
McMaster Divinity College
Winter Semester, 2014

MS 3XC3 / 6XC6

PREACHING IN POST-MODERN CULTURE

Tuesdays, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

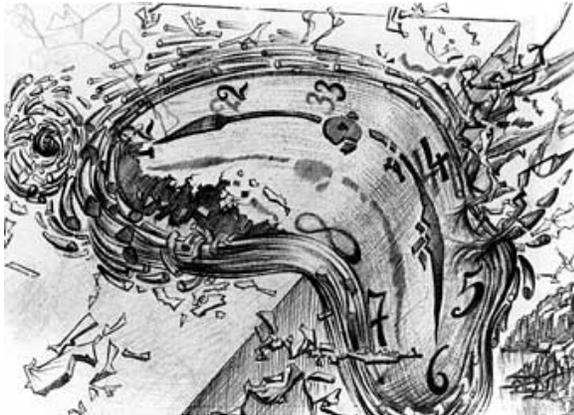
Location: **TBA**

Dr. Michael Knowles

Office: DC 214

(905) 525-9140 x27088

knowlesm@mcmaster.ca



Course Statement

“Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Jean-François Lyotard). Preaching Christ within a culture dismissive of universal truth claims is no small challenge. Nonetheless, after identifying the characteristics of postmodernism and assessing recent homiletical responses, we will endeavour to construct a workable model for contemporary proclamation that emphasizes narrative, community, Christology, and spiritual experience.

Specializations

- ▶ Church & Culture
 - ▶ Pastoral Studies
-

Course Objectives

Knowing [Cognitive]:

- ▶ To gain familiarity with the distinctive characteristics of modernism, postmodernism, and related cultural developments.
- ▶ To assess the relevance of these conceptual models for proclamation of the Christian gospel.
- ▶ To explore models of communication appropriate to each of the foregoing perspectives.

Being [Affective/Experiential]:

- ▶ 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 [Practical/Functional]:

- ▶ To gain proficiency, as appropriate, in Scriptural exegesis for modernist, postmodern, and/or subsequent cultural circumstances.
 - ▶ To develop additional skills in the presentation and delivery of sermons.
-

Lecture Outline and Schedule:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| January 7 | Introduction: Preaching in a Word-Wearied World READING: Martel, <i>The Life of Pi</i> |
| January 14 | Where Are We? Part I: Lost in the Cosmos READING: Percy, <i>Lost in the Cosmos</i> |
| January 21 | Where Are We? Part II: Preaching, Perspective, and the Loss of Authority READING: Craddock, <i>As One Without Authority</i> DUE: "The After-Life of Pi" (Sermon) |
| January 28 | Who Are We? Part I: Dust in the Wind READING: Middleton and Walsh, <i>Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be</i> |
| February 4 | Who Are We? Part II: Preaching to a Community "In Christ" |
| February 11 | What Time Is It? Urgency, Efficiency, and the End of the Ages READING: <i>TBA</i> |
| February 18 | Reading Week (classes cancelled) |
| February 25 | What's Wrong? Faith, Failure, and Falling Short of Glory DUE: "Reviewing the Options" (Book Review) |
| March 4 | What's the Remedy? Part I: Preaching Our Way out of Trouble READING: Coupland, <i>Life After God</i> |
| March 11 | What's the Remedy? Part II: Learning to Let God READING: <i>TBA</i> |
| March 18 | "You Will Be My Witnesses": Preaching as Testimony READING: Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony" |
| March 25 | After Postmodernity: What Next? DUE: "Ephesians for the End of the Ages" (Commentary and Sermon Series) |
| April 1 | Student Sermons I |
| April 7 | Student Sermons II |

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 texts are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, MDC Room 145, where they may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, please contact:

READ On Bookstore
304 The East Mall, Suite 100
Etobicoke, ON
M9B 6E2

E-mail: books@readon.ca
<http://www.readon.ca>
Tel: (416) 620-2934
FAX: (416) 622-2308

Additional reading available on reserve at Mills Memorial Library

Douglas Coupland. *Life After God*. New York: Pocket, 1994. PS 8555 .O865 L54 1994

Fred B. Craddock. *As One Without Authority*. Rev. ed. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001. BV 4211.3 .C73 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. BS 476 .R52

Walker Percy. *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983. PS 3566 .E6912 L6 1983

Assignments

% of Final Grade

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. READING

- a. Completion of weekly reading assignments.
- b. The remainder of a total 1,000 pages (2,000 for Research Degree students) may be selected from works on the "Additional Reading" list and/or from theological and exegetical materials that will provide research background for the written assignments (below).

- c. Bibliographies appended to written assignments should indicate the approximate number of pages read in each source listed.

2. THE AFTER-LIFE OF PI 20%

According to the introductory “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, compose an original sermon based (primarily) on this novel that will make its hearers believe in God.

Length: 2,000 words Due: January 21

3. REVIEWING THE OPTIONS 20%

Review one work from the course bibliography on preaching in a postmodern context (minimum 200 pages), assessing a) its understanding of postmodernism and subsequent cultural developments; b) its engagement with and response to specific elements of a postmodern worldview; and c) the theological and cultural appropriateness of its proposed homiletical strategy.

Length: Professional Degree 1,500 words Due: February 25
Research Degree 3,000 words

4. EPHESIANS FOR THE END OF THE AGES 40%

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 thematic commentary on the letter to the Ephesians, interpreting the letter in such a way as to address specifically postmodern concerns and interacting where appropriate with other contemporary commentators or homileticians. On the basis of your analysis, briefly outline a six-week sermon series suitable for presentation in the context of your home church or field education setting.

Length: Professional Degree 2,500 words Due: March 25
Research Degree 5,000 words

5. PREACHING TO POSTMODERNS 20%

Compose and present an original sermon (on a text of your choice) that addresses specifically postmodern (or post-postmodern) concerns. Sermons will be preached in class for peer evaluation.

Length: 15 minutes maximum Due: April 1, 7 (by prior arrangement)

D. Style

Formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses* (<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuideMarch0413.pdf>). Failure to observe the appropriate formatting conventions will result in grade reduction. See also “CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS,” below.

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>.

F. Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College is committed to employing inclusive language for human beings in worship services, written materials, and all publications. With regard to biblical texts, the integrity of original expressions (including references to God) should be respected; the NRSV and TNIV provide appropriate examples of the use of inclusive language for human subjects. With the exception of direct quotations from historical documents, inclusive language is to be used in chapel services and in all assignments submitted for academic credit.

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 generated by computers or other electronic systems.

H. Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class session on the due date. The penalty for late submission of assignments is 1% per calendar day (without limit). Electronic submission of assignments will not be accepted.

The final date for submission of all course assignments is the last day of classes, April 9
Assignments received after this date will not 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.

Illustration: Salvador Dalí, *Soft Watch Exploding*, 1954.
Ink and pencil on paper, 5 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (14 x 19.1 cm).
Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

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 | | | |