



MS 3XW3/6XW6

SPIRITUALITY AND CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

September 22; October 20; November 3; December 8

Location: Room 136/Hurlburt

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## Course Description

With secularism, pluralism, and multiculturalism serving as cornerstones for Canadian social policy and the Internet providing access to information from across the globe, Christians daily encounter convictions radically different from their own. Navigating these differences requires that we understand the distinctive contours of Christian identity and outlook, as well as the characteristics of other contemporary views (both secular and religious). This course will examine fourteen contemporary worldviews, acknowledging the integrity of each while evaluating their implications for Christian spirituality and practice.

**Specializations:** Christian Worldview  
Counselling and Spiritual Care  
Pastoral Studies

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## Course Objectives

### *Knowing*

- ▶ To identify the distinctive characteristics of a Christian worldview, together with its implications for spiritual identity and practice.
- ▶ To understand and evaluate a range of other contemporary worldviews, both secular and religious, in relation to Christian self-understanding.

### *Being*

- ▶ For course participants to recognize and appreciate the distinctive characteristics of their Christian identity and self-understanding.
- ▶ To be formed, collectively, as a Christian community of learning.

## Doing

- ▶ To formulate and assess spiritual practices that reflect a distinctly Christian worldview.
  - ▶ To identify the practical implications of various non-Christian worldviews for spiritual practice, particularly in relation to leadership strategies and the formation of Christian community.
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## Course Schedule

- September 22
1. Introduction to Worldview
  2. Deism  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 47–65  
Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 11–26
  3. Scientific Naturalism  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 66–93  
Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 100–19
  4. Nihilism  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 94–116  
*Book Review due (Professional Degrees)*  
*Review Essay due (Research Degrees)*
- September 29 *Hearing the Other due (one of three)*
- October 20
5. Existentialism  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 117–43
  6. Eastern Pantheism  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 144–65
  7. New Age Spirituality  
*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 166–213  
Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 120–38
  8. Individualism  
*Reading:* Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 27–43
- October 27 *Hearing the Other due (one of three)*
- November 3
9. Nationalism  
*Reading:* Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 45–78

10. Moral Relativism

*Reading:* Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 79–99

11. Salvation by Therapy

*Reading:* Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 160–82

12. Paganism

*Reading:* N. T. Wright, “The New Paganisms,” in J. Stephen Freeman, ed., *Shaping Our Future: Challenges for the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1994) 114–29.

November 10

*Hearing the Other* due (one of three)

December 1

*Keeping Faith* due

December 8

13. Consumerism

*Reading:* Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 44–60

14. Postmodernism

*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 214–43

Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 139–59

15. Christian Theism

*Reading:* Sire, *Universe*, 25–46

Wilkens & Sanford, *Worldviews*, 183–218

December 12

Last day of classes: final date for submission of late assignments

*Hearing the Other* due (one of three)

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## Course Requirements

### A. Texts (on reserve at Mills library)

James W. Sire. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009. MILLS B 823.3.S56 2009

Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford. *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009.

MILLS BR 115.C8 W543 2009

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, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1. Tel. (416) 620.2934; fax (416) 622.2308; email: books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. Supplementary Resources (on reserve at Mills library)

Tawa J. Anderson et al. *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017.

MILLS BR 100 .A485 2017

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.

MILLS BT 28 .M494 1995

David K. Naugle, Jr. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

MILLS BR 121.3 .N38 2002

Lesslie Newbigin. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

MILLS BR 115 .C8 N467 1986

Lesslie Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

MILLS BR 115 .C8 N468 1989

Lesslie Newbigin. *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

MILLS BT 1102 .N49 1991

James W. Sire. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015.

MILLS B 53 .S634 2015

C. Assignments

1. Because they each constitute 25% of the schedule, participation in all four class sessions (in their entirety) is a course requirement. Non-attendance will result in a proportional reduction of the course grade (i.e. 12.5% for all or part of a morning or afternoon session).
2. Written assignments must be submitted to the Avenue to Learn website by 9:00 a.m. on the due date, after which they will be considered late and penalized accordingly. In completing course assignments, MDiv/MTS students are expected to identify and emphasize themes relevant to their chosen

specialization, whether Christian Worldview, Counselling & Spiritual Care, or Pastoral Studies. *Please note that assignments vary according to degree programme.*

3. *Book Review*

Due: September 22

a. Professional Degrees

Provide a summary and review of Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For guidelines on how to proceed, see “Basic Guidelines for Composing a Book Review” (below).

Length: 1,250 words (~5 pages; 20% of final grade)

b. Research Degrees

Due: September 22

Provide a comparative review of David K. Naugle Jr., *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), and Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). On the basis of this review, indicate what Christian faith has in common with all worldviews, and what makes it distinctive as an explanatory construct.

Length: 4,000 words (~16 pages; 25% of final grade)

4. *Hearing the Other* Due: September 29; October 27; November 10; December 12

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on and respond to three specific worldviews. Each response will consist of two parts. First, offer a thoughtful critique of Christian faith and practice from the perspective of a non-Christian worldview. In the course of doing so, be sure to explain the conceptual and/or practical basis for the critique, keeping in mind the five foundational worldview questions (Who are we? Where are we? What’s the problem? What’s the solution? What time is it?), documenting your explanation from appropriate primary and secondary sources. In the second part of the assignment, respond to this critique from the perspective of Christian conviction, again documenting your response where necessary.

Assignments on topics corresponding to lecture material are due one week following the lecture in question. A maximum of one response per class session may be submitted. Alternatively, students may select perspectives not addressed in this course (e.g. Greco-Roman Stoicism, White Supremacism, Confucianism, Native American religion, etc.), provided that topics and due dates are determined in advance in consultation with the course instructor.

Length: Professional Degrees: 3 × 1,000 words (4 pages); 45% of final grade  
Research Degrees: 3 × 2,000 words (8 pages); 45% of final grade

## 5. *Keeping Faith*

Due: December 1

### a. Professional Degrees

The time is a date in the not-too-distant future: although little has changed philosophically, the social and political structures of Western society have collapsed. You are the abbot/abbess of a remote Christian monastery, responsible for disciplining a group of people who have fled there for physical and spiritual refuge. Design a programme of Christian formation that will shape their understanding, identity, and lifestyle by means of specific disciplines, habits, and practices. Since you know little about the survival of Christianity elsewhere, your task is to embody and thereby preserve a Christian worldview within the life of the particular community that you lead.

Length: 2,500 words (≈10 pages; 35% of final grade)

For some initial suggestions on how to proceed, you may wish to consult “Faith Confirmed Through Example,” in Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) 103–107.

### b. Research Degrees

Depending on your area of research specialization, describe and assess the impact (whether positive or negative) of one of the following on the delineation of a distinctively Christian worldview and distinctively Christian spirituality, employing an appropriate range of primary and secondary sources:

- (1) a biblical passage, theme, or interpreter;
- (2) a notable historical figure, historical period, or historian;
- (3) a major systematic or historical theologian;
- (4) a pastoral theorist or theologian.

Please consult with the course instructor regarding your choice of topics. Your essay should first briefly outline the contours of a broadly Christian worldview, then describe and assess the contribution of the chosen text or interpreter, and, finally, indicate the pastoral or missional implications of this contribution.

Length: 5,000 words (~20 pages; 30% of final grade)

<b>Grading Summary</b>			
	Due	Length	Percent of final grade
<i>Professional Degrees</i>			
Book Review	September 22	1,250 words (~5 pages)	20%
Hearing the Other	September 29	1,000 words (~4 pages)	15%
	October 27	1,000 words (~4 pages)	15%
	November 10	1,000 words (~4 pages)	15%
	December 12	1,000 words (~4 pages)	15%
Keeping Faith	December 1	2,500 words (~10 pages)	35%
<i>Research Degrees</i>			
Review Essay	September 22	4,000 words (~16 pages)	25%
Hearing the Other	September 29	2,000 words (~8 pages)	15%
	October 27	2,000 words (~8 pages)	15%
	November 10	2,000 words (~8 pages)	15%
	December 12	2,000 words (~8 pages)	15%
Keeping Faith	December 1	5,000 words (~20 pages)	30%

## 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>

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## **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.

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## **Style**

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/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>. To assist with prose composition, students are encouraged to make use of grammarly.com (<https://ed.grammarly.com/register/signup/features/?edu=true>), which is funded by the university, along with the Writing Support Services provided by McMaster's Student Success Centre (<http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/students/academic-skills/writing-support-services.html>). Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. See also "CRITERIA FOR GRADING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS," below. All course assignments are to be submitted to the appropriate section of course page on the Avenue to Learn website.

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## **Cell Phone/Computer Policy**

Students must refrain from conducting cell phone conversations while the class is in session. Should 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 all computer-generated sound schemes, pagers, or other electronic annunciation systems.

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### **Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty**

Assignments are to be submitted to the Avenue to Learn website by 9:00 a.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).

Once classes have concluded, graded assignments will be available for retrieval from the Student Records Office (Room 210) for 30 days after the end of the semester (calculated as the day on which grades are due, which is December 18), following which they will be discarded.

*Final date for submission of all course assignments is the last day of classes,  
December 12  
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 revisions up to and including the first day of class.

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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

## Basic Guidelines for Composing a Book Review

### 1. Publication Data

- a. Provide essential bibliographical data, in the proper format.

### 2. Description

- a. Who is the author, and what is their 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?

### 3. Evaluation

- 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?

### 4. Application

- 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)?

SUMMARIZE

ASSESS

ENGAGE

"what?"

"so what?"

"now what?"