

Christianity and the Postmodern World - TH 760
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte
Fall 2008
Dr. Alan Myatt

Class meetings - Sept. 6, Oct. 4, Nov. 1, 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.

Requirements

This is a reading course, meaning that most of the work will be done outside of class. The requirements are the following:

- 1) read the texts listed for each session and bring to class a 1-2 page list of questions and key concepts for each text that will be useful for stimulating class discussions. For shorter articles a half page will be sufficient. This is to be accompanied by a statement of the reading that has been completed. Only very limited credit will be given for partial completion of reading assignments.
- 2) write a brief review (5 pages) of a movie or TV show (a series or a single episode of a series) that deals with postmodern themes. Examples and suggestions may be taken from <http://www.onpostmodernism.com/> This is due on Oct. 4.
- 3) 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 pages, double spaced. This is due on Dec. 1st.

Grading: completion of readings and classroom participation - 50%, TV or movie review - 20%, term paper 30%.

Required texts:

David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Millard Erickson. *Truth or Consequences: the promise and peril of postmodernism.* (InterVarsity Press, 2001).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*.

Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo. *The Future of Religion*. (Columbia University Press, 2005).

Myron B. Penner, ed. *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*. (Brazos Press, 2005)

The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives, by Leonard Sweet, Andy Crouch, Brian McLaren, Erwin McManus, Michael Horton, Frederica Matthews-Greene, (Zondervan 2003).

Additional readings from the following on reserve:

A Postmodern Reader. Joseph Natoli, ed. (SUNY, 1993).

Lost and Philosophy. Sharon M. Kaye, ed. (Blackwell, 2008)

Recommended text: Douglas Groothuis. *Truth Decay*. (InterVarsity Press, 2000).

Class Schedule:

Sept. 6: Introduction to Postmodernism

David Lyon, *Postmodernity*.

Millard Erickson. *Truth or Consequences: the promise and peril of postmodernism*. Parts 1 - 2.

Postmodernism Table

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

Oct. 4: Postmodernism from a secularist perspective.

Articles may be found on reserve in the library and on-line. (Keep in mind that many of these articles are fairly short, so the list looks like more reading than it actually is. The two books are also quite short.)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*.

Zygmunt Bauman, "Postmodernity, or Living with Ambivalence" in *A Postmodern Reader*. pp. 9-24.

Jean-François Lyotard, "Excerpts from The Postmodern Condition, A Report on Knowledge." in *A Postmodern Reader*. pp. 71-90.

John McGowan, "Excerpts from Postmodernism and its Critics." in *A Postmodern Reader*. pp. 203-220.

Tom Grimwood, "Lost in Codes: Interpretation and Deconstruction in Lost's Narratives" pp. 111-121.

Karen Kaffney, “‘The Others are Coming’ : Ideology and Otherness in Lost” in *Lost and Philosophy*. pp. 136-147.

Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo. *The Future of Religion*.

“Hyperlink to Hinduphobia: Online Hatred, Extremism and Bigotry Against Hindus.”
http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/pdf/hate_report_2007.pdf Peruse this article to get a feel for how the notions of tolerance and pluralism are being applied.

Millard Erickson. *Truth or Consequences: the promise and peril of postmodernism*. (InterVarsity Press, 2001). Part 3.

“How to Deconstruct Almost Anything--My Postmodern Adventure” by Chip Morningstar
<http://www.info.ucl.ac.be/~pvr/decon.html> A humorous encounter with postmodernism written from outside of academia.

Recommended:

“Postmodernism and Truth” By Daniel Dennett
<http://www.butterfliesandwheels.com/articleprint.php?num=13>

“Can Humanists Talk to Postmodernists?” Mark Goldblatt
http://ducts.org/06_06/html/reviews/goldblatt.html

Nov. 1: Postmodernism and the future of Evangelicalism.

Myron B. Penner, ed. *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views*.

The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives, by Leonard Sweet, Andy Crouch, Brian McLaren, Erwin McManus, Michael Horton, Frederica Matthews-Greene.

Millard Erickson. *Truth or Consequences: the promise and peril of postmodernism*. Part 4.