

MA Student Manual

2010–2011



1. Introduction

Welcome to AMBS! We hope you find life in this community to be intellectually and spiritually invigorating.

Our seminary comprises a diverse community. Students come from many different places, from different denominations, and with different educational backgrounds. They also come with a wide range of vocational goals and academic interests. Many come to prepare for pastoral or other church-leadership ministries, some to prepare for further academic work, and others to discern their gifts and calling. The seminary has tried to design degree programs appropriate to the variety of student interests and to the needs of the church. You will find descriptions of these programs and their requirements in the catalog.

If you have applied to one of the MA programs, you are already familiar with its purposes and curricular components as the catalog describes them. This manual does not replace the catalog, but it will provide more detailed information about some aspects of MA studies at AMBS. You may find it helpful in planning your course of study to read through the entire manual, taking note of matters related especially to your own program. *Appendix 3* lists dates that you will want to keep in mind. Please note that some of the dates will differ if you begin the program in January or second semester. If you have questions, now or at any time, you should feel free to ask your adviser or the MA director. We will try to provide any help you may need.

2. Program Designs

In its MA programs the seminary aims to combine an academically rigorous and well-rounded theological education with a focus on particular theological disciplines, church ministries, or forms of Christian witness. Thus, while the different MA programs each require certain courses within a specific field or area of concentration, students take courses in all of the seminary's departments.

The AMBS curriculum organizes itself in three academic departments: Bible; History, Theology and Ethics; and Church and Ministry. All AMBS faculty with academic appointments hold membership in one of these departments. The seminary's MA programs are related in differing ways to the three departments.

- A. The *MA in Christian Formation* is lodged primarily in the Department of Church and Ministry: faculty members in that department design and conduct both the Christian Formation program and the Mission and Evangelism program. These are ministry programs; that is, they seek to prepare students in particular dimensions, forms, and contexts

of the church's ministries. The *Christian Formation* program encompasses three different concentrations: Christian Spirituality, Teaching Ministry, and Worship. Course requirements among these concentrations vary; the catalog provides details.

- B. The *MA: Theological Studies* program seeks to provide students academic preparation in one or more of the theological disciplines: biblical exegesis, systematic theology, biblical theology, historical theology, Christian ethics, or church history, for example. Students in this program elect to concentrate in one of three areas: Biblical Studies, Theology and Ethics, or Church History. Faculty in the Bible department design and conduct the concentration in biblical studies, while faculty in the History, Theology and Ethics department design and conduct the latter two concentrations.
- C. The *MA: Peace Studies* program combines features of those previously described. It seeks to prepare students for various peace and justice ministries while focusing on the biblical, theological, and historical foundations of the church's peace witness and convictions. This program is designed and administered by the Peace and Justice Studies Committee, whose faculty members are drawn from the three departments. Students may choose the Primary Program or one of three more specific concentrations, in partnership with other institutions: Conflict Transformation (Goshen College), International Development Administration (Andrews University), and Urban Community Development (Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education).

All of the seminary's MA programs and concentrations seek to equip students for ministry, which we affirm to be the vocation of every Christian. Our graduates enter a variety of professions, work in church administration or service agencies, pursue higher degrees in a particular discipline, and give leadership in educational or other congregational ministries. However, none of our MA programs is *professional* in nature. That is, none of them is intended or designed to prepare students for specific careers or professions—with one exception.

AMBS and Andrews University collaborate in the *MA: Peace Studies/Master of Social Work* dual-degree program. This three-year program leads to the MA: Peace Studies degree, conferred by AMBS, and the MSW degree, conferred by Andrews University. Students take the required Peace Studies courses at the seminary and the social work courses at Andrews, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. The Andrews University social work program is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The registrar's office can provide more specific information and answer your questions about this dual-degree program.

Some seminary students begin their MA (or M.Div.) programs aiming to pursue further education in a particular discipline after graduating from AMBS. Others, perhaps sensing a call to college or seminary teaching, wonder if they should consider an advanced degree. Sometime during the

second semester of each year, the MA director or the dean will convene a meeting open to all seminary students who may be contemplating graduate work leading to the Ph.D. or Th.D degree. Members of the faculty will be present in the meeting, responding to questions students may have related to doctoral studies.

Consideration of this and other vocational objectives, along with opportunities that may be open to MA graduates, will take place in the first-year seminars, described below (3.A.). Your adviser and other members of the seminary community will also be important sources of counsel.

One final matter. You may remain uncertain which MA program or concentration is best for you. You may even wonder if you should enroll in the M.Div. program instead. If so, you are by no means unique. It is not at all unusual for students to change concentrations or even degree programs during their course of study. We regard this as healthy. The first semester or even the first year of seminary studies is a unique time of discovery and discernment. AMBS makes time and space for such discernment in all of its programs.

3. Program Requirements

Each of the MA programs and concentrations has its own requirements, which you will find in the catalog. These requirements include specified courses and *kinds* of courses, as well as electives. You may also want to design an Independent Study course, either to pursue a subject that regular course offerings do not cover or to meet a course requirement that you cannot schedule otherwise. Your adviser can help you arrange independent studies. Seminary regulations permit you to enroll in as many as two Independent Studies each academic year, (limited to one per semester).

The different MA programs also share certain requirements. For example, all of them require 60 hours of course credit, comprehensive examinations or a thesis, participation in first-year seminars and a second-year colloquium.

A. Seminars

Students in all MA programs participate in seminars during the first year of residence. All beginning AMBS students should enroll in the *Theological Education and Formation Seminar*, offered in the fall semester. This seminar will meet for five sessions, early in the fall semester. In the second semester, first-year students in the Peace Studies and Theological Studies programs enroll in the *MA Seminar*. First-year students in the Christian Formation program enroll in the *Christian Formation Seminar*. Both of these first-year seminars provide students opportunity to:

- a. discuss with each other their progress in their respective programs;
- b. think together critically and constructively about the content and context of theological education;

- c. engage in vocational discernment;
- d. discern whether they are enrolled in the right program for them.

In addition, each first-year seminar is oriented to the degree programs of which it is a part. Thus, the Christian Formation Seminar includes reflection on students' growth as people in ministry, while MA Seminar 1 includes an introduction to thinking theologically and reflection on students' intellectual development.

A student who successfully completes the first-year MA seminar will be *advanced to candidacy* for the degree, upon recommendation of the seminar leader, the student's adviser, and the MA director, and by vote of the faculty. The recommendations will affirm that the student has made satisfactory academic progress, is enrolled in the appropriate program or concentration, and is qualified to enroll in the *MA Colloquium*.

All second-year MA students enroll in the *MA Colloquium*. Here students from the different programs and concentrations engage in conversation across the theological disciplines and the seminary curriculum. The Colloquium provides opportunity for MA students to consider and to discuss the integration of the disciplines in theological education and for the church. In addition, students will learn to communicate more effectively, in and for the church as well as beyond it, through their writing.

B. Comprehensive Examinations

Comprehensive examinations assess a student's preparation to graduate with the MA degree in an area of theological study, ministry, or peace studies. The examinations may draw from all the curricular areas of a specific MA program, but they will focus on the discipline or disciplines at the core of each student's program or concentration.

While the examinations aim to be comprehensive, they do not assume that you should know everything! In your courses you will learn what are the important issues, topics, and literature – or the practices – in your discipline or area. You will also learn what your professors consider important. In some cases, you will be provided with a reading list at the beginning of the program. Since you can take a limited number of courses within the sixty-hour program, a reading list can lead you to important material that you may not study in any of your classes. Of course, you may also ask your adviser or a professor in your discipline for reading suggestions.

Preparing for comprehensive examinations will be your responsibility. The faculty will be responsible to help you in any way we can, but take the initiative! Here's how the process works.

1. *Examination Schedule.*

Each year, the registrar will set the dates for the MA comprehensive examinations. These dates, which fall in the second semester, will appear on the Calendar that accompanies the Course Offering List for the academic year; available from a link at www.ambs.edu/student-resources. The Calendar also includes dates for meeting with your adviser and selecting second-semester courses. When you register, normally in the fall, for your final semester of classes, you will also need to register your intention to take comprehensive exams. *You must register your intention to do so no later than the first week of the semester in which you plan to take exams.*

Members of the department in which your program is lodged will compose the examination. Faculty on the Peace Studies Committee will compose the MA: Peace Studies exam. Each department – or the committee – determines who among its members will compose the exam questions. They will make this determination prior to November 15 of each year. By that date, the names of faculty composing exams will be posted outside the office of the MA director. You are strongly encouraged to schedule a meeting, before the end of the first semester, with the faculty members who will be composing your exams. They will be able to tell you, in general terms, what you may expect to see on your exams and give you further guidance on preparing for it. If other students in your program or concentration are taking exams, you may want to meet with your faculty exam composers as a group.

2. *Examination Procedure*

The dean's office administers comprehensive examinations. Within the period of time specified on the Calendar, you will pick up your exam questions from the administrative secretary to the dean. Accompanying the questions will be a set of instructions. These will specify (a) the amount of time you have to complete the entire examination; (b) how much time you may devote to each question; (c) what resources you may or should use in answering the questions; (d) how to return your completed examination to the dean's office.

While comprehensive examinations will vary among the MA programs and concentrations, you should expect to write answers to at least three questions. In most cases, you will be given a choice; that is, each part of the examination may ask you to choose between two questions to answer. You will want to ask the faculty composing your examination about this. Appended at the end of this manual you will find sample examination questions for each of the programs. These will give you an idea of what you *may* see on your exam (*Appendix 1*).

3. *The Oral Interview following Comprehensive Examinations*

When you have completed your written exam, the dean's office will schedule an interview with two faculty members. One of these will be your adviser. You should suggest to the dean's administrative secretary your preference regarding the second faculty member. Your adviser will give you counsel if you are uncertain whom to suggest.

The interview will focus primarily on the written examination. The formal purpose of the interview is to assess whether you have "passed" your comprehensive examinations and will be recommended for graduation pending the completion of all course requirements.

In the interview you may be asked to explain something you wrote, or to expand on it; to speak more specifically to an issue that your written examination only broached; to draw connections between your discipline and other components of the theological curriculum or the life of the church; or almost anything at all!

In most instances, the interview will consist of a theological conversation around the topics covered in your examination. The interview may provide you an occasion to strengthen orally an answer whose written form remained weak or incomplete. It may lead to suggestions for further study, or perhaps remedial work in certain areas, after graduation. In exceptional cases, the faculty interviewers may require a student to re-write part or all of the examination following further study. An interview could result in outright failure, but only in the most extraordinary circumstances. Faculty will make every reasonable effort to see you successfully complete your MA program.

C. *The Thesis Option*

Most MA students will take comprehensive examinations. Some MACF and MATS students, and students enrolled in the MAPS primary program, may petition to write a thesis in place of exams. A student who successfully completes a thesis will receive six hours of course credits, which normally replace two courses in the MA program. [Note: MAPS students have the option of completing a project rather than a thesis. Consult the Director of Peace and Justice Studies for information.]

1. *Comprehensive exams or a thesis?*

You may have good reasons for wanting to write a thesis. The seminary does not have stated criteria for what could count as "good reasons." If you want to write a thesis, you will have to make your case! And you will need to make it before the conclusion of your first year in the program.

The seminary's MA programs are both *foundational* theological programs (i. e., they do not have a baccalaureate degree in theology or religious studies as a prerequisite) and *graduate* programs in an area of theological studies. For

that reason, very few students are prepared to articulate, in their first year, a carefully defined subject for intensive research; a method guiding that research; and a thesis – that is, an *argument* – regarding the subject itself. For the same reason, most students benefit more from course work and comprehensive examinations than they would from attempting to write a thesis. Most, but not all.

2. *The thesis petition.*

If you decide to pursue the thesis option, you should (1) read through *Appendix 2* of this manual, on “The MA Thesis;” (2) secure a “Petition to Write a Thesis” form by downloading it from the AMBS forms on the seminary web site or asking the MA director for a copy; and (3) consult with your academic adviser. Her approval or his will be necessary before you can proceed further. *You must return the completed thesis petition, and its required attachments, to the MA director by May 1 (or the following Monday).*

The thesis petition will ask you for the prospective title of your thesis, a brief description of your projected research, a tentative outline, and a proposed schedule for completing the thesis. It will also ask you to name your preferences for thesis supervisor (normally, this will be your adviser) and second reader. With the petition you will include a statement giving the educational rationale for writing a thesis rather than taking comprehensive examinations and two courses (i. e., why it serves your theological education better to do so). Your adviser will include a statement affirming your ability to write well and to complete written assignments on time. With your adviser’s endorsement, the petition will come to the MA director for approval.

Your adviser’s endorsement and the MA director’s approval will depend on judgments about (1) the depth and breadth of your foundation in theological studies; (2) the academic quality of your first-year’s course work; (3) your capacity for independent research; (4) your preparation for the specific thesis research you propose; and (5) the appropriateness of the method or procedure you propose to employ.

After approving your thesis petition, the MA director will confirm the availability of your thesis supervisor and second reader.

3. *The Thesis Prospectus.*

If the MA director approves your thesis petition, you will need to prepare a prospectus. *It will be especially important to show in your prospectus that you have proposed a clearly defined, sharply focused, and manageable thesis.* The prospectus must include the following items:

- a. A description of the subject to be investigated in the thesis, including why this is a subject worthy of investigation within your MA program.

- b. A statement of the thesis that will guide your research. For example, you might write a paragraph or two summarizing the argument you intend to make.
- c. A description of the research method to be employed in the thesis, including how the method fits both the subject under investigation and the thesis guiding the research.
- d. An account of the current “state of the question.” What are the current or prevailing views on the subject you intend to investigate? Has it been the topic of previous academic research? If so, what questions, interests, and methods have guided this research and what conclusions did it reach? Addressing these questions will help you to locate your thesis in the context of current discussion, and to focus your own investigation of the topic. Thus, it will help to prepare you for items a – c, above, and item e, below.
- e. A bibliography sufficient to demonstrate the availability of resources (library and otherwise) necessary to conducting your research.

In general, the prospectus should demonstrate to the Curriculum Committee that you have conducted the basic research on your topic and are prepared to carry through with further research and writing. You might think of your prospectus as an abbreviated form of the thesis itself – subject, of course, to revision and expansion! Here is a set of questions (not necessarily an outline) to consider in your prospectus (from <http://webb.nmu.edu/Departments/CriminalJustice/SiteSections/GraduatePrograms/ThesisProspectusFormat.shtml>):

1. Research Question: Your question must be clearly stated and well justified. Why is it a question worth answering? Why should we care what the answer is? This is the dreaded 'so what' question that you will face from here on out?

2. Literature Review: While the theoretical development of your topic will require some substantive literature review, you need not conduct a full-blown literature review. It is more important that you spend time thinking about these categories and issues of research design.

3. Theory: What theoretical approach will you take in your research? How do you plan to answer your research question? Are there alternative perspectives? Why is your approach appropriate for the question?

4. Hypotheses: What specific hypotheses or statements will you evaluate? How do they follow from your theory?

5. Methods: What methods will you use to assess your theory and test hypotheses? Are these the best methods for your study?

6. Data: What kinds of data will you use? How will you collect it? What is your measurement strategy? How will you operationalize variables? Do you face reliability and validity issues?

7. Allowable Conclusions: Given your data and methods, what is the scope of the conclusions or inferences you can make? What problems do you foresee?

You can download from the AMBS website a "Thesis Prospectus" form to attach to your prospectus. *Both the prospectus and the form are due in the MA director's office by August 15 (or the following Monday).* Your thesis supervisor must sign the form, thereby recommending your prospectus to the Curriculum Committee. The MA director will then forward the prospectus to the committee for its approval.

Preparing the prospectus will already involve you in thesis research. Continuing and completing your research and writing will be your responsibility. Of course, you should consult regularly with your thesis supervisor regarding your work. It would also be wise to keep your second reader informed of your progress.

4. *Thesis Time Limits*

In the semester following the approval of your thesis petition, you must register for the course "MA Thesis Research." The course will carry regular tuition fees for six credit hours, normally in each of two semesters.

You should aim to complete your thesis during your second year of residence, when you can still meet with your thesis supervisor, have easy access to library resources, and enjoy the luxury of being a seminary student! If you are unable to complete your thesis during the two semesters you have registered for thesis research, you must apply for a thesis extension by completing the Thesis Extension form available on the seminary website and submitting it to the MA Director. If an extension is approved, you must register for Thesis: Extension (0 credit hours) and pay a fee equivalent to one credit hour of tuition. Financial aid does not apply to this fee. You will be assessed the thesis extension fee each semester, until you complete your thesis and successfully defend it (see 3.C.5, below). Any extension will be granted only if you demonstrate progress toward completion of your thesis. In any case, you must complete your thesis no more than two years following the end of residence.

If you have not completed your thesis following a two-year extension, your file will be assigned an "inactive" status (described in 3.D, below).

5. *The Oral Defense*

When you have completed your thesis, to the satisfaction of both your supervisor and the second reader, the MA director will convene an oral defense. You should allow your second reader time – at least two weeks – to read your completed thesis. You will also need to provide a copy of your thesis to the MA director at least one week prior to the oral defense, which the dean's office will announce publicly. It will be your responsibility, in

consultation with your thesis supervisor, to secure a date and time for the oral defense.

The defense will be open to the public; at its beginning, you will have an opportunity briefly to describe your research and the conclusions you reached. Your supervisor and the second reader will then question you on any aspects of your thesis. Finally, anyone present at the oral defense may ask questions or make comments.

At the conclusion of the oral defense, your supervisor, the second reader, and the MA director will meet to determine whether your thesis is approved and what letter grade to assign it (unless you have registered for a pass-fail grade). They *may* require you to make certain corrections or revisions. When your supervisor agrees that your thesis is in an acceptable form, you will provide the MA director with a one or two page abstract along with a “perfect” print copy and a “perfect” digital copy in .pdf format. The print copy will be bound and deposited in the AMBS library; the digital copy will be added to the Theological Research Exchange Network (you must submit a completed TREN permission form to the library).

Please note that your thesis should follow a published manual of style. You may choose one among the *Chicago Manual of Style*; Kate L. Turabian’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations; Form and style: Theses, Reports, Term Papers*, by Campbell and Vaughn; or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. You can find these in the library’s reference collection.

D. Duration of the Program

Students who enroll (as an example) for thirteen hours of credit each semester, three hours during January Interterm, and two hours during one summer term can complete their MA program in two years. Because of work, family, or other responsibilities, some students need to take a reduced course load. Others choose to extend their program over a longer period of time. However, students who have not registered for courses in four consecutive semesters must complete an application for re-admission to AMBS and file a written request with the MA director to have their files reactivated. The Curriculum Committee will act on such requests.

Students who have not completed their program requirements within five years will be subject to any changes in degree requirements published in subsequent catalogs. (Students who write a thesis should consult 3.C.4., above.)

4. Graduation

The events surrounding graduation, especially the commencement ceremony, are the easiest and most celebrative components of the seminary’s

degree programs! To enjoy them, of course, you must meet your program's requirements for graduation. The catalog contains the official description of these requirements. In addition, the registrar's office prepares a plan of study for each student. The plan of study lists your program's requirements and charts your progress in meeting them. Your adviser will have a copy of your plan of study. It is important that you and your advisor, with the registrar's help, keep the plan up to date. That way, whenever you prepare to register for the following term, you can see at a glance how many courses, which kinds of courses, required and elective, or which specific courses you have left to take before you can graduate.

According to seminary policy, you may participate in the commencement ceremonies if you fall no more than six hours short of completing your program; in that case, you will receive a *faux* diploma. However, you must have completed and passed your comprehensive examinations to do so. If you are writing a thesis, you must have completed the thesis. In all cases, you will truly graduate and receive your *true* diploma when you have completed any remaining requirements.

You will also receive the hearty congratulations and blessings of the faculty, staff, and administration of AMBS. Your graduation – not only with a degree, but also with a first-class theological education – is the goal toward which we all work together.

Sample Comprehensive Examinations

The three departments, along with the Peace Studies Committee, have provided the following sample examinations. They comprise questions that have appeared on MA exams in the past. Your own examination will be different, but these samples may aid you in preparing for it. They may also help you determine if you are in the right program or concentration! This manual refers, in paragraph 3.B.2, to instructions that will accompany your exam. Only the questions are included here, not the instructions.

MA in Christian Formation

The examination is in two parts. Answer one question from each part.

Part 1

1. The Psalms have been considered the songbook and prayerbook of the Bible. Select one from among these three: 58, 88, and 136. Please discuss the following:
 - a. How does the psalm you chose inform your view of God, the human being, and the God-human relationship?
 - b. How would you use that psalm as a ministering person? (In your response, supply setting, age group, and ministry art form.)
 - c. In light of what you know about the use of the Psalms in the history of the church, what recommendations might you make regarding the church's use of the psalms?

2. In the history of Christian spirituality, various biblical images and themes emerge in the devotional and spiritual writings of the different ages. Describe several of these biblical themes and images from a variety of writers. Be careful to set your description within the historical and ecclesiological contexts in which they emerged. In writing your essay, attempt to answer the question, *What is Christian spirituality?*

Part 2

1. Discuss your understanding of the *Congregational Discipling Vision*, including the interplay and the assumed correlation between the formation and transformation of both the faith community as well as the person growing into Christ (likeness). In your response, please:
 - a. provide a brief reference to the biblico-theological base that undergirds such an assumed correlation;
 - b. focus on two or three indicators of "spirit-fruit" (e. g., generosity, peacemaking, etc.) and consider how they would be manifest in the life of a faith community as well as in the life of a Christian disciple, and how they would interplay for the sake of corporate as well as personal growth.

2. Choose a ministry art form such as teaching or spiritual guidance and define it as essential for discipling and spiritual formation. Further, in your response please discuss the following:
 - a. how the practice of such a ministry art form actually contributes to enabling the church for worship, equipping it for community, and empowering it for mission;
 - b. discuss three or four traits of the profile of a fruitful ministering person.

3. Apply the *Congregational Discipling Vision* to a given institutional setting. In your response, please:
 - a. choose and briefly describe an age group;
 - b. identify and discuss three significant practices conducive to growth in the life of the Christian faith;
 - c. explain how you would encourage, guide, and evaluate those practices as a ministering person (for instance as a caregiver, spiritual director, or teacher for that group of people).

End of the Christian Formation examination

MA: Peace Studies

The examination is in three parts. Answer one question from each part.

Part 1

1. How have Christians understood issues of war, peace, and revolution during the centuries since Christ's time? What range of positions has emerged? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the positions you identify? Which do you hold, and why? Note historical examples of positions you identify.
2. Attached [but not in this appendix] is a recent MCC statement on peace, entitled, "A Commitment to Christ's Way of Peace." Assume that the statement is still in the process of being drafted and revised. You have been asked to comment on it, giving affirmations on points of agreement, suggested changes, and objections to the content of the statement. You are also invited to suggest additions to it. How would you respond? That is, what should Mennonite Christians be saying in a statement outlining the fundamentals of "Christ's Way of Peace?"

Part 2

1. You have been asked to design a curriculum for youth and adults focused on the church's peace and justice convictions and commitments. Please address the following questions, justifying and illustrating your responses as much as possible:
 - a. Goals – What would be the expected outcomes of the educational efforts?

- b. Content—What would be the main topics selected by you as essential (e. g., related to biblical-theological foundations, current events, challenges, etc.)?
 - c. Approach—What kinds of concrete practices should be included (e. g., praxis-oriented Bible study, communicating with legislators, advocacy on behalf of an oppressed group, developing skills for mediation, etc.) as conducive to those learnings consistent with the stated goals?
2. Imagine that you are a consultant facing a special challenge (identified by the leadership of a conference) concerning such peace and justice issues involving racism, sexism, and heterosexism, or overt violence in the surrounding community. After identifying the “challenge” (it can be one of your choosing), please address the following threefold question of how your contribution will relate concretely to the church’s life and ministry in the areas of:
 - a. Worship, both corporate and personal;
 - b. Community, in the sense of the internal dynamics of the church as a spiritual family;
 - c. Mission, in terms of presence, word, and deed in the midst of history and culture.

In a nutshell, the question is about how congregations can be guided and enabled to become living signs, symbols, and instruments of the gospel of the reign of God, with special attention to peace and justice as essential to the gospel.

Part 3

1. How does the death and resurrection of Jesus provide a foundation and mandate for Christians to be peacemakers? You should include not only the Gospels, but also Paul.
2. Discuss the themes of peace and justice in the Bible and their relationship to one another. How does the Bible define them? What is the role of God in achieving them? How does this guide our peacemaking?
3. Relate the biblical notion of God’s wrath and judgment to human actions promoting justice and peace. Who are the agents of God’s wrath? Does God’s judgment bring peace and justice? What is our role in these actions of God?

End of MAPS examination

MATS: Biblical Studies

The examination is in three parts. If you answer an Old Testament question in Part 1, you will answer a New Testament question in Part 2 (and the reverse).

Part 1: Exegetical Questions

Old Testament:

Answer one of the following questions:

1. Micah 3:1-4. Prepare a topography and translation of this passage. Furnish a brief verse by verse commentary. What insights can you contribute to understanding the passage?
2. Jeremiah 23:16-20. Prepare a translation of this passage with notes as necessary. Comment on the true and false prophets and how to know which is which.

New Testament:

1 Peter 3:8-12.

1. Translate the passage and provide translation notes (explanations for word choices, syntactical understandings, and decisions about textual cruxes as needed).
2. Discuss the genre and what difference it makes in your interpretation of the text.
3. Read the rest of the letter, in English, and discuss how this passage fits into the ethos of the larger work. What resonances do you find? What is the point of view of the author toward evil?
4. What meaning does εἰρήνη carry in v. 11?
5. How does this passage function in relation to the canon? With what threads and themes do you associate this text? What weight do you give this text? How would you assess or evaluate the text?

As you work, keep a running list of the resources you use – where did you turn first, second, etc. Part of the exercise is to evaluate your ability to find good, solid resources with confidence and ease.

Part 2: Biblical Theological Questions

Old Testament:

Answer one of the following questions:

1. Psalm 89 is a very rich psalm, drawing on ancient Near Eastern mythology. Discuss the ideology of kingship in this psalm and how it is associated with the depiction of God the Creator.
2. Did the notion of a covenant between God and Israel play a significant role in Israel's belief and ethics before the 8th century prophets? In the following order:
 - a. present your thesis;
 - b. present evidence that supports it;
 - c. answer criticisms that have been advanced against the position you take.

New Testament:

Baptism is an act and a symbol that has taken on many different meanings in the contemporary church. Compare and contrast the way baptism functions in the synoptic gospels and the way Paul discusses it. From your study, outline a 20-minute presentation for a preparatory class on a New Testament view of baptism. What are the salient points?

Part 3: Bridging Question

1. Discuss how sin and salvation as a set of correlated theological themes are treated in both testaments. Are you impressed with continuity or with differences as you observe how the various parts of the testaments deal with these linked themes? Illustrate with reference to a range of specific biblical texts.
2. What role do the so-called Servant Songs in Isaiah 40-55 play in the New Testament? Where are they quoted and to what purpose? Did the Gospel writers use these passages to depict Jesus as a suffering servant/messiah?

End of Biblical Studies examination

MATS: Church History

The examination is in two parts. Answer one question from each part.

Part 1

1. Using two periods of Christian history between 150 AD and 1500 AD, and at least two geographic regions, what do we know about the life of Christians? In your answer include some comment on the following:
 - a. How did they worship?
 - b. How did most people not in monasteries encounter Christ?
 - c. Why did women continue in a Christian faith that so often suppressed them or even treated them as not fully in the image of God?

About 70% of your answer should be devoted to the above questions, and 30% to discussing (by brief illustration) how historiography has changed and even methods of identifying and using sources help us read 'history from below'.

2. The history of Christianity can also be called the history of Christian mission, but it is an uneven story. By means of specific illustration compare and contrast the missions of the early missions to the Slavs, the 16th century Jesuit missions to Asia and South American, and 20th century American Evangelicals.
 - a. What accounted for their intense commitment, what was the nature of their vision, and what were their methods or strategies?
 - b. What have been the themes emerging from such regions of mission – the global church and its surrounding context – that representative voices have been articulating?

Part 2

1. The broad range of peace and justice issues now addressed by self-consciously Anabaptist/Mennonite ethicists and theologians was preceded by a new sense of Anabaptist and Mennonite history and its respectful reception in the broader community of scholars. Arnold Snyder noted (*Anabaptist History & Theology*, p. 388) that "the historical 'recovery' of Anabaptism was undertaken primarily by the historians of the 'Old Mennonite' conference. This had important consequences for subsequent

Mennonite thinking about peace.” Snyder goes on to illustrate the quite different use of peace terminology by Henry Krehbiehl in 1937 compared to the ‘nonresistance’ language of Guy F. Hershberger.

By means of discussing at least two different experiences of the Mennonites on social/political issues (e. g., nature of involvement in American Civil Rights, or Vietnam War protest, German Mennonites and National Socialism, Russian Mennonites and communism, etc.) test or illustrate what those “important consequences “were for a Mennonite social ethic. In doing so, refer to actual historical developments as well as how American Mennonite ethicists have grasped those experiences theoretically.

2. Instead of the immensely popular word ‘spirituality’, C. J. Dyck chose to give his recent book the title *The Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*. In a recent essay Arnold Snyder claimed that “Anabaptism emerged as a spirituality, not a dogmatic theology.” Nevertheless, Snyder went on to try to articulate a systematic Anabaptist theology by “drawing out the implications of the occasional sayings of ordinary Anabaptists,” the result being “our Collective Anabaptist Theologian” able to “Beat Luther at his own game” – that at least was the catchy critique this elicited from James Stayer. Stayer preferred to speak about the “piety” of the Anabaptist movement.

Recently in *Gospel Herald* Denny Weaver triggered a lively reader response when he argued in favor of developing a distinctive “theology” that replaces ethnicity as the real identity of modern Mennonites” (Jan 23/1996). Some readers argued in favor of stressing Mennonite theological distinctives, others urged that “we must not crave to be unique in the family of God. We can bring our distinctive issues hammered out in the pain of Mennonite history to the unifying church” (*Gospel Herald*, Feb 27/1996, p. 6).

From the perspective of the historian, discuss the strengths and perils of understanding Anabaptist theology and spirituality of the 16th century and how current writers (scholarly and popular) seek to appropriate it today. In doing so, situate your subject in the broader context of 16th century European and 20th century American piety.

End of Church History examination

MATS: Theology and Ethics

The examination is in two parts. Answer one question from each part.

Part 1: Theological Questions

1. Summarize and defend your understanding of (a) revelation and (b) scripture in relation to theological methodology. Should theological method take sources and criteria other than revelation into account? If yes, what are they and how do they relate to scripture? If not, why not?

2. You receive a letter from an old acquaintance who is not a Christian. She remembers that you are a Christian and so writes to you for some spiritual help. She herself has never made any kind of faith commitment, having grown up in a largely secular environment. She is beginning to sense that there is more to life than just the material or the secular. However, visiting a fundamentalist church for a number of months has only raised more questions. She asks you:
 - a. What does it mean to be “saved?” Saved from what? Saved for what?
 - b. How can a person (Jesus Christ) who lived nearly 2,000 years ago do me any good today?
 - c. How does one become a Christian? What does it mean? How does the church enter into becoming and being a Christian?

In responding to the question you choose,

- Identify the most relevant biblical themes and texts that undergird your understanding.
- Develop your perspective on the theological themes involved.
- Interact with two theologians who have addressed this issue. “Interact” here means to state briefly their perspectives, how they differ with or are similar to each other, and how you would assess their understanding from your own perspective.

Part 2: Ethical Questions

1. You are corresponding with a conservative “evangelical” friend who feels that evangelism and missions are central to the work of the church, and who worries that Christians who focus on peace and justice issues are “confusing the proclamation of the *gospel* with social betterment. What is essential is personal faith in Jesus Christ. Focusing on peace and justice issues is a distraction; it is making central what is, at best, peripheral.” Write a letter of response addressing this concern.
2. Mr. X is a senior officer of a major U. S. corporation that supplies weaponry to the Defense Department, in addition to manufacturing a large line of consumer products. He is also a dedicated member of a mainline Protestant denomination, one of the largest contributors in his local church, and a man who, for 30 years, has served on boards and commissions of his denomination.

Not long ago, Mr. X had three memorable telephone calls. The first was from a general in Washington who urged him to hurry the development of a device that his company was scheduled to produce. It is a nasty weapon. The second call was from a friend in the national headquarters of his church, warning him that his denomination was looking askance at his company and might well make a public issue of the company’s military production. The third was from his pastor who, out of personal friendship of long standing, wanted to tip him off that some members of his local church had heard of the possible action by the

national church and might decide to make the case an issue in the local church as well. Mr. X. describes his reaction these words:

“I have to confess that, in my entire business career, I have never before been faced with a moral problem of this kind. To recommend to my company that we cut out, or even cut down, military production would be, I think, an irresponsible and an unpatriotic act. Right or wrong, our country is fighting a war and our government says it needs our help. Beyond that, if we cancel our defense contracts, thousands of local people will lose their jobs, including some in my own church. And if I tell our board of directors that we ought to turn out backs on a substantial fraction of our sales and profits, I, too, may be unemployed, with all that can mean for me and my family.”

Describe the nature of the moral dilemmas Mr. X faces in this case? I. e., what are the various moral obligations that are in conflict with each other?

As the pastor of Mr. X, what moral guidance would you give and why? Give biblical and theological rationales for your response.

End of Theology & Ethics examination

The MA Thesis

The nature of a thesis will depend to some extent on its subject. Consider five sample thesis topics (not necessarily *titles*), which I have invented:

- (a) "The Influence of Pietism on Lutherans and Mennonites in southern Russia, 1824-1880."
- (b) "The Interpretation of Isaiah in Micah 4:1 - 5:14."
- (c) "Tragedy and Realism in the 'Non-Pacifism' of Barth, Niebuhr, and Milbank."
- (d) "A Christian Doctrine of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom."
- (e) "The Church's Liturgy as Christian Formation."

These represent different *kinds* of theses. Obviously, a student in the Church History concentration would be more likely to write thesis (a), one in the Biblical Studies concentration to write (b), one in the Peace Studies program to write (c), and so forth. But I should like to point to some differences that seem more substantial.

Theses (a) - (c) are *critical* and interpretive in nature: they involve the interpretation of a circumscribed body of primary texts, or sources: the sermons of Johannes Bonekemper and Eduard Wüst, for example, and other 19th century sources, in (a); the texts of Micah and Isaiah, and other Hebrew and Greek texts, in (b); the relevant writings of Barth, Niebuhr, and Milbank in (c). Further, each of these theses would draw on scholarly studies of the sources and the people or phenomena relevant to their topics: studies of Bonekemper and Wüst, for example, in (a); commentaries on Isaiah and Micah, for example, in (b); and scholarly discussion of Barth, Niebuhr, and Milbank, in (c).

By contrast, theses (d) and (e) are *constructive* in nature: they propose particular ways of understanding certain issues, problems, or practices. To be sure, a constructive thesis will also involve analysis and interpretation. For example, (d) might analyze (and hence interpret) the medieval work of Luis de Molina and the contemporary work of Alvin Plantinga on its subject, while (e) might use Catherine Pickstock's philosophical discussion of liturgy as a framework for considering spirituality and education in the faith. However, the thesis would not have as its principal aim to present a critical assessment of the thought of de Molina and Plantinga, or of Pickstock. It would need to some critical assessment as well, but specifically in order to consider, perhaps, how their work has shaped the way we currently conceive (or misconceive) an issue, as in (d); or how it might constructively *reshape* the way we look at an issue or a set of practices, as in (e). In either case, the point of the thesis would be to propose how *we* should think more constructively about a theological and philosophical problem, or how the church might reform its liturgical understandings and practices (or its formational ones).

Granting all of that, it should be evident that theses (a) – (e) would each have both critical and constructive dimensions. Each would involve a *critical investigation* or *inquiry* into some subject or combination of subjects. And each would propose particular ways, and perhaps new or better ways, that we should understand its subject(s); each would be *constructive* in that sense. Further, a thesis in any program or concentration may be (more or less) critical or constructive in nature. For example, a thesis in church history may make a *constructive* proposal about that discipline using recent arguments about historiography; one in Christian formation may subject Christian education curricula to feminist *critique*; one in biblical studies may make a *constructive* proposal about Old Testament theology by way of *criticizing* current models from a Mennonite theological perspective, and so on.

From these reflections you may draw three inferences:

1. *Every thesis makes an argument.* In fact, “argument” is one synonym of “thesis.” To argue (at least in seminary!) simply means giving reasons for your views or claims. Even a historically descriptive thesis such as (a), above, would argue at least that pietism did influence both Lutherans and Mennonites; likely, it would also argue *how* it influenced both of them, and why it makes good sense to consider Lutherans and Mennonites together. It may also argue that pietism’s influence was positive (or negative). In any event, a thesis involves more than finding out about something. It certainly involves that! Indeed, the greater part of your thesis may well consist of what you found out in your research. But a thesis also involves an argument – a *thesis*. Your *thesis petition* will need to include a statement, in one or two sentences, of the argument you intend to make. (Before writing your thesis, you may want to read *A Rulebook for Arguments*, by Anthony Weston [Indianapolis: Avatar, 1987]. You can find it in our library [168.W53].)
2. *An argument, whether it is primarily critical or constructive, depends on criteria.* In your *thesis prospectus*, you will need to describe for the Curriculum Committee the criteria you will employ and how you will employ them. These will guide your thesis research, so it is important that you be clear about them. In a thesis like (d) or (e), for example, you may want to employ Mennonite or Methodist, or feminist or anti-racist, convictions as criteria for your constructive argument. Of course, you may discover in your research that your initial hypothesis (the argument you *thought* you would be making) was mistaken! This would be far from unusual. Though it may disappoint you, it may actually enhance the quality of your thesis.
3. *You should be clear about the nature of your thesis, whether it is primarily critical or constructive.* Or, you should be clear about the

critical and constructive components of your thesis. You may think of it this way: "What kinds of claims will I be making in my thesis, and how will I go about supporting those claims?" The claims you make in a constructive argument will depend on kinds of criteria different from those you make in a critical argument. In thesis (c), above, for example, the criteria you would use in supporting the claim that Barth, Niebuhr, and Milbank share conceptions of tragedy and realism in their rejection of pacifism, on one hand, would differ in kind from those you would employ in arguing, on the other hand, that (as we shall suppose!) Christian pacifism can adequately embrace both tragedy and realism.

If you are hoping to write a thesis, please do not let the examples in this appendix limit your imagination. Instead, consider this counsel:

- ◆ Propose a thesis topic that you find both deeply interesting and significant. Writing a thesis is hard work. If you do not find its topic compelling and significant, you probably won't do good work.
- ◆ Propose a thesis topic that you find both deeply interesting and significant, even if it falls between (or outside of) disciplinary and departmental boundaries. Your thesis supervisor and second reader may come from different departments. You may request a second reader from outside AMBS.
- ◆ If you simply want to study a subject that seminary courses do not cover, or to study it in greater depth, enroll in an Independent Study (or two) instead of proposing a thesis.
- ◆ Propose research that you will be competent to conduct. Don't propose a thesis on Cappadocian spirituality, regardless how intriguing you find the subject, if you cannot read Greek!
- ◆ Consider the research interests of seminary faculty and the areas in which they have expertise. While this bit of counsel *may* stand in tension with the first two, above, it remains worthy of your consideration.



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