

TH 3XC3: Theology for the Contemporary Church (CC/CT/CW/PS)

**McMaster Divinity College
Winter 2018
Campus (6 weeks) and Hybrid (6 weeks)
Mon 10:30–12:20**

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and by appointment
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I. Description:

This course discusses significant issues related to the contemporary Church and Christian life from a theological perspective. It explores the theological issues and implications of the current *context* and *approaches* to Christian ministry and discipleship and considers ways that theological reflection can contribute to these current approaches. The book of Revelation encourages Christians to “hear what the Spirit” is saying to the churches. This course endeavors to discern the work and direction of the Spirit through contemporary approaches to the Christian life and ministry. Note: This class weekly alternates traditional class room and online learning—see course outline for campus and online learning dates.

II. Course Objectives:

A. Knowing:

1. Know key movements in contemporary Christian ministry and life.
2. Know key books that are shaping contemporary Christian ministry and life.
3. Know key trends within contemporary impacting the contemporary church.

B. Doing:

1. Become familiar with significant movements and people shaping contemporary Christian life and ministry.
2. Research and discuss a contemporary movement or figure shaping Christian life and ministry.
3. Engage in the process of constructive theological reflection on a significant issue facing the contemporary church and Christian life.

C. Being:

1. Appreciate the role of theological reflection for Christian life and ministry.
2. Embrace a deeper understanding of the nature of Christian ministry and living.
3. Develop a sense of the Holy Spirit’s work in the world.

III. Required Text(s):

A. Textbook on God and Western Culture:

Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).

B. Student Selected Textbook: Select **One** text that treats a significant issue related to contemporary Christian life and/or Ministry: * *If you have ideas for a book not listed below, please consult with me.* *

1) Christian life possible selections:

Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel: 2017)

David Fitch, *Faithful Presence: 7 Disciplines That Shape the Church For God's Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016).

or (with Geoff Holsclaw), *Prodigal Christianity: 10 Signposts into the Missional Frontier* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2013).

Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011).

Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*, The Church and Postmodern Culture series, ser. ed. James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

2) Christian ministry possible selections:

Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003).

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emergent Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2005).

David Kinnaman & Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation really thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

Sam Reimer and Michael Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith: Evangelical Congregations in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015).

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

Assignment	Percent	Due
A. Blended Learning Assignments • Each assignment is worth 10 points	70%	
1) Postmodern Artifact		Jan 25
2) SCMC Ramachandra Textbook		Feb 2
3) Post-Christendom Artifact		Feb 1
4) Op-ed/Blog Religious Pluralism		Feb 15
5) SCMC Student Selected Textbook		Feb 26
6) Op-ed/Blog Science and Religion		Mar 22
7) Capstone Collaboration		
B. Capstone Project/Paper	30%	Apr 9
	Total: 100%	

V. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- Please submit papers in electronic format (MS Word preferred)
- All papers and assignment should conform to the [MDC Writing Style Guide](#)

A. Blended Learning Assignments:

1. Postmodern Artifact Assignment

Prior to F2F (face to face):

- Read “Postmodernism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>).
- Watch video resources on Avenue to Learn on postmodernism.

Reading this article and listening to the video resources provide the background information for selecting and analyzing the postmodern artefact—see third bullet point.

- Post artifact and analytic annotation on Padlet (if your artifact is not material, post a concrete example—e.g., Starbucks cultivation of third space ethos reflects community emphasis in contrast to individualism).

During F2F:

- Collaborate—practicing postmodern pedagogy. Postmodernism emphasizes the communal nature and social construction of knowledge and identity.
- Come prepared to discuss your insights on the challenges and/or opportunities that postmodernism represents for ministry leaders.

After F2F:

- Integrate postmodernism: building on your work identifying postmodernism (artifact and analytic annotation), creative and collaborative postmodern pedagogy, integrate your new understanding of postmodernism in your creative capstone project.

2. Summarize, Correlate, Miss, Challenge (SCMC): Ramachandra Textbook

- This assignment develops analytical, synthetic, and critical skills.
- In your textbook on Christian life/ministry (see above III.B):
 - 1) Summarize: Present the primary content, arguments, and problems and solutions identified in the book. 1 page maximum.
 - 2) Correlate: based on your observations of contemporary church life, ministry, and the nature of Christian life today, identify correlations with the themes discussed in the book. 1 page maximum.
 - 3) Miss: identify and describe several areas/issues that the book misses about the nature of contemporary Christian life and ministry. 1 page maximum.
 - 4) Challenge: Where do you think the book is wrong about contemporary Christian life and ministry? Is its description of the “problem” and its proposed “solution” misguided, blinkered, one-sided? Identify, describe, and make your suggestions for alternative solutions. 1 page maximum.

3. Post-Christendom Artifact

Prior to F2F:

- Watch video resources on Avenue to Learn on post-Christendom.
- Identify an example in culture or church, important data-set (statistical data and analysis—e.g., Pew surveys), research article, blog, or some other artifact that discusses/demonstrates post-Christendom in North America
- Post artifact and analytic annotation on Padlet. Your analytic annotation can be text or video. For video, Voice Thread is an easy to use medium that can be added to your artifact posting.

During F2F:

- Collaborate: Come prepared to discuss your insights on the challenges and/or opportunities that post-Christendom represents for ministry leaders.

After F2F:

- Integrate post-Christendom: building on your work identifying ramifications of post-Christendom (artifact and analytic annotation), creative and collaborative pedagogy, integrate your new understanding of post-Christendom (where applicable) in your creative capstone project.

4. Op-ed/Blog Religious Pluralism

1) *Research:*

- Select an important issue for the relationship between Christian mission in the context of religious pluralism and multiculturalism.
- Find and read two or three resources (e.g., articles, lectures, statistical reports) and integrate them in your op-ed/blog.
- For an example of an op-ed/blog related to this topic, see my Read my [“Fort Hood and the Myths of Secularism”](#) on Christianity.ca
- The online resources listed below are helpful for sparking ideas and finding resources.

2) *Write* an opinion piece (op-ed/blog) on the topic. The audience for the op-ed is not academic. It should effectively deliver the contribution of your research to a popular audience. Length: 500 words. Be concise, clear, and interesting.

3) *Post* your op-ed/blog to the course Padlet.

4) *Interact:* Comment on at least one of the op-eds/blogs posted by your class colleagues. You can contribute with the text or audio/audio-video [VoiceThread](#).

5. Summarize, Correlate, Miss, Challenge (SCMC): Student Selected Textbook

- This assignment develops analytical, synthetic, and critical skills.
- In your textbook on Christian life/ministry (see above III.B), identify:

1) *Summarize:* Present the primary content, arguments, and problems and solutions identified in the book. 1 page maximum.

- 2) Correlate: based on your observations of contemporary church life, ministry, and the nature of Christian life today, identify correlations with the themes discussed in the book. 1 page maximum.
 - 3) Miss: identify and describe several areas/issues that the book misses about the nature of contemporary Christian life and ministry. 1 page maximum.
 - 4) Challenge: Where do you think the book is wrong about contemporary Christian life and ministry? Is its description of the “problem” and its proposed “solution” misguided, blinkered, one-sided? Identify, describe, and make your suggestions for alternative solutions. 1 page maximum.
6. Op-ed/Blog Science and Religion
- 1) *Research:*
 - Select an important issue for the relationship between science and religion.
 - Find and read two or three resources (e.g., articles, lectures, statistical reports) and integrate them in your op-ed/blog.
 - The online resources listed below are helpful for sparking ideas and finding resources.
 - The Veritas-Forum (<http://www.veritas.org/>)
 - BioLogos (<http://biologos.org/>)
 - Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation (<http://www.casca.ca/>)
 - 2) *Write* an opinion piece (op-ed/blog) on the topic. The audience for the op-ed is not academic. It should effectively deliver the contribution of your research to a popular audience. Length: 500 words. Be concise, clear, and interesting.
 - 3) *Post* your op-ed/blog to the course Padlet.
 - 4) *Interact:* Comment on at least one of the op-eds/blogs posted by your class colleagues. You can contribute with the text or audio/audio-video [VoiceThread](#).
7. Capstone Collaboration
- 1) *Write* a one paragraph interaction for each of your colleagues’ project/paper presentations. These interactions are based on the in-class project presentations the previous week (see week 12, March 26 in the syllabus course outline)

- 2) *Interact*: Your interaction should be dialogical rather than descriptive.
- 3) *Identify* strengths and areas for development.
- 4) *Recommend* sources and ways to enhance strengths and improve areas that need development.

B. Constructive Capstone Project or Paper:

1. General guidelines:

This assignment constitutes the “major paper” and presentation of the course. The purpose of the paper/project is vocational development. It should advance your vocational trajectory. Selecting whether to prepare a *project* or a *paper* is an important step in the process.

Should I do a paper or a project?

If you anticipate further graduate work or writing a thesis as part of your MTS or MDiv, then an academic research-thesis paper is an excellent option. A research-thesis paper provides skill development in conducting the concentrated study on a particular research topic necessary for advanced academic work. If your vocational track is the field of ministry or an alternative professional field, then a project may be an effective option. Completing a project provides skill development in contextualizing and applying the fruit of theological research and reflection.

If you have an idea for a paper or creative project that does not neatly fit into the parameters of your specialization’s assignment description, please come and discuss your idea with me. I am open to papers/projects that cohere with the essence of the course and are suited to your research field and interests.

◆ Please consult the assignment description for your degree specialization ◆

2. Specialization focus: CC/CT/CW/PS

a. Christianity and Culture

This specialization focuses on the intersection of the church and its cultural setting. Developing the ability to interpret culture *and* to specify an appropriate Christian response and interaction with it is the purpose of this assignment. Discerning appropriate ways to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in terms of a specific cultural location is an essential feature of Christian discipleship and ministry and this assignment provides the opportunity to develop these skills. The paper/project analyzes a contemporary issue, cause, phenomenon, or movement from a Christian perspective. Careful and accurate description of the issue, as well as thoughtful assessment and response from a Christian perspective is essential. An alternative approach is to consider the influence of cultural context on a particular type of Christian theology.

Possible topic/s: what are the cultural assumptions and contexts that lead to the mega-suburban all-inclusive campus church, on the one hand, and the gentrifying urban hipster church, on the other hand? How does cultural background shape the practices, values, and theology of these different approaches to church life? How can religious institutions navigate the tension of certain civil rights issues and maintaining fidelity to biblical morality? What is the political role of the church in an increasingly post-Christian, multicultural, and religiously plural society?

- b. **Christian Thought and History**
 Considering the contribution of past figures and movements in the history of Christianity for the church today is essential to this specialization. Students in this specialization write a paper or create a project that investigates a select figure, topic, or event (or combination of those elements). This paper/project facilitates development in resourcing the Christian tradition for contemporary issues and questions facing the church. Depending on your vocational goals, the paper/project can be written with an academic and scholarly way (i.e., students considering thesis writing) or with an eye toward bringing the paper topic into conversation with a contemporary issue of Christian life and ministry

Possible topics: How do historical understandings/conflicts between science and religion contribute to the current tensions and questions? How does the revival theology of a historical figure/movement—e.g., Jonathan Edwards’ revival theology—contribute and/or challenge contemporary church growth and revival theology.

- c. **Christian Worldview**
 This specialization relates to the ways Christians understand the world with an awareness of Christianity’s intellectual environment—historical, contemporary, and global—of contemporary Christianity. Select an area of theology, a figure, and/or event and show how it contributes to an area of Christian worldview. The paper/project can focus on contemporary issues or look at historical ones. The paper/project should be constructive and not only descriptive. The heart of this assignment is your creative proposal on the contribution this person, figure, event offers to a Christian worldview.

Examples of topics: Discuss Walter Rauschenbusch’s articulation of the Social Gospel in the context of late-nineteenth urban poverty and the rise of labor movements and state sponsored social assistance—how did they shape him or he shape them? “Tommy” Douglas and the development of Canada’s public health system is another example topic on the interplay between culture and Christian worldview. How does the culture of North America, both its legacy of racism and notions of individual liberty, form the context for the theology of civil rights in a leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and alternately, how did King’s biblical faith shape his political and social vision?

d. Pastoral Studies

This specialization focuses on vocational ministry. Prepare a sermon/message/curriculum appropriate for a given ministry audience related to a contemporary issue facing Christian life and/or ministry. You can draw on a historical or contemporary figure, an event, and/or a topic in the Protestant tradition. The content of the sermon draws from theological resources, but expresses the yield of that theology in language and terms that are appropriate for a ministry audience. Documentation of research will be provided in footnotes and an annotated bibliography (an annotated bibliography provides a paragraph description for each resource used in the project).

Alternatively, if you have an idea for contextualizing a figure/event/theological topic for ministry in a format other than a sermon, please talk with me so we can design a project that enables you to maximize your work in the class for your ministry context and meets the goals of the specialization in Pastoral Studies.

Possible topics: A sermon on the how retain the integrity of faith and hospitality in a multicultural but ironically also increasingly politically polarized society. Prepare a break out session presentation for a group of ministry leaders on a lesson from a figure or event for ministry in post-Christendom Canada.

3. Class Presentation:

You will present and facilitate a discussion of your paper/project (I encourage multi-media, audio, audio-visual methods when appropriate). *Length of presentation and discussion will be determined based on final class roster.* Normally presentations are 15–20 minutes followed by 5–10 minutes of class discussion (for a total time of 20–30 minutes)

4. Written submissions

1) Papers:

a) Content and argument:

- Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports).
Example of a thesis statement: Luther's theology of the priesthood of all believers supports flat/non-hierarchical approaches to leadership in missional/emerging congregations.
- Describe your topic under consideration.
- Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.

- Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms of the position and interact with them vis-à-vis your view (where appropriate and in so far as space allows).

b) Presentation:

- Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., avoid colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active). Research-thesis papers must have a thesis statement (stated in the introduction), an introduction, content section, and a conclusion to the paper.
- Use and document a *minimum* of ten scholarly resources (book, journal articles, book essays). Internet resources can be utilized, if they are scholarly and/or professional sources.
- Accurately document sources according to the College's Style Guide. [Link](#) to Style Guide.
- Paper length: 10–12 pages.
- Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).

2) Projects/Sermons:

- a) Annotated bibliography of research sources: an annotation is a paragraph or two that describes the content of the book, essay, or article and how it relates to your project.
- b) Sermon: submit a manuscript of your sermon/message that includes footnotes, which detail where and how you applied and adapted your theological research.
- c) Double-spaced pages, 12 point Times New Roman font.
- d) Use and document at least 10 scholarly resources (e.g., books, journal articles, and essays). Internet resources can be utilized, if they are scholarly and/or professional sources.
- e) Document sources with footnotes and follow the College's Style Guide. [Link](#) to Style Guide.

C. Participation:

Developing a community of learners through online posts and discussion is central to the class experience. Each student contributes to the online learning community of the class. See syllabus outline for discussion topics and assignments for posts.

The online venue is McMaster University's Avenue to Learn

VI. Course Outline (*tentative*):

Week & Format	Date	Topic
1 Class	Jan 8	Introduction to the Course I. The Context of Contemporary Christian Life and Ministry A. Modernism
2 Online	Jan 15	B. Postmodernism • Complete Prior to F2F Postmodern Artifact Assignment.
3 Class	Jan 22	C. Post-Christendom & Disenchantment with the Church/Christianity • F2F Postmodernism Artifact. • Discuss Ramachandra, <i>Subverting Global Myths</i> .
4 Online	Jan 29	<i>Post-Christendom continued</i> • Post-Christendom Contribution and Interaction. • Summarize, Correlate, Miss, Challenge (SCMC): Ramachandra, <i>Subverting Global Myths</i> .
5 Class	Feb 5	II. Current Issues in Christian Life & Ministry A. Emerging Adults and Spirituality • F2F Post-Christendom Contribution and Interaction

6 Online	Feb 12	<p>B. Christian Mission in the Context of Religious Pluralism and “Tolerance”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op-Ed/Blog on Religious pluralism and Christian mission. 																					
7	Feb 19	<p>Family Day and Reading Week</p>																					
8 Class	Feb 26	<p>C. Thought Leaders of Contemporary Christian Life</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Fitch, <i>Faithful Presence: 7 Disciplines That Shape the Church For God’s Mission & Prodigal Christianity</i> (Reclaiming the Mission blog) • Scott McKnight, <i>Jesus Creed</i> (Jesus Creed blog) • Francis Chan, <i>Crazy Love</i> • David Platt, <i>Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream</i> (website: www.Radical.net) • Tim Keller (website: http://www.timothykeller.com) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCMC on Student Selected Textbook. • Group discussion on Student Selected Textbook. 																					
9 Online	Mar 5	<p>D. Social Justice & Creation Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review online lecture and resources 																					
10 Class	Mar 12	<p>E. The Simple Way or the Suburbs?</p>																					
11 Online	Mar 19	<p>F. Religion and Science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review online lecture. • Op-Ed/Blog on Science and Religion. 																					
12 Class	Mar 26	<p>Class Presentations and Discussion Groups</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="467 1535 1421 1801"> <tr> <td>1.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>3.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>4.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>5.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>6.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>7.</td> <td>Project/Paper Presentation:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	1.	Project/Paper Presentation:		2.	Project/Paper Presentation:		3.	Project/Paper Presentation:		4.	Project/Paper Presentation:		5.	Project/Paper Presentation:		6.	Project/Paper Presentation:		7.	Project/Paper Presentation:	
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13 Online	Apr 2	• Capstone Collaboration
14 Class	Apr 9	Conclusion • Course Evaluations

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3 : phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. Academic Honesty:

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 ~ <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

C. Gender 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 TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.

B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus

C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late, the grade will be reduced to 85).

- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.

- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

Please Note: 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.