

Vancouver School of Theology
Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) History Reading Course
DS580T

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The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada from its roots in 16th century Europe to its present life and times. Seminal events, persons and movements understood in their context (theological, historical & cultural) will provide a focus for our discussion and a resource for understanding and responding to contemporary challenges for the PCC. This course will prepare students by providing a framework and background to thrive in their local ministry context.

Major areas to be covered in this directed reading course:

- Identify some of the major personalities and movements that have shaped the Presbyterian Church in Canada
- Exploration of how the Presbyterian tradition was planted and evolved here in Canada
- Study of church & state relations in the development of Presbyterianism in Canada
- Grasping the essential question of “identity” for Canadian Presbyterians before and after the Church Union debate
- Focus on the Presbyterian tradition as it has moved through the post-Second World War era to the current state of post-Christendom Canada

Competency Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate a grasp of the basic introductory knowledge of the history of Canadian Presbyterianism
- Students will identify and analyze historical factors that influence the changing religious landscape of Canada and the PCC
- Students will articulate and evaluate historical influences on Canadian Presbyterian identity before and after the Church Union debate
- Students will work with primary and secondary historical resources to demonstrate integration of thought on one major area of historical significance in the development of Canadian Presbyterianism and its continued influence on the leadership challenges of today’s PCC

Texts:

- Moir, John. *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*. Burlington: Eagle Press, 1987.

Please note that Enduring Witness is increasingly difficult to get in stock and is available online for free here: <https://presbyterianarchives.ca/historical-publications/>

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the most significant "take-aways" for you from this vast overview of the history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada?
2. What surprised you the most in this reading?
3. What critiques do you have to make of Enduring Witness?
4. What is most urgent in this overview of PCC history for the church to know today?
5. How might your future leadership in the PCC be shaped by our denomination's past?

- Bryden, Walter. *Why I am a Presbyterian*. Belleville: Essence Publishing, 1997.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe what you believe was the author's main goal or thesis in this publication?
 2. What does the author name as his own personal reasons for remaining in the PCC and not joining the new United Church?
 3. As a primary source in Canadian Church history written in the 1930s, comment on the author's thinking and arguments regarding multi-faith traditions in Chapter 7.
 4. What are the notable ways in which the author draws on other theologians to make his argument in this book (Calvin, Barth, etc)?
 5. If you were to write a book entitled "Why I am a Presbyterian" today – what would your main arguments be considering this book?
- Clarke, Brian & Stuart Macdonald. *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada since 1945*. Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queens University Press, 2017.

Discussion Questions:

1. Select a quote from the book that most clearly speaks to your experience of the changing religious landscape in Canada. Why?
2. Reflect and describe the ways in which you have observed the end of Christendom in your local church. What is the most painful part of that change for members of the church?
3. What opportunities do you see in this new post-Christendom Canadian context?

4. What are the essential parts of our Presbyterian heritage that can assist us in this time?
5. How might Christian witness thrive in this new post-Christendom soil?

Course Requirements

1. Reading all assigned texts
2. Three (3) online conversations with the Professor and other students enrolled in DS580T
3. Book Review
4. Research Essay on PCC History

Assignments

Book Review: Write a four-page (1000-word maximum) book review on one of the following books. Be sure to include how the content of the book helps you to reflect on leadership challenges of today's PCC:

- Airhart, Phyllis. *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada*. Montreal: McGill/Queens Press, 2014.
- Bush, Peter. *Western Challenge: The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Mission on the Prairies and North, 1885-1925*.
- Johnston, John, ed. *No Small Jewel: A History of the Synod of Southwestern Ontario*. Burlington: Eagle Press, 2005.
- Laverdue, Paul, ed. *Early Presbyterianism in Canada: Essays by John Moir*. Gravelbourg: Laverdure & Associates, 2003.
- Klempa, Lois & Rosemary Dawn, *Certain Women Amazed Us: The Women's Missionary Society, 1864-2002*. Toronto: Presbyterian Publications, 2002.
- Klempa, William, ed. *Burning Bush and a few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994.
- Moir, John. *Christianity in Canada: Historical Essays*. Yorkton: Redeemer's Voice Press, 2002.
- Prang, Margaret. *A Heart at Leisure from Itself: Caroline Macdonald of Japan*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995.
- Rawlyk, George, ed. *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990*. Burlington: Welch Publishing, 1990.
- Vissers, John. *The Neo-Orthodox Theology of W. W. Bryden*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006.

Research Essay:

Competency Objective - Students will work with primary and secondary historical resources to demonstrate integration of thought on one major area of historical significance in the development of Canadian Presbyterianism and its continued influence on the leadership challenges of today's PCC (from above)

In consultation with the Professor, students will select a topic of interest connected to a significant aspect of Presbyterian Church in Canada History and write a research paper of between 12-15 pages (3000 words maximum) and should include a proper bibliography and citation of 5-8 primary and secondary sources beyond the required course readings, with a major focus on PCC resources.

All assignments due by the last day of class of the term in which the course is offered.