

*Theology in Context Seminar*  
**Christianity and Culture**  
REL472 / 4 Credits / Northwestern College / Spring 2009

**Instructor:** Dr. Michael Andres, [andres@nwcsiowa.edu](mailto:andres@nwcsiowa.edu)

**Office/Hours:** VPH115; Mon, Tue, Fri 3:30-5:00pm; Wed 9:00-11:30; ext. 7079

**Class Time:** TuTh 9:25-10:55      **Class Location:** VPH 202

**Course Description:**

This course is a research seminar in which students will explore contemporary questions and issues in light of the Christian religious and theological tradition. It features the writing and presentation of a major paper, discussions, analysis and critique of research. This semester we will explore Christian engagement with culture(s).

**Course Objectives:**

- To further develop careful research and analytical skills.
- To reflect carefully on the meaning and application of the Bible in assessing Christian engagement with and cultivation of culture(s).
- To think more clearly, consistently, historically and biblically about Christian engagement of culture(s) in a contemporary context, especially the North American cultural context.
- Survey key interdisciplinary (theological, biblical, missiological, etc.) concepts that are useful in interpreting culture.
- Explore several current theories about the role and religious/theological content of popular culture in North American society and Christian faith.

**Primary Texts:**

- Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Blackwell, 2005).
- Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Intervarsity Press, 2008).
- Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998).
- H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture, expanded edition, fiftieth anniversary* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1951, new edition 2001).

**Course Requirements:**

- *Class attendance/participation:* Participation and attendance are mandatory; one express purpose of this course is to discuss theological and religious issues in a seminar format. After *three* unexcused absences, students will be graded down one half letter grade for every subsequent unexcused absence.
- *Readings:* Reading should be completed *before* class time listed. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of forthcoming reading assignments given in syllabus.
- *Written Projects:* Three written analyses are required, including a major integration paper.
- *Oral Presentations:* One oral presentation is required.

## Course Assessment:

- Oral Presentation (20%) = 100 points
- Book Analyses (40%) = 200 points / 100 points each
- Integration Paper (40%) = 200 points

## Final Exam Schedule:

No final exam.

## Guidelines for Oral Presentations (30 minute max. / 100 points):

Please pass out a one-page handout with an outline of your presentation on one side, and a bibliography on the other side; at top of handout include your name, REL 472, date, and title of presentation (give me a copy *at least one half hour in advance* of class time and I will copy it free of charge).

Focus on the theologian/Christian thinker/Church leader as an exemplar of a general approach to Christian engagement with their particular culture. Explain both their suggested *analysis* of and *practice* within that culture.

The objective of the oral presentation is to *teach your classmates* about your given subject. Therefore your presentation should be clear, concise, persuasive, and informative.

Demonstrate your superior grasp of the subject, and be prepared to respond to questions. You may use OHP, video, PowerPoint, marker board, or any other media available to enhance the learning process. Students may be graded on the material you present to them, so strive for accuracy.

In preparation you should *thoroughly research* your subject. Do not merely summarize the reading/article given to rest of class. You should consult dictionaries and encyclopedias of religion, theology, church history, biblical studies, etc., works treating your subject, and journal articles. Read various sources; be sure to read sources from alternate viewpoints on your subject (e.g. there are differing views on the nature, limits, and value of natural theology). You should also read relevant portions of primary sources (e.g. actually read relevant parts of Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries)! You may use a few key quotations but do not flood your presentation with quotes. As always, do not plagiarize! You must explain the subject in your own words.

Pick out and focus on key, crucial areas in your subject. Be discerning. Put emphasis on main themes ("best") rather than less-central ("good/interesting") issues; you do not need to say everything there is to say on your subject. Include very brief historical background only if necessary, but omit if unnecessary. Historical background and cultural context *should be around ten minutes* of oral presentation. While cultural context is crucial, this is not meant to be a mere biography of the subject. Focus on the *views and arguments* of your subject. Be fair, nuanced, and sensitive to all views on your subject. This presentation is not designed to be an assault on "false views." Carefully present your subject, noting various differing views, then analyze and evaluate (e.g. specify the strengths and weaknesses of Moltmann on creation). Try to empathize with and understand the persuasive power of the view you are evaluating, even if you do not finally agree with it. However, do not be afraid to state any fair criticisms of the view. Evaluation should be based on Scripture, church tradition (key theologians, creeds, and confessions), reasonable arguments, findings from general revelation (other disciplines,

science, etc.), and Christian experience (but take care that you do not lapse into mere feelings or opinions).

This is a 400 level, capstone course – the standard is high! Demonstrate excellence in your presentation. Be well prepared. If you have difficulties come see Prof. Andres ASAP.

You can find the oral presentation evaluation form [here](#).

### **Guidelines for Book Analysis #1** (2000 words / 100 points / Due January 27):

Students are to analyze and evaluate the five models of Christianity and culture in H. Richard Niebuhr's classic text *Christ and Culture*. First briefly explain each model of Christian cultural engagement as described by Niebuhr, giving one historical example of each. Second, explain the following evaluations of Niebuhr's models from Yoder (via Carter), Hauerwas/Willimon, Marsden, Gustafson, and Crouch:

- Craig A. Carter, "[The Legacy of an Inadequate Christology: Yoder's Critique of Niebuhr's Christ and Culture](#)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 2003).
- Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Abingdon, 1989), 36-48 (see 'content' section of synapse).
- George Marsden, "[Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr's Categories](#)," *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 115, no. 1 (Fall 1999).
- James Gustafson, "An Appreciative Interpretation," Preface to the 50th-anniversary edition of *Christ and Culture*," xxi-xxxv.
- Andy Crouch, *Culture Making*, 178-183.

Focus each author's main *argument(s)* for their evaluation. Third, give arguments for *your view* of the usefulness of Niebuhr's models. Students will be evaluated according to their overall grasp of the subject matter and arguments, the clarity of explanation, the fairness and depth of analysis, and the cogency of the arguments given in their paper. Grammar and spelling are important. For further clarification on assessment see [Grading Guidelines](#). See also the [Writing and Submission Guidelines](#). Please note that a hard copy of written assignments should be submitted to instructor at class time on due date and an electronic copy to Synapse.

### **Guidelines for Book Analysis #2** (2000 words / 100 points / Due March 31):

Students are to analyze and evaluate the approach to Christian engagement with culture in Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (MC). First, briefly summarize the analysis of contemporary North American culture in MC (chapters 2-3). Second, succinctly articulate the MC approach to missional engagement with culture in the areas of witness, church, community, leadership, and structure. Third, evaluate whether you think the approach of MC to cultural engagement is (i) biblical and theologically sound, and (ii) whether you think it would be effective in the North American cultural context. What are its strengths and weaknesses? Give arguments and evidence for your evaluation. Evaluation section should be at least 1/3 of entire paper.

### **Guidelines for Integration Paper** (3000 words / 200 points / Due May 14):

This paper consists in two parts: (1) state and argue for *your own view* on Christian analysis and engagement with culture(s), and (2) demonstrate how *your view* relates, integrates, and influences the other disciplines in both religion and the liberal arts. You need not discuss every

single topic and issue listed below, but you should discuss several of the most significant from each paragraph.

(1) Articulate carefully *your* view of Christianity and culture. Make sure to include discussion of key issues germane to each doctrine. Interact with models, tools, and strategies covered in course.

(2) Explain and demonstrate how your view of Christianity and culture interacts, integrates, supports, challenges, forms and is formed by the following, and give at least *one fully developed example of each*:

(a) One *theological doctrine* (God, humanity, sin, Christ, sanctification, last things, etc.);

(b) by other *disciplines within the study of religion*; e.g. church history, missiology, New and Old Testament studies, Christian ethics, Christian education, youth ministry, philosophy of religion, and so on;

(c) other *disciplines in the liberal arts* (e.g. world or American history, psychology, sociology, political science, philosophy, literature, music, arts, and hard sciences like biology, chemistry physics, etc.).

Your essay should show significant research, do not use only course texts as resources. The extent of your research should be reflected in your bibliography. Students will be evaluated according to their overall grasp of the subject matter, the clarity of explanation, the extent and depth of integration, the truthfulness and cogency of the arguments given, and the quality of research demonstrated in their paper. See [Writing and Submission Guidelines](#).

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:**

Northwestern College is a Christian academic community committed to integrity and honesty in all intellectual and academic matters. All students, faculty, and staff are expected to follow the highest standards of honesty and ethical behavior. In addition, as members of the campus community all students, faculty, and staff have a responsibility to help other members of the community to demonstrate integrity in their actions. Behavior that violates academic integrity can take a variety of forms including, but not limited to, cheating on tests, quizzes, papers, and projects; plagiarism using unauthorized material; willful misrepresentation of evidence and arguments.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words or ideas, with the intent of deceiving the reader concerning the origin of the words, ideas, or images. (Excerpts from *NWC Student Handbook*, 11)

### **Course Assistance:**

I have an open door policy. Please come by my office, preferably at office hours, if you have any questions or are having any problems with the reading, lectures, note taking, written project, etc. Or come by for a cup of tea and chat about life. For further assistance in academic matters help is available through Tom Trusdell at Academic Support (VPH 125B).

### **Christianity and Culture Web Pages:**

[Culture Making](#)

[The Gospel and Our Culture Network](#)  
[Culture 11](#)  
[ThinkChristian](#)  
[a time to tear down | A Time to Build Up](#)  
[The Intersect](#)  
[Christ and Pop Culture](#)  
[The Evangelical Outpost](#)  
[Between Two Worlds](#)  
[in the open space: God & culture](#)  
[the church and postmodern culture](#)  
[C. Orthodoxy](#)

## Course Schedule:

\* Indicates that text is in "Content" section of course Synapse page.

Date	Topic	Reading/Assignment
Jan 13	<b>Introduction / Basic Theology Exam</b>  <i>Christian Cultural Analysis and Engagement</i>	
Jan 15	<b>Meaning and Analysis of Culture</b>	Crouch, Intro-ch 1; Cobb, Intro-ch 1
Jan 20	<b>Are Cultures Harmful? Can they be Redemptive?</b>	Cobb, ch 2-3; Lynch, "Can Popular Culture Be Bad For Your Health?"*
Jan 22	<b>Tools for Cultural Analysis</b>	Cobb, ch 4; Crouch, ch 2-3
Jan 27	<b>Models of Cultural Engagement</b>  <i>Cultural Engagement in the Biblical Era</i>	Crouch, ch 4-5; <u>Book Analysis Due</u>
Jan 29	<b>Cultural Engagement in the Creation Narrative</b>	Crouch, ch 6-Interlude
Feb 3	<b>Cultural Engagement in Ancient Israel</b>	Crouch, ch 7
Feb 5	<b>Cultural Engagement the Gospels</b>	Crouch, ch 8
Feb 10	<b>Cultural Engagement in the First Century Church</b>	Crouch, ch 9
Feb 12	<b>A Look Ahead: Engaging Culture in the Eschaton</b>  <i>Cultural Engagement in the Church Era</i>	Crouch, ch 10-11
Feb 17	<b>Tertullian, Clement, and Pre-Constantinian Greco-Roman Culture</b>	Tertullian, <u>"Of Public Shows"</u> ; Clement, <u>"Exhortation to the Heathen"</u> , esp sect V-VIII.
Feb 19	<b>Augustine and Post-Constantinian Greco-Roman Culture</b>	Augustine, <i>On Christian Doctrine</i> , 2:XVI-XLII (26-62)*
Feb 24	<b>Thomas Aquinas, Christendom, and High Middle Ages Culture</b>	Aquinas excerpts, "Society and Political Philosophy," IV*



Feb 26	<b>Martin Luther, John Calvin, and 16<sup>th</sup> Century European Culture</b>	Luther, "Secular Authority"*; Calvin, <i>Institutes</i> , III.IX-X*
Mar 3	<b>Menno Simons, Anabaptists and 16<sup>th</sup> Century European Culture</b>	Simons, " <a href="#">The New Birth</a> "; <a href="#">"The Schleithem Confession"</a>
Mar 5	<b>Friedrich Schleiermacher, the Enlightenment, and Early Modern Culture</b>	Schleiermacher, " <a href="#">On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers</a> "
<b><u>Spring Break – March 7-17</u></b>		
Mar 19	<b>Fundamentalism and Modern Culture: J. Gresham Machen, Dispensationalism, and the Scopes Trial</b>	Machen, " <a href="#">Christianity and Culture</a> "; Clough, " <a href="#">Dispensationalist View of Christ and Culture</a> "; Bob Jones University, <a href="#">Biblical Separation</a>
Mar 24	<b>Karl Barth, Nazism, and Modern Culture</b>	<a href="#">Barmen Declaration</a> ; Barth, " <a href="#">Letter to Mozart</a> "
Mar 26	<b>Paul Tillich, Liberal Christianity, and Modern Culture</b>	Tillich, <i>Theology of Culture</i> , 40-51*
	<b><i>Theological Analysis of Contemporary American Culture</i></b>	
Mar 31	<b>Understanding Contemporary North American Culture</b>	Guder, ch 2-3; <a href="#">Book Analysis #2 Due</a>
Apr 2	<b>God and Humanity in American Pop Culture</b>	Cobb, ch 5-6; Smith, " <a href="#">Moralistic Therapeutic Deism</a> "
Apr 7	<b>Sin and Salvation in American Pop Culture</b>	Cobb, ch 7-8
<b><u>Easter Holiday – April 9-13</u></b>		
Apr 14	<b>Eschatology in American Pop Culture</b>	Cobb, ch 9-Conclusion
	<b><i>Christian Engagement with Contemporary American Culture</i></b>	
Apr 16	<b>Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, the Christian Right, and Modern American Culture</b>	Dobson, " <a href="#">Education Turned Perversion</a> "; " <a href="#">Lift Up Your Voice... and Vote!</a> "
Apr 21	<b>John Paul II, Post-Vatican II Catholicism, and Modern American Culture</b>	John Paul II, " <a href="#">Centesimus Annus</a> "
Apr 23	<b>J. Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Modern American Culture</b>	Hauerwas and Willimon, <i>Resident Aliens</i> , ch 2.*
Apr 28	<b>Lesslie Newbigin and Modern/Postmodern American Culture</b>	Newbigin, <i>The Gospel in a Pluralist Society</i> , ch 15*

Apr 30	<b>Lamin Sanneh, Post-Western Christianity, and Modern/Postmodern Culture</b>	Sanneh, <i>Whose Religion is Christianity?</i> , Intro-ch1*
May 5	<b>Emerging Church and Modern/Postmodern American Culture</b>	Gibbs/Bolger, "Transforming Secular Space"*
May 7	<b>Tim Keller, D.A. Carson, the Reformed-Evangelical Church, and Modern/Postmodern American Culture</b>	Keller, " <a href="#">Being the Church in Our Culture</a> "; Carson, <i>Christ and Culture Revisited</i> , ch 6*
May 14	<b><u>Integration Paper Due</u></b>	