McMaster Divinity College
Winter Semester, 2022

Preaching in the Post-Christendom Era

MS 3XC3 (Professional Degree)   Dr. Michael Knowles
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Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:50 p.m.
Location: TBA

Course Statement

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives" (Jean-François Lyotard). Preaching Christ to hearers who are instinctively dismissive of universal truth claims yet open to spiritual experience is no small challenge. Nonetheless, after discussing post-Christendom culture as an extension of the postmodern ethos and assessing recent homiletical responses, we will endeavour to construct a workable model for contemporary proclamation that emphasizes narrative, community, Christology, and spirituality.
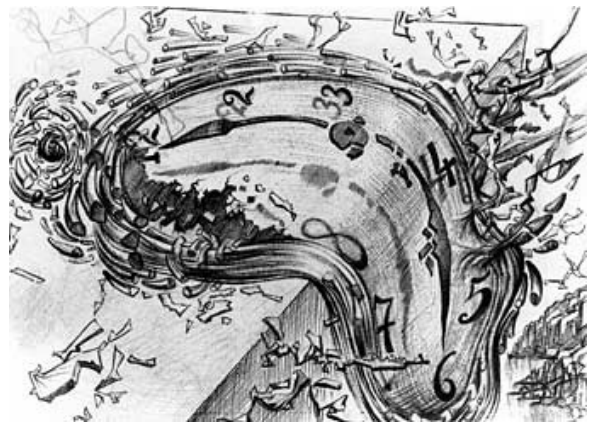
Specializations   Pastoral Studies   Church & Culture

Course Objectives

Knowing:
- ▸ To gain a basic familiarity with the characteristics of modernism, postmodernism, post-Christendom culture, and related developments.
- ▸ To assess the relevance of these concepts for proclamation of the Christian gospel.
- ▸ To explore models of communication appropriate to each of the foregoing perspectives.

Being:
- ▸ To explore and experience the implications of modernist and postmodern models of personal, social, and corporate identity.
- ▸ To help students clarify the relationship between their own spirituality identity and contemporary cultural contexts.
- ▸ To develop and function corporately as a community of learning.

Doing:
- ▸ To gain proficiency, as appropriate, in Scriptural exegesis for postmodern and subsequent cultural circumstances.
- ▸ To develop skills in the presentation and delivery of sermons.

Lecture Outline and Schedule

Offered in a modified hybrid format, this course will alternate between online and in person meetings. When meeting in person, students are required to maintain social distancing and observe appropriate health protocols, for the safety of all members of the community.

January 13 Module One (in person)
"What is Truth?" Preaching in a Word-Weary World
READING: Martel, *The Life of Pi*

January 20 Module Two (in person)
Where Are We? Part I: Lost in the Cosmos
READING: Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*
DUE: "The After-Life of Pi" (Sermon)

January 27 Module Three (online module + synchronous meeting)
Where Are We? Part II: Preaching, Perspective, and the Loss of Authority
READING: Craddock, *As One Without Authority*

February 3 Module Four (online module + in person meeting)
Who Are We? Part I: Dust in the Wind
READING: Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*
DUE: "Reviewing the Options" (book review and class presentation)

February 10   Module Five (online module + synchronous meeting)
Who Are We? Part II: Preaching to a Community "In Christ"

February 17   Module Six (in person)
What's Wrong and What's the Remedy?
Part I: Preaching Our Way out of Trouble
READING: Coupland, *Life After God*

February 24   Module Seven (online module + synchronous meeting)
What's Wrong and What's the Remedy?
Part II: Learning to Let God
READING: Solomon Avotri, *Return to Babel*, 17–25

March 3   Hybrid/Reading Week (no class scheduled)

March 10   Module Eight (in person)
"You Will Be My Witnesses": Preaching as Testimony
DUE: Paul for the End of the Ages

March 17   Module Nine (online module + synchronous meeting)
Preaching in a Postmodern Mood: A Crash Course in Sermon Preparation
READING: Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony"

March 24   Module Ten (in person)
Student Sermons I

March 31   Module Eleven (online module + synchronous meeting)
After Post-Postmodernity: What?

April 7   Module Twelve (in person)
Student Sermons II

April 8   Last day of classes; last day to submit overdue assignments

Course Requirements

Textbooks

Yann Martel. *Life of Pi: A Novel*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002.

J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995.

All required textbooks are available from the McMaster Divinity College book service, READ On Books, located in the Hurlburt Family Bookstore in Cullen Hall. For advance purchase, orders can be placed by phone (416.620.2934), text (416.668.3434), or email (books@readon.ca), with payment by e-transfer, credit card, or cheque; shipping is free for students. Other retailers may also carry these texts.

READ On Bookstore	E-mail: books@readon.ca
5 International Blvd	http://www.readon.ca
Etobicoke, ON	Tel: 416.620.2934
M9W 6H3	FAX: 416.622.2308

Supplementary resources available at Mills Memorial Library

Douglas Coupland. *Life After God*. New York: Pocket, 1994.

Fred B. Craddock. *As One Without Authority*. Rev. ed. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001.

Paul Ricoeur. "The Hermeneutics of Testimony." Tr. David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan. In *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980. Pp. 119–54.

Walker Percy. *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983.

The course bibliography ("Post-Christendom; Post-Modernity; Post-Secularism") is available on the Avenue to Learn course page

In addition of the virtual and print collections of McMaster Mills Library, all registered students have access to the online Digital Theological Library collection: https://libguides.thedtl.org/home. Please keep the password that you have been assigned confidential.

Assignments

Written assignments are due at 2:00 p.m. on the due date, and are to be submitted via the Avenue to Learn course website. In order to avoid late penalties, students are responsible for ensuring that assignments have been successfully uploaded.

In completing course assignments, students are expected to identify and emphasize themes relevant to their chosen area of specialization, whether Church & Culture or Pastoral Studies.

1. CLASS PARTICIPATION

Regular and timely participation in all virtual and in-person class sessions, including peer evaluation of sermons presented in class. Auditors are requested to complete the course readings and are required to complete the final assignment ("Preaching to Post-Christendom").

2. READING

a. Completion of all assigned reading. Written assignments should give evidence of course and background reading commensurate with programme standards:
MDiv/MTS   3,000 pages
DPT   4,000 pages
PhD   8,000 pages

3. THE AFTER-LIFE OF PI (all programmes)   Due: January 20

According to the "Author's Note," Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* was inspired by the claim of an accidental acquaintance: "I have a story that will make you believe in God." In a style of your own choosing and in dialogue with the content and outlook of *Life of Pi*, compose an original sermon that will make its hearers believe in God.

Length (all programmes): 1,500 words   15%

4. REVIEWING THE OPTIONS (all programmes)   Due: February 3

The purpose of this assignment is to help students gain familiarity with recent literature on the topic of preaching in a postmodern and/or post-Christendom context. Selecting from the Book Review Bibliography, students have the option of reviewing a single longer work (List I: Books for Single Review) or presenting a review and comparison of two shorter works (List II: Books for Review and Comparison). Inclusion on the bibliography does not imply endorsement of a particular work: reviews are expected to assess contributions and shortcomings alike. Students may propose an alternative selection, subject to the approval of the instructor (minimum length of 250 pages, at an appropriate level of academic discourse, provided that a review of the proposed work has not been submitted for credit in another course). A sign-up sheet will be made available on the A2L course page.

Depending on the student's area of specialization (Church & Culture or Pastoral Studies), the review will assess
    a) the proposed analysis of contemporary cultural developments;
    b) the book's engagement with and response to specific aspects of a postmodern and/or post-Christendom worldview from the perspective of Christian faith;
    c) the theological, cultural, and pastoral appropriateness of any proposed homiletical, pedagogical, or other leadership strategies.

Essays for Research Degree programmes will be distinguished by (and graded in relation to) their interaction with contemporary developments in postmodern philosophy and homiletical theory.

Length:	MDiv/MTS	2,000 words	25%
	DPT	2,500 words	30%
	MA/PhD	4,000 words	30%

In addition to the written assignment, students will present an account of their chosen work(s) to the other members of the class (online; 7–10 minutes in length, depending on course enrolment). After summarizing content and argument, explain how this book or books can help your fellow students to preach more faithfully or wisely in a postmodern, post-Christendom setting.

5. PAUL FOR THE END OF THE AGES (Basic Degree Programmes only)   Due: March 10

Reflecting on the biblical account of Israel in the wilderness, Paul observes that "These things were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Assuming a similar perspective, compose a brief thematic commentary on either Ephesians, Philippians, of Colossians, interacting where appropriate with other contemporary commentators or homileticians and interpreting the letter of your choice in such a way as to address specifically postmodern, post-secular, and/or post-Christian concerns. In conclusion, provide a one or two page outline of a sermon series that is based on your commentary and suitable for presentation in the context of your home church or field education setting. Do not include the proposed sermons. Essays must identify and interact with the student's area of programme specialization (Church & Culture or Pastoral Studies).

Length: MDiv/MTS   2,500 words   40%

6. POST-CHRISTENDOM CHURCH; POST-CHRISTENDOM SCHOLARSHIP (MA/DPT/PhD Programmes only)   Due: March 10

The purpose of this assignment (which is in two parts) is to facilitate reflection on the moral, pastoral, and intellectual implications of ministry and scholarship in the context of post-postmodern, post-Christendom culture. In Part One, making use of key resources from the course bibliography (especially section 1 "Theory and Concept"), explain and discuss the relevance of cultural definitions such as postmodernism, metamodernism, post-Christendom, and post-secularism for Christian identity and/or theology in general. In Part Two, discuss the significance of these concepts for confessionally-oriented scholarship and/or pastoral ministry. MA, PhD, and DPT students will focus on issues of relevance to their respective programmes of research.

Length: DPT   3,500 words   45%
          MA/PhD   6,000 words   45%

7. PREACHING TO POST-CHRISTENDOM (all programmes)   Due: March 24, April 7

Compose and present an original sermon that addresses the concerns of post-postmodernism and Christian identity within a post-Christendom culture. Although

scheduling requirements are such that sermons cannot exceed the assigned length, creativity—in particular the use of contemporary literature and film—is encouraged. Sermons will be presented in class for peer evaluation.

Length: MDiv/MTS   15 minutes maximum   20%
            DPT   15 minutes maximum   10%
            MA/PhD   15 minutes maximum   10%

Grading Summary		Length	Percentage	Due
MDiv/MTS				
After-Life of Pi		1,500 words	15%	January 20
Reviewing the Options	Book Review	2,000 words	25%	February 3
	Presentation	7–10 minutes		
Paul for the End of the Ages		2,500 words	40%	March 10
Preaching to Post-Christendom		15 minutes	20%	March 24, April 7
DPT				
After-Life of Pi		1,500 words	15%	January 20
Reviewing the Options	Book Review	2,500 words	30%	February 3
	Presentation	7–10 minutes		
Post-Christendom Church; Post-Christendom Scholarship		3,500 words	45%	March 10
Preaching to Post-Christendom		15 minutes	10%	March 24, April 7
MA/PhD				
After-Life of Pi		1,500 words	15%	January 20
Reviewing the Options	Book Review	4,000 words	30%	February 3
	Presentation	7–10 minutes		

Post-Christendom Church; Post-Christendom Scholarship	6,000 words	45%	March 10
Preaching to Post-Christendom	15 minutes	10%	March 24, April 7

D. Style and Documentation

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses (https://mcmasterdivinity.ca resources-forms/mdc-style-guide). Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

To assist with prose composition, students are encouraged to make use of grammarly.com, which is funded by the university, along with the Writing Support Services provided by the McMaster University Student Success Centre (http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/ students/academic-skills/writing-support-services.html). See also "CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS," below.

Research assignments for professional degree students will interact with a minimum of six scholarly articles and monographs; assignments submitted for credit in the MA, DPT, or PhD programmes are expected to cite as many secondary sources as necessary to provide a comprehensive account of contemporary discussion on the topic in question.

E. Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity

College Statement on Academic Honesty: http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations

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F. Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and NIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. Inclusive language is to be used in all MDC assignments.

G. Cell Phone/Computer Policy

Students are to refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. If you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom. The same policy applies to sound schemes generated by computers or other electronic systems.

H. Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due at 2:00 p.m. on the due date, after which they will be considered late and penalized accordingly. The penalty for late submission of assignments is 1% per calendar day (without limit). The final date for submission of late work is April 8, after which assignments cannot be accepted for grading or credit.

Disclaimer:
This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class. Notwithstanding the publication of draft syllabi, provisions indicated in the syllabus posted on the Avenue to Learn course page shall be in force.

Illustration: Salvador Dalí, Soft Watch Exploding, 1954.
                Ink and pencil on paper, 5½ × 7½ in. (14 x 19.1 cm).
                Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Book Review Bibliography
List I: Books for Single Review

Davis, John Jefferson. *Practicing Ministry in the Presence of God: Theological Reflections on Ministry and the Christian Life*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015. [320 pp.]
                                                                BV 4011.3 .D39 2015

Eswine, Zack. *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. [288 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .E89 2008

Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006. [333 pp.]   BR 115 .P74 F76 2006

Groothuis, Douglas R. *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000. [303 pp.]   BT 50 .G66 2000

Kelly, Stewart E. *Understanding Postmodernism: A Christian Perspective*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017 [282 pp.]   BR 115 .P74 K45 2017

Kysar, Robert, and Joseph Webb. *Preaching to Postmoderns: New Perspectives for Proclaiming the Message*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006. [239 pp.]
                                                                BV 4211.3 .K97 2006

Long, Jimmy. *Emerging Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generations*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004. [247 pp.]   BV 4446 .L66 2004

Lose, David J. *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. [264 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .L67 2003

Murray, Stuart. *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange World*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004. [343 pp.]   BR 481 .M87 2004

Reed, Randall, and G. Michael Zbaraschuk, eds. *The Emerging Church, Millennials, and Religion.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018. [306 pp.]   BV 601.9 .E64 2018 v.1

Stone, Bryan P. *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness.* Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007. [335 pp.]   BV 3790 .S85 2007

Tyra, Gary. *A Missional Orthodoxy: Theology and Ministry in a Post-Christian Context.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013. [393 pp.]   BT 28 .T97 2013

Vicker, Douglas. *The Fracture of Faith: Recovering Belief of the Gospel in a Postmodern World*. Fearn: Mentor, 2000. [238 pp.]   BT 771.2 .V53 2000

Watkins, Eric Brian. *The Drama of Preaching: Participating with God in the History of Redemption.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. [255 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .W38 2017

Wells, David F. *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. [339 pp.]   BR 115 .P74 W45 2005

List II: Shorter Works for Review and Comparison (select two)

Altrock, Chris. *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age.* St. Louis: Chalice, 2004. [160 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .A47 2004

Brueggemann, Walter. *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. [159 pp.]   BV 4211.2 .B745 1997

Clarke, Erskine, ed. *Exilic Preaching: Testimony for Christian Exiles in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. [137 pp.]
BV 4211.2 .E95 1998

Johnston, Graham. *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. [189 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .J64 2001

Lose, David J. *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. [112 pp.]   BV 4211.3 .L67 2014

Penner, Myron B., and Hunter Barnes. *A New Kind of Conversation: Blogging Toward a Postmodern Faith*. Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007. [208 pp.]
BR 115 .P74 N49 2007

Smith, James K. A. *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006. [156 pp.]   BR 115 .P74S66 2006

Tomlinson, Dave. *The Post Evangelical.* El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS/Zondervan, 2003. [146 pp.]   BR 115 .P74 T66 2003

Willimon, William H. *Exilic Preaching: Testimony for Christian Exiles in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*. Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998. [137 pp.]   BV 4211.2 .E95 1998

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

Date: Start time: End time:

Preacher: Evaluator:

Theme, focus, or text:

Thesis: The main point this sermon makes is...

Purpose: As a result of this sermon, the hearers should...

Structure: What is the basic outline of this sermon? (List points on reverse side)

Was the sermon clearly structured or developed (beginning, middle, end)? Easy to follow?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   __

Biblical exegesis/theological analysis: How clearly did the sermon explain the text/theme?

3   6   9   12   15   18   21   24   27   30   __

Culture and Audience: How clearly did the sermon relate to contemporary culture/the immediate audience?

3   6   9   12   15   18   21   24   27   30   __

The Speaker: How effectively did the speaker use voice and body movements?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   __

Communicative strategies: How effective were the illustrations in relation to the text/theme?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   __

Summary: How effective was the sermon in accomplishing its intended purpose?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   __

Additional comments and observations:

TOTAL   __

100

CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Grading of written materials will be based on the following general criteria

Grade Range	Content		Argument		Presentation	
90–100 A+ 85–89 A 80–84 A–	Mastery of subject matter; creativity and individualized integration of insights and their relationships; exceeds required elements		Clear, logical structure; with comprehensive introduction, persuasive argumentation, and innovative conclusions		Detailed adherence to relevant style for formatting of text, notes, and bibliography; no errors of grammar or syntax; elegant presentation	
77–79 B+ 73–76 B 70–72 B–	Above-average grasp of principles and concepts, and their inter-relationship; completion of all required elements		Coherent structure and consistent argumentation; well-stated introduction and conclusion		General adherence to relevant style and format; few errors of grammar or syntax	
67–69 C+ 63–66 C 60–62 C–	Adequate understanding of theoretical foundations; minimal completion of required elements		Rudimentary structure; minimal introductory and concluding statements		Significant errors of grammar, syntax, or style	
57–59 D+ 53–56 D 50–52 D–	Low level of comprehension; required elements incomplete or missing		Lack of coherence or structure in argumentation; no introduction or conclusion		Abundant grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic errors	
0–49% F	Inability to grasp basic concepts; required elements missing		Incomprehensible or illogical structure and argumentation		Failure to follow stylistic guidelines; incomprehensible syntax	
Comments						

Basic Guidelines for Composing a Book Review

1. *Publication Data*
   a. Provide essential bibliographical data, in the proper format.

2. *Description*   "what?"
   a. Who is the author, and what is his/her expertise or qualification for writing?
   b. What main points does the author make? Is there a key passage or statement?
   c. How does each part relate to what precedes and follows?
   d. For what audience is this argument/discussion intended?

   SUMMARIZE

3. *Evaluation*   "so what?"
   a. Is the author's thesis cogent and convincing?
   b. Are there unstated assumptions or gaps in logic? Does the author offer novel insights and perspectives? An innovative synthesis of current knowledge?
   c. Who are the author's main discussion partners? Who does the author cite for support, or argue against, and why?

   ASSESS

4. *Application*   "now what?"
   a. How do the author's insights apply to your own field of endeavour or research?
   b. What are the implications of this study for the life and ministry of the church?
   c. To whom would you recommend this book (or not)?

   ENGAGE