

---

---

McMaster Divinity College  
Winter Semester, 2020

**Preaching in the Post-Christendom Era**

MS 3XC3 (Professional Degree)

MS 5XC5 (DPT)

MS 6XC6 (MA/PhD)

Tuesdays, 6:30 – 8:20 p.m.

Location: **TBA**

Dr. Michael Knowles

Office: DC 214

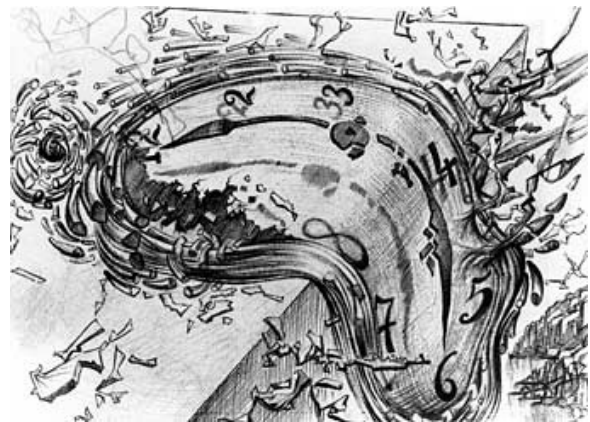
(905) 525-9140 x27088

knowlesm@mcmaster.ca

---

**Course Statement**

“Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Jean-François Lyotard). Preaching Christ 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**

- ▶ Church & Culture
- ▶ Christian Worldview
- ▶ Pastoral Studies

Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective

in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.

---

## 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 conceptual paradigms 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:

January 7 "What is Truth?" Preaching in a Word-Weary World  
READING: Martel, *The Life of Pi*

January 14 Where Are We? Part I: Lost in the Cosmos  
READING: Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos*  
DUE: "The After-Life of Pi" (Sermon)

January 21 Where Are We? Part II: Preaching, Perspective, and the Loss of Authority  
READING: Craddock, *As One Without Authority*

- January 28 Who Are We? Part I: Dust in the Wind  
READING: Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be*
- February 4 Who Are We? Part II: Preaching to a Community "In Christ"  
DUE: "Reviewing the Options" (Book Review)
- February 11 What Time Is It? Urgency, Efficiency, and the End of the Ages  
READING: TBA
- February 18 Hybrid/Reading Week (no classes)
- February 25 What's Wrong? Faith, Failure, and Falling Short of Glory
- March 3 What's the Remedy? Part I: Preaching Our Way out of Trouble  
READING: Coupland, *Life After God*
- March 10 What's the Remedy? Part II: Learning to Let God  
DUE: PAUL FOR THE END OF THE AGES
- March 17 "You Will Be My Witnesses": Preaching as Testimony  
READING: Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony"
- March 24 Preaching Practicum: Moving from Text to Proclamation
- March 31 Student Sermons I
- April 7 Student Sermons II

---

## Course Requirements

### Textbooks

Yann Martel. *Life of Pi: A Novel*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002. PS 8576 .A7683L54 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. BT 28 .M494 1995

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.

---

Supplementary 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, Christian Worldview, or Pastoral Studies. Auditors are requested to complete the course readings, and are required to complete the "Preaching to Post-Christendom" assignment.

1. CLASS PARTICIPATION

Regular and timely participation in all class sessions, including peer evaluation of sermons presented in class. Auditors are asked to complete the assigned readings, as well as the final assignment ("Preaching to Post-Christendom").

2. READING

- a. Completion of weekly reading assignments.

- b. The remainder the minimum reading requirements may be selected from the course bibliography and/or from theological, devotional, and exegetical materials that provide research background for the written assignments (below).
  - i. MDiv/MTS 1,500 pages
  - ii. DPT 4,000 pages
  - iii. MA/PhD 6,000 pages
- c. Bibliographies appended to written assignments should indicate the approximate number of pages read in each source listed, as well as a cumulative total.

3. THE AFTER-LIFE OF PI 15%

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 and in dialogue with this novel, compose an original sermon that will make its hearers believe in God.

Length (all programs): 2,000 words

Due: January 14

4. REVIEWING THE OPTIONS 25%

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 neither implies nor requires 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 (subject to considerations of minimum length [250 pages] and the appropriate level of academic discourse). A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the first day of class.

Depending on the student’s area of specialization (Church & Culture; Christian Worldview; or Pastoral Studies), the review will assess

- a) the proposed analysis of contemporary cultural developments;
- b) engagement with and response to specific aspects of a postmodern and/or post-Christendom worldview; and
- c) the theological, cultural, and pastoral appropriateness of the proposed homiletical strategy or 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 1,500 words  
DPT 2,500 words  
MA/PhD 4,000 words

Due: February 4

5. PAUL 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 First or Second Corinthians, Ephesians, or Philippians, 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 and/or post-Christian concerns. In conclusion (for all degree programmes), 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 for Professional Degree programmes will identify and interact with the student’s particular area of specialization, making use of appropriate secondary literature. Essays for Research Degree programmes must include detailed discussion of and interaction with postmodern philosophy and homiletical theory.

Length: MDiv/MTS 2,000 words  
DPT 3,000 words  
MA/PhD 6,000 words

Due: March 10

6. PREACHING TO POST-CHRISTENDOM

20%

Compose and present an original sermon that addresses the concerns of post-postmodernism and Christian identity within a post-Christendom culture. Creativity — in particular the use of contemporary literature and film — is encouraged. Sermons will be presented in class for peer evaluation.

Length: 15 minutes maximum

Due: March 31 or April 7

---

---

#### D. 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 <http://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mdcstyleguide.pdf>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

To assist with prose composition, students are encouraged to make use of [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com), 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>). 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 ~ <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>

---

---

#### F. Inclusive Language

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the

following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

---

---

#### 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. Late Submission Penalty

Written assignments (submitted via the Avenue to Learn website) are due at 6:30 p.m. on the due date, after which they will be considered late. The penalty for late submission of assignments is 1% per calendar day (without limit).

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), following which they will be discarded.

*Final date for submission of all course assignments is the last day of classes,  
April 8*

*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, 5½ × 7½ in. (14 × 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
- 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
- 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: Books for Review and Comparison (Choose 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
- 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*

- 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?

### 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?"