

Christian Mission and Culture
MS3XC3
CC/CW/PS
Winter 2023

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Office # 237

Class Begins Tuesday, Jan. 10, 11:00-12:50 EST. The course is live in person and live streamed, meeting weekly *except* during the week of Feb 27 – Mar. 3. The last day of class will be Apr. 4.

Course Description

The mission of the church is always done in a context. The context is inevitably entwined with a culture. Thus, as the church engages in its mission it must understand its relationship with culture. This course is designed to help students consider the relationship between the church and culture and how to think effectively about how to do ministry in a contextualized way that aids its effectiveness. The course will consider topics like; the nature of culture, how culture is formed, a theology and philosophy of contextualization and some of the cultural issues that the church is and will face as it seeks to do mission in a Canadian, North American and globalized context.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. As a result of this course students will be able to articulate what culture, as a concept, is.
- 2.. As a result of this course students will be able to identify and explain key trends that are shaping the contour of Western culture today.
3. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate a coherent philosophy of contextualization based on biblical, historical and theoretical practices.
4. As a result of this course students will be able to identify several major cultural issues facing the church as it moves into the mid-late 21st century.

Being

1. Upon completion of this course students will have had the opportunity to reflect on the impact of culture on their own lives and ministries.

Doing

1. Upon completion of this course students will have a foundational philosophy for contextualizing their ministry in a mid-late 21st century cultural context.
2. As a result of this course students will have a foundational ability to anticipate the future of Western culture and its implications for ministry in the next 50 years.

Working together as a learning community

A core value of our class is that it is a “learning community,” designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and formed through our mutual learning experience.

As a responsible member of our learning community you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level, therefore it is expected that each student will faithfully attend class weekly whether in person or online via the live stream. **Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an attachment to an email to the professor.** Assignments should be sent in on or before the due date specified in this syllabus. All assignments handed in after the due date may be subject to a penalty of 3% for each business day that they are late.

Instructor’s role and availability

As professor it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I come to position myself as a fellow learner in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together. Further, it is my responsibility to give good evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class in our discussions and through written work so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

I will do my best to answer any email enquiries within 24 hours during week days (Mon.-Fri). I do not generally answer emails Saturdays or Sunday during the day. If an email is sent later in the afternoon on a Friday it will probably not be answered until Sunday evening or Monday morning. I will do my very best to grade assignments within three weeks of submission.

I am not only available but also welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside class time. If you would like to meet together in person or via zoom please feel free to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

Required Reading

Dyrness, William A. *The Facts on the Ground: A Wisdom Theology of Culture*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022.

Bevans, Stephan B. *Models of Contextual Theology* (Revised and Expanded Edition). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

Harari, Noah Yuval. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York, NY: Signal, 2016.

Assignments

1. Paper: A Theology of Culture

This paper should offer a clear understanding of what culture is, how it is formed and what it means for a Christian and/or the church to engage responsibly and effectively in the creation of and tending to the culture in which they find themselves. The paper should provide a reflection on and definition of culture itself, some thoughts on how culture is formed and primarily what a Christian theology and practice of culture making and stewardship looks like. The paper should demonstrate conversance with course material and the text book *The Facts on the Ground* as well as at least eight other sources. These sources should be peer reviewed (books published by well established publishers and/or articles found in academic journals). Other sources can be used but only as an augment to the primary research.

This paper should be 10-12 pages in length and will constitute 30% of the course grade. It is due Feb. 7, 2023.

2, Paper: A Theology and Practice of Contextualization

This paper should seek to offer a clear theology and philosophy of contextualization. That is, an answer to the question how does the church proclaim its message effectively in various cultural contexts? The paper should answer questions like; how does scripture help us reflect on the work of contextualization? How does the history of the church help us think about contextualization? What other resources are necessary for doing contextualization well? What are some of the challenges in doing contextualization faithfully? What is your current approach to and/or philosophy of how the local church should approach the work of contextualizing the Christian gospel today? The paper should draw from Biblical and secondary resources including the course textbook *Models of Contextual Theology* and at least eight other credible sources (books published by well established publishers and/or articles found in academic journals).

The paper should be 10-12 pages in length and will constitute 30% of the course grade. It is due Mar. 7, 2023.

3. Paper: Addressing the Mission of the church in the mid-late 21st Century

This paper is designed to help students think about how our current cultural context is evolving and what effect that will have on the mission of the church. Each student will choose a topic that represents a cultural issue/trend that the church is facing as we move into the middle to late 21st century. Students can pick a topic from the list below or one of their own. The paper should offer an introduction of the topic, why it is an important issue for the church to consider in the mid-late part of the 21st century? What does the Christian narrative say to this issue? How can the church constructively engage the issue as part of its mission and how does your specialization (cc/cw/ps) play a role in helping the church respond? That is, the paper should include some reflection (1-2 pages) on how your specialization informs and will influence your approach to the issue you are writing about.

Prior to writing the paper each student must submit a brief written proposal (100-150 words) to the instructor no later than **Mar. 14**. The proposal should name the topic you intend to write about, why you think it is important and how it relates to your specialization. Please send it via email to the instructor by the due date. If you have questions about potential topics please feel free to contact the instructor for any help needed.

The paper is a research paper and should reflect an in-depth engagement with multiple sources (10 minimum, these must be books published by well established publishers and/or articles found in academic journals). The topics listed below offer broad categories for consideration. In some cases you may need to narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific issue related to the broad topic offered here.

Possible Topics Include:

Technology and its uses

Medical discoveries and their application

Evangelism in a Post-Religious culture

Immigration

Climate Change/Creation Care

Inter-faith dialogue in a Post-Religious world

Authority

Sexual ethics

Other possibilities?

The paper should be approximately 10-12 pages and will constitute 30% of the course grade. It is due Apr. 4, 2023.

4. Paper Presentation

Students will present their final paper topic and initial research to the class. These presentations will be an executive summary of your chosen topic and the overall direction you are taking with

this topic in your final paper. Presentations should be 10 minutes in length and include the following elements.

- An overview of your topic and why it is important.
- Your thesis statement for your final paper
- A summary of the main ideas that you intend to present in the paper
- At least one concrete action that the church needs to take in order to effectively address the issue you are studying.

Presentations will be evaluated on their clarity, attention to the required structure of the presentation, depth of insight, creativity and adherence to time.

Following each presentation there will be time (approximately 10 min.) for Q+A.

The Presentation should be 10 minutes in length and will constitute 10% of the course grade. Presentation dates will be Mar. 21 and 28 (possibly Apr. 6 if necessary) depending on the size of the class. A presentation schedule with exact due dates for each student will be finalized on the first week of the course.

Course Outline

Section One: A Theology of Culture (Jan. 10, 17, 24, 31)

Topics Include:

- What is culture?
- How is culture formed?
- The ethics and issues inherent in culture and its formation
- A Christian Theology of Culture

Student Responsibilities: Join us for class each week and participate in the lectures and discussions. Read the book *The Facts on the Ground*. Work on your paper; A Theology of Culture and prepare to submit it as an email attachment to the professor on Feb. 7.

Section Two: Contextualization: Challenges, Theology and Approaches (Feb. 7, 14, 21, Mar. 7) *Note there is no class Feb. 28th

Topics Include:

- What is contextualization?
- Biblical models of contextualization
- Historic models of contextualization

- Best practices of contextualization

Student Responsibilities: Join us for class each week and participate in the lectures and discussions. Read the book *Models of Contextual Theology*. Work on your paper; A Theology and Practice of Contextualization and prepare to submit it as an email attachment to the professor on Mar. 7. Begin Reading the book *Homo Deus*.

Section Three: Mission in Contemporary Culture (Mar. 14, 21, 28, Apr. 4)

Topics Include:

- A consideration of current Western cultural realities and their challenges
- Discussion of the book *Homo Deus*
- Student Presentations
- Integrating class material and praxis

Student Responsibilities: Join us for class each week and participate in the lectures, presentations and discussions. Read the book *Homo Deus*. Prepare for a deliver your class presentation. Work on your final paper; prepare to submit it as an email attachment to the professor on Apr. 4.

Additional notes:

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://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>

C. Gender 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).

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.

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.

Some Suggested Further Resources

- Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove, IN: Intervarsity, 2008.
- Edgar, William. *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Intervarsity, 2017.
- Fleming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove, IN: Intervarsity, 2005.
- Moreau, Scott. *Contextualization in World Mission: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012.
- _____. *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018.
- Lynch, Gordon. *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- Niebuhr, Richard H. *Christ and Culture*. New York, N.Y.: Harper Colophon, 1951.
- Schreiter, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies* (30th Anniversary Edition). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015.
- Sedmak, Clemons. *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015.
- Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press. 1959.