended* readings:

- Wells, Harold. “The Making of the United Church Mind—No. 2,” *Touchstone* 18 (January 1990): 17–29.

- Short, Peter, “Dear George” in *Outside Eden*, pp.74-83
- Clifford, N.K., “The United Church of Canada and Doctrinal Confession” in *Touchstone* May 1984 pp. 7-21
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- United Church of Canada, “Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality: A New Statement of The United Church of Canada by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council 1988,” in Huntly, Allison, *Daring to Be United*, pp 170-174.
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- The United Church of Canada, Division of Mission in Canada, Committee on Christian Faith and David Lochhead, “The Lordship of Jesus” (27<sup>th</sup> General Council, 1977; *ROP* pp. 419–447)

Further reading on social analysis and faith: (on reserve)

- Holland, J and Henriot, P, “Industrialization and Pastoral Responses” in *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, pp 64-105
- Leddy, Mary Jo, “The Texture of the Times,” in *Reweaving the Religious Life* pp. 13-43
- Leddy, Mary Jo, “The Unraveling of Religious Life” and “This Threadbare Moment” in *Reweaving the Religious Life* pp. 47-101
- Baum, Gregory, “From Solidarity to Resistance” in *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*”
- Hallman, David G., “Values in Contemporary Western Societies” in *Spiritual Values for Earth Community* pp. 11-32

Primer in theology for the church for reference: (on reserve)

- Robinson, Anthony B., *What’s Theology Got To Do With It?: Convictions, Vitality, and the Church*