



AMBS

Anabaptist Mennonite
Biblical Seminary

MA STUDENT MANUAL

Rooted in the Word, Growing in Christ

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 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 the Christian Formation program. This is a ministry program; that is, it seeks to prepare students in particular dimensions, forms, and contexts of the church's ministries. The *Christian Formation* program encompasses two different concentrations: Christian Spirituality and Public Ministries (Teaching and Worship.) Course requirements in 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 two more specific concentrations, in partnership with other institutions: Conflict Transformation (Goshen College) and International Development Administration (Andrews University).

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 dean'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 will be happy to speak with any seminary students contemplating further graduate work leading to the Ph.D. or Th.D. degree.

Consideration of this and other vocational objectives, along with opportunities that may be open to MA graduates, will take place in the MA Symposium, 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.

The different MA programs also share certain requirements. For example, all of them require 60 hours of course credit, comprehensive examinations, a project, or a thesis, and participation in a beginning course (Leadership Education in Anabaptist Perspective for MACF students; MA Symposium for MAPS and MATS students).

A. MA Symposium

Students entering the MAPS and MATS programs participate in the MA Symposium. Students entering the MACF program will participate in the

LEAP course (see the seminary catalog for details). The MA Symposium includes online work that students complete before arriving on campus, an intensive week on campus before the beginning of fall classes, and weekly meetings during the first six weeks of the semester. The symposium introduces beginning students to community life and theological study at AMBS. During the intensive week, from noon Monday to noon Saturday, students are involved in plenary sessions, discussions, learning experiences, and community events. MAPS and MATS students receive an orientation to the library and to computer resources and they will read and discuss with the symposium leader(s) assigned material on critical thinking and writing well. Discussions around thinking theologically begin in the intensive week and continue into the semester. Students will also have opportunity to reflect together on their sense of vocation and academic identity.

A student who successfully completes the MA Symposium and submits a candidacy paper (explained in the MA Symposium syllabus) 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 approved as a candidate for the degree.

B. Comprehensive Examinations or Interview

Students in the MAPS program participate in a six-hour Integrative Seminar in their final year of study. The seminar includes a supervised practicum. In the second semester of the seminar, students will prepare a paper that will serve as the basis for a comprehensive interview with the student's advisor, the leader of the Integrative Seminar, or the director of the peace and justice studies. See the catalog for further details.

Students in the MATS program write comprehensive examinations during the final semester of their program. These examinations assess a student's preparation to graduate with the MA degree in an area of biblical studies, theology and ethics, or church history. The examinations may draw from all the curricular areas of a specific MATS 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; you will find one in your registration packet. 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.

MACF

Students in the MACF program will complete a final project that 1) is approved by the student's adviser and the MA director at the beginning of the student's second year of study (or equivalent); 2) utilizes knowledge gained from courses required in the degree program and other readings designated by the Church and Ministry department; 3) develops a ministry program appropriate to the student's preparation that could be implemented in a

particular ministry setting; 4) provides commentary on the biblical, theological, and historical assumptions that undergird the program's structure and content; 5) provides a progress report on the program's implementation; and 6) provides the student's assessment of what she or he has learned about leadership through the program's development process. The written project report will be presented to the student's adviser and one other faculty member in an oral interview

C. The Thesis Option

Most MA students will take comprehensive examinations. Some 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 credit, 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. In addition, you must have a Grade Point Average of 3.5 or better to have your petition considered.

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 “Forms” page 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 10 (or the following Monday), unless you make other arrangements approved by the MA director.*

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 the MA director approves your thesis petition, the dean 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:

1. Research Question: Your question must be clearly stated and well justified. What question are you asking and seeking to answer in this thesis? Why is it a question worth answering? Why should we care what the answer is?
2. Research Design: How do you propose to go about answering the question that your thesis asks? What steps will you take and in what order?
3. Literature Review: Not only, “What have reputable scholars written on the subject of your thesis?” but what is the state of the question?
5. Methods: What methods will you use to assess your conclusions and test your hypotheses?
6. Data: What kinds of data will you use? How will you collect it? What is your measurement strategy?

See also *Appendix 2*, below.

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! However, if you are unable to complete your thesis during the two semesters when you have registered for thesis research, you may arrange with the MA director and your thesis supervisor for a one-semester extension without penalty. After that, you will be assessed a continuation fee each semester, equivalent to the fee for one hour of course credit, until you complete your thesis and successfully defend it (see 3.C.5, below). A Thesis Extension form, available on the seminary website, must be completed and approved. Any extension will be granted only if, in the judgment of your thesis supervisor, 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. Students who have enrolled in MA Thesis Research are not eligible for a leave of absence.

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).

Note: If unanticipated circumstances prevent you from completing your thesis, you may appeal to have your research credited as two three-hour independent studies. You should appeal first to your thesis supervisor, who may recommend that you take this course of action. The appeal, initiated by you or by your thesis supervisor, would require approval of the MA director and the dean. Should they approve your appeal, you would write comprehensive examinations designed by your thesis supervisor and second reader.

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 MA director 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 evaluate your thesis and your performance in the defense. They will decide whether to award your thesis "Pass," or perhaps "Pass with Distinction." 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, six hours during January Interterms, and two hours during one June 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 file a written request with the MA director to have their files reactivated. The Curriculum Committee will act on such requests following payment of a \$50 reactivation fee.

Students who have not completed their program requirements within five years, either since they first enrolled or since their files were reactivated, will also 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.

MATS: Biblical Studies

Instructions: The examination is divided into two parts, Old Testament and New Testament. Each part includes (a) two exegesis questions, (b) two theology questions, and (c) a “bridging” question. You must choose **one** of the exegesis questions in **either** the Old Testament **or** the New Testament part of the examination. You must answer **one** of the theology questions. If you wrote on an Old Testament exegesis question, you must write on a New Testament theology question; conversely, if you wrote on a New Testament exegesis question, you must write on an Old Testament Theology question. You may choose a bridging question from **either** the Old Testament **or** the New Testament part of the examination.

Please devote **eight** (8) hours to your exegesis essay and **four** (4) hours each to your theology essay and your bridging essay.

You may use any print or digital resources, but you must note any sources you depend on in your essays. The notation may be informal, e. g., (Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*).

I. Comprehensive Examination: Old Testament

A. **Exegesis.** Answer one of the following questions (or follow one of the following sets of instructions).

1. Zechariah 1:12-17 is set within Zechariah's "night visions." Write an exegetical essay on this text that takes account of (a) its setting within the larger visionary structure; (b) its use – re-reading or exegesis – of earlier prophetic texts; (c) its historical setting.

2. Micah 7:1-12.

- a. Translate the passage and note any prominent or problematic grammatical/syntactic features.
- b. Is this a single textual unit? I. e., does it include more than one unit? Give reasons for your decision on the matter. You may read the entire chapter in English translation.
- c. Offer your summary interpretation.

B. Theology. Answer one of the following questions.

1. Genesis 1 narrates the creation of heaven and earth. Other texts in the Old Testament describe creation somewhat differently. Discuss the various texts, their differences, and how all of this bears on the matter of the Old Testament's creation theology.

2. In his recent *Theology of the Old Testament*, Walter Brueggemann describes God as sometimes arbitrarily, explosively, uncontrollably angry and violent. Why would Brueggemann describe God in this way? Is he right? Is what the Old Testament says about God true?

II. Comprehensive Examination: New Testament

A. Exegesis: Answer one of the following questions (or follow one of the following sets of instructions).

1. Luke 22:31-34
 - A. Translate the passage and provide translations notes (explanations for word choices, syntactical understandings and decisions about textual cruxes as needed). Especially note the switch from second person plural in verse 31 to second person singular in verse 32.
 - B. Contour the text, as least provisionally, and discuss the major literary features. Discuss the genre and what difference it makes in your interpretation of the text.
 - C. Read Luke's passion narrative and discuss how this passage fits into the ethos of the larger literary context. What connections are there between this passage and the larger context?
 - D. How does this passage function in relation to the canon? In particular, what does it have to contribute toward a biblical

understanding of human nature? With what other themes and threads do you associate this text? What weight do you give it?

2. Jude 24-25

- A. Explain the structure of this passage.
- B. Indicate its genre (with bibliography of sources you have used or might use) and describe briefly the role of this passage in its literary context.
- C. Provide brief historical and social background (and bibliography of potential sources).
- D. What other passages in the canon might it be related to? (What tools would you use to find out?)
- E. What implications does your understanding have for the use of this passage in the contemporary church?

B. **Theology.** Answer one of the following questions.

1. 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?

2. Abraham is not only a Hebrew Bible figure but appears in various literary contexts in the New Testament – all four gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Hebrews, James and 1 Peter. Choose representative examples and formulate a thesis about how the use of Abraham as a literary figure reflects the theological investments of the New Testament authors.

III. *Bridging the Testaments:* Answer 1 of the following questions:

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. In both Testaments, Old and New, the notion of *covenant* bears significant freight. Point to elements of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, and within one or both,

on the matter of covenant. Is there, in your judgment, a *biblical* covenant theology?

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.

In a recent *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.

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 do 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.

Important Dates, 2015-16

- July 22** **Early Registration Deadline**
If you plan to take comprehensive examinations in the first (fall) semester, you should register your intention during these dates (if you have not done so previously).
- August 15-20** **LEAP & MA Symposium on Campus**
If you are beginning your MAPS or MATS program, you should be registered for the symposium.
- October 11 – November 4** **Advising and Course Selection**
Meet with your advisor to select courses for January and spring semester. If you will be taking comprehensive examinations in the second semester, you should register your intention during these dates.
- November 15** **Comprehensive Examination Composers**
By this date, you should know the names of faculty composing comprehensive examinations (see paragraph 3.b.1).
- January 31** **Second Semester Begins**
If you will be taking comprehensive examinations in the second semester, you *must* register your intention by this date (if you have not done so previously).
- Feb 27 - March 8** **MA Comprehensive Examinations**
See section 3.B., above, for more information.
- March 7-31** **Advising and Course Selection**
If you will be taking comprehensive examinations in the first semester of next year, you should register your intention during these dates.
- May 10** **Thesis Petition**
If you plan to write a thesis, your *thesis petition* is due in the MA director's office by this date (see paragraph 3.C.2). Please read all of section 3.C., and *Appendix 2*, before preparing your petition.
- May 20** **Commencement**
This is the academic goal you are working to achieve.

August 15

Thesis Prospectus

If your petition to write a thesis has been approved, your *thesis prospectus* will be due in the MA director's office by this date (see paragraph 3.C.3). Please read, or read again, all of section 3.C., and *Appendix 2*, before preparing your petition.



Anabaptist Mennonite
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