

# Preaching Theological Challenges

Wesley J. Wildman — Boston University — Spring 2010 — STH TC856/TT856

## *Course Description*

This course is both a preaching course and a theology course. The aim is to improve expertise in the preaching art as it is applied to theologically challenging subject matter. Participants will develop homiletical skills that apply to almost any sermon, and also study tough questions in theology that complicate the act of preaching. The course's operative premises are three: (1) no amount of homiletical skill can compensate for poorly thought-out theology, (2) homiletical excellence greatly assists in communicating complex theological ideas, and (3) intellectually compelling theology places special demands on the preaching task. The class will access theologically challenging questions through great literature, on the one hand, and through popular religious books written for children, teenagers, and adults, on the other hand. Two textbooks will guide the class throughout the semester, one in homiletics (Haddon) and one in theology (Cobb).

The class is intended for masters students who plan to make preaching or public speaking on religious topics part of their professional profile. Classes will meet once a week on Thursdays from 2:00 to 5:00. The format of classes will vary from seminar-style discussion of class material to sermon workshops where students preach to one another. The course counts (1) as an MTS Core Concentration course for Theology and for Area B, and also for Homiletics and for Area D; (2) as an MDiv Theology 3 Core Elective, and (3) as an MDiv Preaching course.

The main product of the course will be a project combining (1) a research paper on a theologically challenging theme, (2) a matched pair of sermons on the selected theme, and (3) an analysis of the two sermons from both homiletical and theological perspectives. This project's topic must be approved in advance by the instructor. The project will earn 50% of the course grade (2,000-word research paper, two twenty-minute sermons, and a 1,500-word homiletical and theological analysis of the sermons). One of the sermons will be preached in class, and evaluated for both content and delivery (20%). There will also be several class presentations on assigned reading material (10%). The remainder of the grade (20%) will be based on the quality of seminar participation, including attendance, timeliness, and discussion. Incompletes are not allowed—except when they are; paperwork is necessary. Plagiarism is not allowed—ever. Know the rules.

## *Required Books*

### **Textbooks:**

Cobb, John B. *Becoming a Thinking Christian* (Abingdon Press, 1993; 978-0687287529).

Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academic & Brazos Press, 2001; 978-0801022623).

### **Popular books on theological challenges:**

Gellman, Marc; Hartman, Thomas. *Where Does God Live? Questions and Answers for Parents and Children* (Liguori/Triumph, 1996; 978-0892439270).

Huss, Stephen F. *The God Question for Teens (and for their grownups too)*. (CreateSpace, 2009; 978-1440497285).

Warren, Rick. *God's Answers to Life's Difficult Questions* (Zondervan, 2006; 978-0310273936).

### **Literature on theological challenges:**

Leskov, Nikolai S. *On the Edge of the World* (St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1993; 978-0881411188).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Dover Publications; Unabridged edition, 1999; 978-0486406633).

Wiesel, Elie. *After the Darkness: Reflections on the Holocaust* (Schocken, 2002; 978-0805241822).

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## *Class Schedule*

- Jan 14* Introduction to the course, discussion of requirements, introduction of students  
> [Required Reading](#): none.
- Jan 21* *Where preaching and theology intersect: professional identity and spiritual harmony*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 1: “The Case for Expository Preaching”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): preface and chapter 1: “On Becoming What You Are: A Theologian”
- Jan 28* *The Theological Instincts of Children*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 2: “What’s the Big Idea?”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 2: “Ethics and Theology”  
> [Required Reading](#): Gellman & Hartman
- Feb 4* *Suffering and Evil*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 3: “Tools of the Trade”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 3: “Shaping Up”  
> [Required Reading](#): Wiesel
- Feb 11* *Tough Teen Questions*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 4: “The Road from Text to Sermon”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 4: “Biblical Authority”  
> [Required Reading](#): Huss
- Feb 18* *Religious Pluralism and Evangelism*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 5: “The Arrow and the Target”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 5: “Christians and Jews”  
> [Required Reading](#): Leskov
- Feb 25* *Adult*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 6: “The Shapes Sermons Take”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 6: “Professionals: Help and Hindrance”  
> [Required Reading](#): Warren
- Mar 4* *The Problem with Religion*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 7: “Making Dry Bones Live”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 7: “Christian Counterattack”  
> [Required Reading](#): Nietzsche
- Mar 11* *NO CLASS: Spring Recess*
- Mar 18* *????*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 8: “Start with a Bang and Quite All Over”  
> [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 8: “A Critique of Economics”  
> [Sermon Presentation #1, #2](#)
- Mar 25* *????*  
> [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 9: “The Dress of Thought”

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- > [Required Cobb Reading](#): chapter 9: “A Critique of the University”
- > [Sermon Presentation #3, #4](#)

*Apr 1*    *????*

- > [Required Robinson Reading](#): chapter 10: “How to Preach So People Will Listen”
- > [Required Cobb Reading](#): “An Afterword on Church Theology”
- > [Sermon Presentation #5, #6](#)

*Apr 8*    *????*

- > [Required Reading](#): none.
- > [Sermon Presentation #7, #8](#)

*Apr 15*    *????*

- > [Required Reading](#): none.
- > [Sermon Presentation #9, #10](#)

*Apr 22*    *NO CLASS: BU Monday Schedule*

*Apr 29*    *Conclusion*

- > [Required Reading](#): none.
- > [Projects due before class.](#)