

**Missional Theology**  
**TH 3XM3/5XM5/6XM6**  
**Specializations: (CC/CW/PS)**

**McMaster Divinity College**  
**Winter 2024**  
**Online Asynchronous**

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**Office Hours: By Appointment**

**Course Description**

What does it mean to be the church in an increasingly post-Christian, secular, and religiously pluralistic culture? This course explores this question through the lens of the contemporary movement of “missional theology.” The course provides a comprehensive overview of missional theology and examples of its practice, particularly in North American culture. Biblical, historical, and theological foundations for embodying the gospel in cultural context are considered. By the end of the course, you will be able to understand missional theology and learn how to apply it to your own practice of ministry or research.

**Course Objectives**

*Knowing*

1. Learn key figures and ideas in the area of missional theology
2. Become familiar with the ways missional theology has been put into practice in the contemporary church

*Doing*

3. Develop skills in critical and constructive practical theology
4. Analyze current trends in contemporary ministry and discern their relation with your own understanding of the church and ministry

*Being*

5. Develop concrete ideas for implementing insights of missional theology into your practice of ministry
6. Refine critical thinking and research skills, as well as ability to present theological concepts in meaningful and accessible ways

### Course Texts

Newbigin, Leslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Other readings will be posted on the course site as required.

### Grade Breakdown

#### MDiv/MTS

1. Online Discussion Participation (10%)
2. Book Review (25%)
3. Missional Context Paper (25%)
4. Research Paper (40%)

#### MA/PhD/DPT

5. Online Discussion Participation (10%)
6. Mission and Methodology Paper (25%)
7. Missional Context Paper (25%)
8. Research Paper (40%)

### Assignment Descriptions

**Online Discussion Participation (Objective #1, 2, 6)** - as an online asynchronous course, participation and attendance is demonstrated by regular logins and up-to-date participation in course forums. Throughout the term, you will be required to participate in online group discussions, for the purpose of engaging with your classmates and the theological content of the course. Discussion prompts will be posted on the course page, aimed at exploring the theological ideas presented in class, and especially the practical implications of these ideas for the contemporary church. Posts are due Tuesday evenings at 11:59p.m. (ET), and responses to the posts of three classmates by Thursday evenings at 11:59p.m. (ET).

**MDiv/MTS: Book Review (Objective #1, 2)** - you will write a 6-page book review on a selected work in missional theology, outside of the primary course texts. The purpose of the book review is to briefly describe the main thesis of the book, to analyze theologically significant elements of the text, and to describe how the author's ideas are/are not applicable to the ministry/church context in which you are currently engaged. A list of books will be provided. If there is a book not listed that you are interested in reviewing, please speak to the professor well in advance. Papers are due February 9 @ 11:59pm.

**DPT/MA/PhD: Mission and Methodology Paper (Objective #3, 4)** - How does mission impact the discipline of theology? MA, PhD, and DPT students will write a 6-page paper on how missional theology intersects with their own understanding of their theological method. Papers should contain a definition of theology, or practical theology, its main goals or outcomes, and describe how missional theology might influence your own theological method. Students are encouraged to explain their discussion with reference to their own research. Papers are due February 9 @ 11:59pm.

**Missional Context Paper (Objective #3, 4)** - Understanding and adapting to cultural context is central to missional theology. In this assignment, your task is to critically analyze the missional context of a particular community, religious or otherwise, in order to understand the basic theologies underlying their worldview. Key questions to ask include: what is their understanding of God? What do they believe about their own identity as a community? What do they believe about "mission"? This may be a community to which you yourself belong, and you are encouraged to select a topic or issue that relates to your ministry/vocational context or research interest. Papers must be 6 pages, due March 8 @ 11:59pm.

**Research Paper (Objective #5, 6)** - the major paper for the course will explore a topic or figure within the scope of missional theology. A list of possible topics will be posted to the course page, but you may select a topic that is geared toward your own vocational goals or research interests. MDiv/MTS students will write a paper of 3,000-3,500 words, MA, PhD, and DPT paper length is 7,000 words. Papers are expected to contain a clear thesis statement, sound structure, and a bibliography of at least 10 sources (15 for MA/PhD/DPT papers), drawing from scholarly monographs and peer-reviewed articles. Papers are due April 5 @ 11:59pm.

## Course Outline

*Readings marked \* are required for MA/PhD/DPT students*

### I. Introduction to Missional Theology

#### **Week 1 (Jan. 8-12) - Introduction to Course: The History of Missional Theology**

*Missional Church*, Ch. 1

#### **Week 2 (Jan. 15-19) - The Context of Missional Theology**

Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Ch. 1

*Missional Church*, Ch. 2

\**Confident Witness - Changing World*, p. 127-140, 241-259

#### **Week 3 (Jan. 22-26) - Key Concepts in Missional Theology**

*The Missional Church in Perspective*, Ch. 1, 3

\**Missional Church in Perspective*, Ch. 2

#### **Week 4 (Jan. 29-Feb. 2) - Theologies of Culture**

Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Ch. 2

Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, Ch. 1

\*Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1-44

### II. Themes in Missional Theology

#### **Week 5 (Feb. 5-9) - The Missional God: Theology and Mission**

##### **Book Review/Methodology Paper Due - February 9th**

*Missional Church*, Ch. 4

Wright, *The Mission of God*, Ch. 3

\*Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*

#### **Week 6 (Feb. 12-16) - The Missional Christ: The Incarnation and Mission**

Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Ch. 3

Wright, *The Mission of God*, Ch. 4

\*Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, Ch. 1-3

**February 19-23 - Reading Week (No Class)**

**Week 7 (Feb. 26-29) - The Missional Church: Ecclesiology and Mission**

Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Ch. 6

*Missional Church*, Ch. 5

\*Vinay Samuel, *Mission as Transformation*, Ch. 9

**Week 8 (Mar. 4-8) - Missional Theology & Evangelical Identity**

**Missional Context Paper - March 8th**

Hunsberger, "Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology,"  
*Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*

Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism?* Ch. 1

\*Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Ch. 5-6

**Week 9 (Mar. 11-15) - Missional Theology and Ministry in North America**

*Missional Church*, Ch. 3

Hunsberger, Van Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, pp. 57-78

\*Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, Ch. 5

**Week 10 (Mar. 18-22) - The Practice of Mission**

*Missional Church*, Ch. 6

\**Missional Church*, Ch. 8; Zscheile, "A Missional Theology of Spiritual  
Formation," *Cultivating Sent Communities*

**Week 11 (Mar. 25-29) - Missional Church Leadership**

*Missional Church*, Ch. 7

Osmer, "Formation in the Missional Church," *Cultivating Sent Communities*

\**Missional Church*, Ch. 8

**Week 12 (Apr. 1-5) - Conclusion**

**Final Paper Due - April 5th**

Course wrap-up

**Academic Policies**

**Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other

fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

### **AODA**

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

### **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, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

### **Bookstore**

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or

by email at [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.