

Christianity and Culture
CHTH G105-C10
TH 6XC6

McMaster Divinity College
Winter 2014
Wed. 10:30-12:20
Office: 216

Steven M. Studebaker, M.A., Ph.D.
Phone: 905.525.9140 x20097
Email: studeba@mcmaster.ca
Hours: Mon 3:30-5:30 & 12:30-2:00 and by
appointment

I. Description:

The West and its church are in decline. How should Christians respond? Cheer the collapse of Christendom? Launch a Reconquista of Christendom? Or something else? This course explores ways to navigate the postmodern and post-Christian culture. It considers the different ways Christians negotiate the path of being 'in,' but not 'of' the world. It studies select historical examples such as the early church response to Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, the monastic reaction, medieval Christendom, the Protestant Reformation alternatives, the liberal, neo-orthodox, fundamentalist, and evangelical responses to modernism, as well as current responses to the contemporary condition of western culture.

II. Course Objectives:

A. Knowing:

1. Know a variety of biblical, historical, and contemporary ways Christians have understood the relationship between Christianity and culture.
2. Know the distinct historical-cultural contexts of Christianity and the variety of Christian responses to those cultural conditions.
3. Know the contemporary evangelical alternatives to postmodern and post-Christian culture.

B. Being:

1. Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. Embrace a deeper sense of your own Christian identity vis-à-vis contemporary culture.

C. Doing:

1. Analyze contemporary culture from a Christian perspective.
2. Be able to develop responses to culture that are both credible within the culture and authentic to the Gospel.
3. Develop skills in academic analysis, writing, and presentation of research.

III. Required Texts:

- A. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).
 - B. Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).
 - C. Recommended/useful:
For a model of analyzing culture, see Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2007).
- Additional reading may be assigned—e.g., Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*.

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

Assignment	Percent	Due
A. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement: (a.k.a. presentation and paper)	50%	One week after presentation
1. Presentation	20%	
2. Paper	30%	
B. Response and Facilitation	15%	Day of presentation
C. Lecture and Discussion:	30%	Day of lecture
D. Annotated Bibliography:	5%	Day of lecture
Total: 100%		

V. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- I prefer electronic submissions (Microsoft Word with last name in the file name), but will

accept *stapled* hard copies.

- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.
- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form attached to the syllabus
- All papers and assignments should conform to (and will be marked against) the MDC Style Guide located at:
<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/MDCStyleGuideMarch0413.pdf>

A. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement (a.k.a. paper and presentation):

1. Description:

Research degree students will write an academic thesis paper or prepare a cultural engagement project. If you have an idea for a paper or creative project, 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.

2. Purpose:

This assignment gives you experience writing article, essay, and chapter length theological papers and presenting research in an oral form similar to that performed at academic conferences.

3. Guidelines for the Paper:

The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .

a. Content and argument:

1) Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports).

- Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.

2) Describe your topic.

3) Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.

4) Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.

b. Presentation:

1) Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid excessive first person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).

2) Use and document a *minimum* of fifteen scholarly resources.

3) Accurately document sources according to the [MDC Style Guide](#).

4) Paper length: 20–25 pages. Not to exceed 7,000 words.

5) Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).

6) Use footnotes.

4. Guidelines for the Class Presentation:

a. Time:

The paper presentation takes a fifty-minute segment of the class. Each presentation includes two parts: 1) the paper presentation (25–30 minutes) and 2) the response and facilitation, which is led by another student (20–25 minutes, see below for more details on the response and facilitation).

b. Presentation content:

You should articulate the paper's thesis, topic, and argument. You can PowerPoint, etc. if you wish. The purpose of this assignment is to give you experience with presenting papers as would might at an academic conference. You should prepare and present your paper for that type of venue. I encourage you to consider presenting your paper for this class at a conference and/or the Theological Research Seminar of the Divinity College.

B. Response and Facilitation (due day of presentation):

1. Description:

Each student *prepares a critique* and *facilitates a discussion* of a thesis paper presentation.

a. The critique:

- 1) Remember to be charitable; it is not only Christian, but since academia is a small guild, it is also self-preservation.
- 2) Critical (includes highlighting and discussing problems *and* strengths):

The critique should explore the following sorts of issues:

- Does the paper have a thesis?
- Does the content develop and support the thesis?
- Does it use appropriate sources?
- Does it interact with the relevant secondary literature?

- b. The discussion:

You should keep the presentation to time limit and effectively manage student discussion (do not let one person dominate the interaction; move on to a new issue if discussion begins to go off on tangents and run down rabbit trails). Be sure to elicit comments from all people present. You might want to have some prepared questions and discussion prompts to facilitate the initial discussion.

2. Purpose:

Provides experience in responding to and moderating academic presentations and discussions, such as one might do at an academic society meeting.

3. Guidelines:

- a. Each student paper presentation will take approximately fifty minutes (one segment of a class session).
- b. The presentation and discussion typically includes the following items:

- 1) Presenter presents the paper: approximately thirty minutes.
- 2) Response: approximately fifteen minutes.

You can go through point by point as a monologue or start by raising and offering your thoughts on the paper's primary contributions and arguments and invite discussion based on your remarks and interaction with the paper and then so forth through the rest of the points you have identified.

- 3) Class discussion of the paper and response: approximately five to ten minutes.
- c. A written submission/outline is not required, but is encouraged as it may be beneficial to other students in the course.

C. Lecture and Discussion: (due day of scheduled presentation):

1. Description:

You will present a lecture on one of the topics listed in the course outline (or an approved alternative topic). Lecture topic and major paper topics can be coordinated.

2. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to give students experience with developing and presenting lectures.

3. Guidelines:

a. Research:

- 1) Research for the lecture will account for the supplemental reading for advanced degree students (approximately 5,000-6,000 pages)
- 2) Documentation of reading:

Please provide an annotated bibliography of the reading consulted in the preparation of the lecture (the annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text).

b. Lecture:

- 1) The lecture should present and discuss the primary content points of the topic (or sub-topic)
- 2) Lecture handouts/outlines and PowerPoint/Prezi are helpful, but not required
- 3) Length:
The lecture and discussion will take a fifty-minute period of the course. We will have two for each session of the student lecture segment of the course.

4. Evaluation:

Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following . . .

- a. Please submit to the professor a copy (electronic or hard copy) of your lecture notes and annotated bibliography used to develop the lecture.

- b. Does the lecture accurately present and discuss the topic?
- c. Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation/discussion of the content?
- d. Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it have value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry?
- e. Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?

D. Annotated Bibliography:

Complete the bibliography in conjunction with your lecture preparation. Research for the lecture should be approximately 5,000–6,000 pages of reading. The annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text. You will read broadly for the lecture so that you have a command of the topic. This reading, in general, is survey. It helps you gain a broad understanding of the subject area of the lecture.

VI. Lecture Outline (*tentative*):

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Assignment & Presentation Schedule
1	1/8	Introduction to the Course I. Faith & Culture in the Bible A. Old Testament Case Studies (e.g., the creation accounts)	
2	1/15	B. New Testament Case Studies (e.g., implications of the Incarnation for a theology of culture) II. Faith & Culture in the History of the Church A. The Emergence of Christendom B. Responses to Christendom 1. Monasticism 2. Protestant Reformers (Magisterial, Militant, and Anabaptist)	
3	1/22	C. Models of Faith & Culture 1. Augustine's Two Cities	

		<p>2. Luther's Two Kingdoms 3. Niebuhr's Five Models</p> <p>• Guest: G. Heath case study on Christians and culture: The Canadian Church and Empire (50 minutes)</p>	
4	1/29	<p>III. Faith & Culture in the Evangelical Tradition</p> <p>A. Modernism & Evangelicalism</p> <p>B. Postmodernism & Evangelicalism</p>	
5	2/5	1. Postmodernism & Post-Christendom	
6	2/12	<p>2. Contemporary Church & Culture</p> <p>3. Servants of Christ, Servants of Caesar</p>	
7	2/19	Reading Week	
8	2/26	IV. Grace and Culture: A Proposal for a Theology of Culture	
9	3/5	Studebaker @ SPS March 6–8	<p>1. Student Lecture _____</p> <p>2. Student Lecture _____</p>
10	3/12		<p>3. Student Lecture _____</p> <p>4. Student Lecture _____</p>
11	3/19		<p>5. Student Lecture _____</p> <p>6. Student Lecture _____</p>
12	3/26		1. Student Presentation _____

			2. Student Presentation _____
13	4/2		3. Student Presentation _____ 4. Student Presentation _____
14	4/9		5. Student Presentation _____ 6. Student Presentation _____
	4/16	Exam Week	

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 Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail 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 ~ <http://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.

Appendix 1: Web Resources for Christianity and Culture

Restoring Eden: Christians for Environmental Stewardship (http://www.restoringeden.org/index_html)

Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and Arts (<http://www.brehmcenter.com>)

The Journal of Religion and Film (<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf>)

Sojourners: Faith, Politics, Culture (<http://www.sojo.net>)

The Gospel and Our Culture Network (<http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm>)

The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture (<http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/index.html>)

The Ooze: Conversation for the Journey (<http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm>)

Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity (<http://www.touchstonemag.com/>)

The Wittenburg Door (<http://www.wittenburgdoor.com>)

Yale Center for Faith & Culture (<http://www.yale.edu/faith>)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk>)

Evangelical Environmental Network and Creation Care Magazine (<http://www.creationcare.org>)

Allelon: A Movement of Missional Leaders (www.allelon.org)

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
(http://www.virginia.edu/iasc/publications_hedgehog_review.php)

The Center for Law and Culture (http://www.lawandculture.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk/>)

Emergent Village (<http://www.emergentvillage.com/>)

Reginald Bibby: <http://www.reginaldbibby.com/>

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Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

Braaten, Carl E. *Christ and Counter-Christ: Apocalyptic Themes in Theology and Culture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972.

Carter, Craig A. *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

Clapp, Rodney. *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000.

Cobb, Kelton. *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008.

- Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Dark, David. *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and Other Pop Culture Icons*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002.
- Detweiler, Craig. *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008).
- Detwiler, Craig and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Gallagher, Susan & Lundin, Roger. *Literature Through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1989.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic, 1973.
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