



McMaster Divinity College

A Spirituality of Exile: Forming Congregations in a Post-Christian Context MS 5XD5/6XD6 Winter 2024

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Office # 237

Class begins Tuesday, Jan. 9, at 4:00 pm EST.

Doctoral Students will meet three times as a separate group, Jan. 9, Feb. 27, Apr. 2. 6:00-7:00 pm EST. Information on these gatherings will be provided at the first meeting which will be an introductory gathering with focus on the unique aspects of this course for doctoral students.

Instructor Biography

Dr. Lee Beach is the Associate Professor of Christian Ministry, the Garbutt F. Smith Chair in Ministry Formation and the Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. He teaches courses on the church in culture, pastoral ministry and Christian spirituality. Prior to coming to MDC Lee pastored for over 20 years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada serving churches in Peterborough, Cobourg and Scarborough, Ontario. He is deeply involved in Ancaster Village church in Ancaster, ON where he now lives. He is the author of the book, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* (IVP) and co-author (With Dr. Franklin Pyles) of the book *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Four-Fold Gospel Today* (Wipf and Stock).

Course Description

Exile is an experience of living away from home. While most often associated with someone being sent away from their homeland, exilic experience can encompass more than physical banishment. We can experience exile in multiple ways including spiritually when we go through a time of experiencing a sense of God's absence. For ancient Israel exile was a profound experience of removal from their land and of struggle with where God was in their exilic experience. Through the exilic prayers of a number of Psalms and the book of Lamentations

Israel cultivated a sustaining communal spirituality that sustained them through this trying time. Today, the church in North America faces a time of cultural displacement and new challenges, yet it remains crucial to the mission of God in today's context. The same spiritual resources that sustained ancient Israel have potential to form and sustain congregations in Post-Christian contexts today. This course will examine the experience of exile, the reality of Israel's historic exile, the movements of lament, reorientation, memory and hope that sustain spiritual communities and how these resources apply to congregations today.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to explain a basic understanding of the meaning of exile, its Old Testament experience, its New Testament usages and its usefulness for the church in various contexts today.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to describe the implications of Old Testament exilic prayer language and its movements of lament, reorientation, memory and hope for the church today and provide ideas for their implementation in the life of a congregation.

Being

1. As a result of this course students will be able to offer a vision for communal spirituality and its importance to the church's mission today.

Doing

1. Upon completion of this course students will be equipped to help congregations consider and put into practice new spiritual disciplines in their corporate life.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify specific cultural and contextual issues that affect the effectiveness of the church's mission today and articulate how an exilic paradigm can empower the church to greater missional faithfulness.

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 be present in the weekly class gatherings. Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an attachment to an email sent 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 will be subject to a penalty of 3% for each day (including weekends) 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 weekdays (Mon.-Fri). I do not generally answer emails Saturdays or Sunday. 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 formal class time. If you would like to meet together via zoom or in person, please feel free to email me in order to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

Required Reading

Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture. Michael Frost (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2006).

The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom. Lee Beach (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015).

Virtuous Persuasion: A Theology of Christian Mission. Michael Niebauer (Lexham: Belleville, WA, 2022).

Assignments

1. Research Paper: Exile as an experience and a paradigm

Students will prepare a paper on the Topic *A Theology of Exile*. This paper should introduce the concept of exile as a multi-faceted human experience, some of the key theological themes and biblical texts that emerge in the literature of the Old and New Testaments around the theme of exile. This paper should also trace how connections can be made between a New Testament theology of exile and an Old Testament theology of exile. Finally, some brief reflection on exile as a theme for the church in a post-Christian context will also be valuable. The Paper should draw from course texts as well as several other relevant sources (a minimum of eight). This assignment is designed to address learning goals “knowing” #1 and “doing” #2.

This paper should be 4,000 words, double spaced in length and is due Feb. 13, 2024. It is worth 40% of the final course grade.

2. Reflection paper: Personal Formation and Congregational Experience

This paper invites students to reflect on how they have been personally and spiritually formed through involvement in the local church and/or other Christian groups that they have been a part of. We often think of spiritual formation in individual terms, and that is legitimate in many ways, but spiritual formation is also corporate. In what ways have you experienced corporate formation that aided your own personal spiritual growth as well as empowered you to participate in God’s mission in your community and/or world? What corporate practices have you experienced that have been helpful in communal formation? What practices have been harmful? While this is largely a personal reflection paper it should also include some interaction with research sources that help inform your reflection on your experience (a minimum of three). This assignment is designed to help students think about spirituality and spiritual formation from a corporate perspective and it addresses learning goal #1 under “being.”

This paper should be 7- 8 pages in length and is due Mar. 5, 2024, and will constitute 20% of the course grade.

3. Research Paper: Exilic Spirituality and Congregational Formation

Students should book an appointment with the instructor to discuss how this topic can relate to their overall doctoral topic and how the larger topic of exilic spirituality in a post-Christian age can connect to their more specific doctoral work.

Doctoral students will present their paper topic and basic outline to the other doctoral students in the course at a special gathering on Apr. 2, 6:00-7:00 EST. Group feedback will be given to each paper by each group member. More detailed instructions will be supplied at the start of the course.

This paper is designed to help students address learning goal #2 under “knowing,” goal # 1 under “being,” and #1&2 under “doing.”

he paper should be 6000 words (double spaced) in length and is due Apr. 2, 2024. It will constitute 40% of the course grade.

Tentative Course Schedule

Theology/Sociology of Exile

- Exile as a human experience
- Exile in the Bible
- Key biblical figures and their spiritual practices in exile
- The early church as an exilic community

Experiencing Exile both personally and corporately

- A Theology of God's Absence
- God's Presence in Absence

Israel's Response

- Lament
- Reorientation
- Memory
- Hope

Congregational spiritual formation in exile

- Practices of lament, reorientation, memory and hope

Taking Exile Personally (spiritual life when God seems absent)

- Practicing an exilic spirituality today

Additional notes:

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. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

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/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.