

Christianity and the Postmodern World - TH 760
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte
Fall 2011
Dr. Alan Myatt

Class meetings - Sept. 10, Oct. 8, Nov. 5, 5-7pm.

Course Description - For the past three decades, attempts to understand the cultural transitions from the 20th to the 21st century have focused on the notion of the “postmodern”. The meaning and implications of this term have been hotly debated across the entire spectrum of the academy as well as in many popular venues. More recently trends labeled as postmodern have been having a direct impact on the Evangelical church. Whatever else may be the case, it seems clear that a major cultural shift is underway, with significant implications for all areas of life, including the life and ministry of the local church. In this course we propose to explore various aspects of this cultural phenomenon through the reading of a selection of relevant texts, as well as an analysis of some examples of its manifestation in popular media. The course will conclude with a discussion of potential responses and practical implications for the church.

Objectives - After completing this course the student should have competence in understanding and discussing the issues, both theoretical and practical, involved in postmodern philosophy and its implications. In particular, the student will be able to:

- 1) Understand the basic presuppositions of postmodernist thought and how such thought compares and contrasts with both modernist and biblical ideas.
- 2) Recognize and analyze postmodern influences and ideas in popular culture and provide positive responses.
- 3) Create and effectively communicate a biblical apologetic to postmodern persons in a culturally relevant fashion.

Requirements: This course will require at least 135 hours to complete. This total breaks down as follows:

Reading of texts, writing reflective responses, forum discussions	72 hours
Film and critical analysis	10 hours
Harry Potter film/book	5 hours
Term Paper	40 hours
Class Discussions	6 hours

Please note that the hourly tracking has to do with new US gov regulations. By tracking hours you will be helping me to know, on average how long it takes to do the assignments. I will explain more in class, but do not let this create any anxiety! Students will be provided a form on which to keep track of their hours.

1) Read the texts listed for each session before class and submit a reading log documenting number of pages and percentage of total required reading completed. Upload this to Sakai prior to class.

2) Watch a postmodern themed film and write a review and apologetic response to the world view represented. Imagine that you have been asked to write this for a magazine and the editor has given you a page limit of 2000 words. After that the editor will start cutting, so you want to make sure you get it in the final form the way *you* want it. Film suggestions may be found at <http://www.onpostmodernism.com/> Due on Nov. 5.

3) Watch one of the Harry Potter films, or read one of the Harry Potter books in preparation for discussion on Nov. 5. If you have already done this, then review some of this material to have it fresh in your mind.

4) Participate in forum discussions of the class material on Sakai. Since internet discussions on blogs and other sites are a prominent medium in post-modern culture, you need to be adept at using it as a learning, teaching and evangelizing tool. You need not wait for someone else to start a thread. These discussions should be on going as you are doing your reading. Feel free to bring up relevant articles or popular media (TV, film, etc.) as well. The hope is to stir up some lively conversation that will explore the themes and deal with questions we may not have time for in class. Students should spend time on this every week. Guidelines for your participation will be provided.

5) Write a final term paper, analyzing a theme, author, work or other cultural event or phenomenon relevant to postmodernism, including your response from a biblical perspective and your understanding of the practical implications for ministry. The paper should show evidence of having consulted an expanded bibliography, beyond the required course reading. Papers should be about 15-20 pages, and follow either Turabian or APA format (counseling students only). A guideline for grading will be posted on Sakai. This is due on Dec. 5th.

Grading: In order to receive an A in this course 100% of the reading must be completed, for a B 85%, for a C 70%. Completing the required reading will make it *possible* to receive the associated grade, but does not guarantee it. This will be determined by performance on the other assignments. The term paper will count for 60% of the final grade. The movie review will count for 20% and class/forum participation and reflective responses to reading will count 10% each.

Assignments will be given a point value on a 100 point scale. Points are earned from a starting point of zero, not taken off from a starting point of 100. Final grades will be calculated according to the above percentages weighted for each assignment and letter grades will be applied with cutoffs as follows: A 94, A- 90, B+ 87, B 84, B- 80, C+ 77, C 74, C- 70, D+ 67, D 63, D- 60, F below 60.

Late work: All late work will be penalized by a deduction of one point for each day of lateness, unless arrangements are made ahead of time. Extenuating circumstances will be considered in case of dire emergency. Work turned in after December 6th will normally require that an

extension has been approved by the seminary. If you anticipate a problem contact the professor.

Required texts:

The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism. 3rd edition. Stuart Sim, ed. Routledge, 2011.
ISBN-13: 978-0415583329

Unlocking Harry Potter: Five Keys for the Serious Reader. John Granger. Zossima Press, 2007.
ISBN-13: 978-0972322126

Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism. Millard J. Erickson. IVP Academic, 2001.
ISBN-13: 978-0830826575

Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge.
Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Zondervan, 2009.
ISBN-13: 978-0310324690

The Future of Religion. Gianni Vattimo, Richard Rorty and Santiago Zabala. Columbia University Press, 2007.
ISBN-13: 978-0231134958

Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views. Myron B. Penner, ed. Brazos Press, 2005.
ISBN-13: 978-1587431081

The Anti-Christ. Friedrich Nietzsche, SoHo Books, 2010.
ISBN-13: 978-1936594269

A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey, Brian D. McLaren. Jossey-Bass, 2008.
ISBN-13: 978-0470248409

Simulacra and Simulation (The Body, In Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism)
Jean Baudrillard. University of Michigan Press, 1995.
ISBN-13: 978-0472065219

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please note that missed classes will require a significant amount of make-up work in the form of extra reading and writing that will require more than the two hours of missed class time. Make-up work for unexcused absences will not be allowed.

Sept 10 – Introduction to Postmodernism

<http://nmc.loyola.edu/intro/postmod/table.htm#>

Sim: Preface, Chpt 1-3 (44pp)

Erickson: Part 1, Part 2 (96pp)

Vanhoozer: Preface, Introduction, Part 1 (187pp)

The Anti-Christ

Friedrich Nietzsche, (86pp)

Vattimo, Rorty and Zabala (81pp)

Penner, Introduction, part 1 (140pp)

(634pp)

Recommended:

“Postmodernism and Truth” By Daniel Dennett

<http://www.butterfliesandwheels.org/2003/postmodernism-and-truth/>

“Can Humanists Talk to Postmodernists?” Mark Goldblatt

http://ducts.org/06_06/html/reviews/goldblatt.html

Oct 8 - Postmodernism and Christian Faith

Sim: chpt 7-8 (20pp)

Erickson: Part 3, Part 4 (145pp)

Vanhoozer: Part 2, Conclusion (271pp)

Penner, part 2: (80pp)

McLaren: (200pp)

“Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and The Postmodern Turn” J. P. Moreland
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 48, 1, 2005, p75. (13pp)

(729pp)

Nov 5 - Postmodernism and culture

Baudrillard, (164pp)

Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment. Brian Godawa.
InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0830837137
On reserve. Chapters 2&4 (35pp)

Granger (312pp)

Sim: Chpts 3-6, 9-19 (179pp)

A Postmodern reader / edited by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon. State University of New York Press, 1993. ISBN-13: 978-0791416389

On reserve

Preface

Zygmunt Bauman "Postmodernity, or Living with Ambivalence" 9-24

Jean-François Lyotard Excerpts from *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* 71-87

John McGowan, Excerpts from *Postmodernism and its Critics.* 203-222

Ihab Hassan "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" 273-286

Michel Foucault Excerpts from *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction.* 333-341

Cornel West. "Black Culture and Postmodernism" 390-397

Agnes Heller, "Existentialism, Alienation, Postmodernism: Cultural Movements as Vehicles of Change in the Patterns of Everyday Life" 497-509 (90pp)

Postmodernism: a reader. Thomas Docherty. Columbia University Press, 1992. ISBN-13: 978-0231082211

On reserve

Frederic Jameson "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 62-91

Umberto Eco "The City of Robots" 200-205

Charles Jencks "The Emergent Rules" 281-291

Paolo Portoghesis "Postmodern" 308-315 (51pp)

(831pp)

2194pp total