



Mirrors of Modern Culture Online DC 943Z

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Meeting Location: Online
Office: Reid Hall, room 14
Office Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10:00 to 12:00
Elective. Three credit hours

Course Description

The course addresses three concerns:

- (1) the minister's perennial task of sensing the spirit of the age;
- (2) in a time of rapid change, discerning the cutting edge of an emerging generation;
- (3) in a time of cultural disestablishment, adjusting the Church's mission and articulation of the Gospel. The arts such as music, painting, literature, and architecture provide lead indications for the task.

Building on biblical and theological foundations, students look closely at the relationship between the Gospel and culture, the similarities between Christian piety and aesthetic experience, and how to read the theological commitments in works of art. Modern media and youth culture receive special attention in addition to the important artists and artistic periods.

Relationship of Course to Institutional Mission and Purpose

As a part of the faculty-approved curriculum of Erskine Seminary, this course seeks to "educate persons for service in the Christian Church." Based upon the goals of the Doctor of Ministry program as enunciated in the current catalog this course will address the following specific goals:

- (1) Graduates will be prepared to articulate the relation between the Bible and the contemporary contexts in which ministry takes place;
- (2) Graduates will engage in contemporary theological discussion;
- (3) Graduates will explore the contextual dimensions which affect Christian ministry today, notably the data of contemporary life at the points of culture, congregational and community demographics, ethical issues, and major events of the day; and



- (4) Graduates will be prepared to communicate the Bible's message, so as to make clear that its meaning is relevant for today.

Course Objectives

Based upon both the catalog description and the mission and purpose of the institution, the following learning outcomes are set forth for the learners in this course:

1. To critically engage the current American cultural landscape through the media of movies, television, and technology.
2. To critically evaluate the messages and meanings conveyed through these media from a distinctively Christian worldview.
3. To critically discuss observations, interpretations, and analyses of modern American culture in the 21st century.
4. To collectively discover ways in which we can apply our new found skills of cultural exegesis to the practice of church ministry.

Course Outline and Schedule

Module One	The Mission of the Church & Critical Cultural Engagement
Module Two	Movies: "The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly"
Module Three	Television: "Good Morning, America"
Module Four	Technology: "Can You Hear Me Now?"

The purpose of this course will be to examine critically certain aspects of American culture. This includes discerning redemptive analogies that one may use to more effectively communicate the Christian message and analyzing how some Christians use movies, television, and technology to communicate the gospel in a post-Christian and postmodern cultural context and thus more effectively carry out the Mission of the Church.

Resources

Students are expected to secure their own copies of all required textbooks. As a convenience, the seminary has a bookstore portal of the website at <http://www.erskineseminary.org/bookstore.html>. There you will find links to familiar vendors (CBD, Amazon, B&N, and Books-A-Million) and can check availability of texts, compare prices, and place orders. The ETS SBA will receive a modest percentage of the profits from students' and professors' purchases through this portal. The Erskine Campus Bookstore will carry a limited number of copies of every required text and orders for books can be placed through the Campus Bookstore.



Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture, William D. Romanowski. Revised and Expanded Edition, Baker Publishing Group, 2007.

Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue, Robert K. Johnson. 2nd Edition. Baker Academic, 2006.

Students may purchase either one of the following two texts:

The Truth is Out There: Christian Faith and the Classics of TV Science Fiction, Thomas Bertonneau and Kim Paffenroth. Brazos Press, 2006.

OR

Watching What we Watch: Prime Time Television Through the Lens of Faith, Walter Davis, Jr. et al. Geneva Press, 2001.

The other text you are expected to purchase is:

Understanding Evangelical Media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication, Quentin J. Shultze & Robert H. Woods (Eds.). IVP Academic, 2008.

Grading Criteria and Scale

The following criteria will be used by the professor to assess student work for this course. In order for a student to earn an "A" for course work submitted, it must reflect exceptional skill and mastery above the minimum requirement of fulfilling the assignment as stipulated in the course syllabus.

- A Level Work* = Exemplary ability to differentiate constituent parts; assess and critique theories, thoughts, ideas, concepts, proposals, and relevant literature; and the ability to reason in a logical and compelling manner.
- B Level Work* = Reflects above average grasp of the subject matter; displays a superior ability to use new knowledge in a creative manner; and can demonstrate an above average ability to discriminate among alternative viewpoints.
- C Level Work* = Adequate but not exceptional ability to think cogently and clearly; sufficient ability to understand and comprehend subject matter; and a satisfactory ability to integrate and organize course concepts in a logical and coherent manner.



Erskine Seminary Grading Scale:

100-95	A	87-86	B-
94-93	A-	85-84	C+
92-91	B+	83-80	C
90-88	B		

Assignments are due when stated for each module. Grade penalties apply for assignments that you submit past the stated due date. Students do have the option of submitting work ahead of the stated schedule and by doing so speed up the pace at which you complete the course.

Course Components

FAQ's

- (1) When submitting your assignments online via email attachment to me, please include on each submission (1) your name; (2) the course name and number; and (3) the assignment number.
- (2) Use Microsoft Word format to submit your assignments since this is the default software for the seminary.
- (3) I will automatically reduced by one letter grade any assignment submitted past the posted due date. Excessively delinquent assignments may receive a further reduction.

Course Assignments

Interactive Component

Part of the course requirements includes your regular participation in the online classroom much like you would participate in an on campus class. The difference is your participation will be online through keyboarding. I expect you to upload assignments as directed for other students to read and respond to online. I also expect you to respond to the **Going Deeper** question for each module and to respond to the postings of other students to the question. In addition, you will be required to read and react to one other student's assignment during the month of a given module. Part of your grade for the course will include the quantity and quality of your online participation. Please review the online participation grading rubric (below) so that you know ahead of time what I expect for the grades awarded. I will equally average the grade for online participation with the other grades earned for course assignments. I do not accept online postings past the stated due date. This means that you cannot go back and make up online postings later in the semester. Postings are due during the month when you are working on a given module.



The following rubric provides an overview of my expectations concerning your interaction online:

	Wonderful! A	Great! B	Acceptable C	Inadequate D	Poor F	Score
Stays on Task:	The student follows teacher's instructions and guidance.	Occasionally the student gets off task and gets back on task without the need of the teacher's assistance.	The student is on task most of the time and is responsive to guidance meant to bring the student back on task.	The student starts out following the specific instructions of the assignment but rapidly moves off subject.	The student is unresponsive to instructor guidance.	
The student participates in the discussion in timely and substantive ways.	The student posts to the online discussion 4 or more times with posts that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted question.	The student posts to the online discussion 3 times with posts that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted question.	The student posts to the online discussion 2 times with posts that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted question.	The student posts to the online discussion 1 times with a post that is on task and contributes in a substantive way to the posted question.	The student has not participated in ways that are on task and contribute in a substantive way to the posted question.	
The student demonstrates a knowledge base from assigned texts.	The student's posts are clearly built on familiarity with and comprehension of assigned materials.	The student's posts are clearly built on familiarity with and limited comprehension of assigned materials.	The student's posts are clearly built on some familiarity with and comprehension of assigned materials.	The student's posts are built on some familiarity with and limited comprehension of assigned materials.	The student's posts demonstrate a lack of familiarity with and comprehension of assigned materials.	

Module One

- Read Introduction to Mirrors of Modern Culture that I provide for you in the online classroom for this course.
- When you are finished with it read the required text *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*, William D. Romanowski. Revised and Expanded Edition. Based upon your reading of these texts, I want you to particularize the concepts and principles set out in the both by identifying specific ways in which you can have your “eyes wide open” as you critique American culture.



- Using both resources, write a 3-5 page (double-spaced) analysis of the relationship between the Mission of the Church and critical cultural engagement. Why is it important to begin our cultural analysis with a discussion of the Mission of the Church? What principles or techniques from both sources did you use in your cultural analysis and why? In a final segment of the paper, I want you to consider some specific and concrete ways you can go about helping the members of your congregation or faith community to be more adept at evaluating American popular culture. Upload* your paper to the online classroom so that other class members may read it and respond to it. **In addition, send me a copy as an email attachment.**
- Each student should read at least one other student's paper (if applicable) and react to it in the online forum provided sometime during month for this module. This expectation is the same for each module in the course.

Due: last day of first month of the course.

*Steps to upload your assignment:

1. Find the "Depot" discussion forum in the online classroom.
2. Click on that link and you will find assignment listed there.
3. Click on "Add a new discussion topic" and this will take you to the upload area
4. Type in your name and reaction paper title (i.e. Joe Smith's paper) in the subject line.
5. Type a BRIEF explanation in the message section (i.e. Summary)
6. Click on the "browse" feature at the bottom of that paper and find your paper on your desktop.
7. Double-click on your document and select "post to forum" shown at the bottom of the screen.

Steps to download (or read) others' assignment:

1. Find the "Depot" discussion forum in the online classroom.
2. Click on that link and you will find student postings listed there.
3. Click on the title of the student posting listed under Discussion.
4. Click on the Word document in that posting.
5. Select "open" to read the document instantly or "save" to save the document to your desktop folder.
6. Post your comments related to the paper by hitting "reply" on the discussion board. Enter your comments in message section. Hit "post to forum" when finished.

Module Two

- Read the online document *The Christian and Movies* and study *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Robert K. Johnson. 2nd Edition.
- After you have read and studied both texts, choose a movie to watch and critique it using the concepts and principles set out in these two resources. Write a 5-7 page paper in which you identify the film's genre and other technical features. In addition, you should identify any redemptive analogies present in the film as well as the way it treats matters of faith. Be sure to demonstrate how you are using the concepts and principles set out in both



resources to make your observations and come to your conclusions about the film from a Christian perspective.

- **Send me an email copy of your paper** and upload a copy to the online classroom for other students to react to. Read and react to one other student's paper as well.

Due: Last day of second month of the course.

Module Three

- Read *The Christian and Television* provided in Module Three of the online classroom and either *The Truth is Out There: Christian Faith and the Classics of TV Science Fiction* or *Watching What we Watch: Prime Time Television Through the Lens of Faith* prior to the third class session.
- Write a 5-7 page double spaced paper in which you map out a strategy for teaching your children/grandchildren how to watch television critically as a Christian and a program for doing the same in your local church. What topics or issues will you address and what will be your strategies?

Due: Last day of third month of the course.

Module Four

- Read the *Mission of the Church and Communication Technology* provided in Module Four of the online classroom and *Understanding Evangelical Media*.
- Browse through the research report "Faith Online" produced by the Pew Internet & American Life Project and provided in the Module Four section of the online class.
- Based upon your reading of these resources, design a media ministry plan for your church. The plan should consist of the following components: (1) biblical and theological rationale for the use of media in ministry; (2) intended outcomes of the ministry; (3) specific media technologies that the church will use and how you plan to use them; (4) a timeline for implementation. **This will constitute your final exam for the course.**
- Read and react to one other student's assignment.

Due: First day of final exam week or before.



The seminary has produced a *Writing Theological Papers* document that guides a student through the process of producing a high quality theological paper. It is included as part of the materials for this course located in the online classroom. You may also find a copy in your Student Handbook and on the Doctor of Ministry section of the seminary web page.

Please edit your paper for typographical errors, misspelled words, stylistic miscues, and grammatical mistakes. The paper should be double-spaced and constitute original work written for this course only and cannot include material previously used in another course or for another purpose. Please read over the notation regarding the seminary policy on plagiarism included at the end of this syllabus. Your use of the work or thoughts of another without proper citation and acknowledgement constitute plagiarism. **Any content you find at an Internet web site you must assume is copyrighted material written and produced by another person.** Undocumented wholesale use of words from an Internet web site passed off as the student's own work in a research paper of this sort constitutes plagiarism and the Seminary considers a violation of its plagiarism policy. Students who are determined to have violated the seminary's policy on plagiarism will receive a grade of zero for the paper, cannot re-submit another paper, and will have a written report of the violation added to their permanent student record. Further violations of the seminary's plagiarism policy could result in temporary or permanent dismissal from the seminary.

Please visit these websites for more information about plagiarism:

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_plagiar.html

Relevant Institutional Policies

http://seminary.erskine.edu/content_policies/SeminaryPoliciesforETSSStudents.pdf

Course Related Precedents in Literature

Barsotti, Catherine M and Johnson, Robert K. (2004). *Finding God in the Movies: 33 Films of Reel Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Brasher, Brenda E. (2001). *Give me that Online Religion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Briner, Bob (1993). *Roaring Lambs: Communication Across Cultural Landscapes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Cooke, Phil (2003). *Successful Christian Television*. Bloomington: First Books.

Dawson, Lorne L. and Cowan, Douglas E. (2004). *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*. London: Routledge.

Down, Tim (1999). *Finding Common Ground*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Dyrness, William A. (1989). *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.



- Ellul, Jacques (1964). *The Technological Society*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Engel, James F. and Norton, Wilbert (1975). *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?*
- Getz, Gene A. (1974). *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press.
Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Hayes, Mike (2007). *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in their 20s and 30s*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Hesselgrave, David J. (1978). *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. Grand Rapids:
Zondervan.
- Kroner, Richard (1951). *Culture and Faith*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lens of Faith. Louisville: Geneva Press.
- Lindvall, Terry (2001). *The Silents of God: Selected Issues and Documents in Silent American Film and Religion 1908-1925*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Mayer, Marvin K. (1974). *Christianity Confronts Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard (1951). *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper.
- Piatt, Christian & Amy (2007). *Myspace to Sacred Space: God for a New Generation*. New York: Chalice Press.
- Richardson, Don (1981). *Eternity In Their Hearts*. Ventura: Regal Books.
- Smith, Donald K. (1992). *Creating Understanding: A Handbook for Christian*
- Van Til, Henry R. (2001). *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Wuthnow, Robert (1989). *The Struggle for America's Soul*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Online Resources

Pop Culture

<http://www.hollywoodjesus.com/>

"Visual movie reviews, with explorations into the deeper more profound meaning behind film, music, and pop culture."

<http://www.dickstaub.com/index.php>

Links to movie, music, and book reviews from a Christian perspective

<http://allmusic.com>

A comprehensive encyclopedia of popular music from hip hop to folk to jazz to alternative rock.

<http://www.theooze.com>

Captures the pulse of the emergent church community, a new Christian movement recognizing and responding to a transitioning culture from modern to postmodern. The Ooze strives to connect with digital culture and the online community of people.



<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/books/chapters/index.html>

First chapters of books from the New York Times Bestseller List.

<http://www.imdb.com>

The Internet Movie Database. Provides synopsis, reviews, trailers, and news for movies on and off screen.

<http://www.marshallreview.com/>

Mars Hill Review. Full length essays, in-depth studies of issues having theological import and interviews of writers, teachers and artists. Features original fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and critical reviews of film, books, music and other texts that remind us of God.