

Erskine Theological Seminary
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Mirrors of Modern Culture (DC 943)

An EDEN Hybrid Course

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Normal Office Hours
Monday-Thurs 9:00 a.m. to 12:00
Reid Hall – EDEN Office Suite

PLEASE SEE THE POLICY ON ABSENCES BELOW

Class will meet on the following Mondays
Sept 8, Sept 29, Oct 27, and Dec. 8.
Fall Semester 2008
Room Location: Room 11 Reid Hall

Catalog 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 Learning Outcomes

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 understand American culture so that we can more effectively carry out the Mission of the Church in the 21st century using any means available and appropriate.

Student Learning Outcomes (what do you intend to learn in this course?)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Course Outline and Schedule

First class	The Mission of the Church & Critical Cultural Engagement
Second class	Movies: "The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly"
Third class	Television: "Good Morning, America"
Fourth class	Technology: "Can You Hear Me Now?"

The purpose of this course will be to critically examine certain aspects of American culture, discern redemptive analogies that may be used to more effectively communicate the Christian message, and analyze 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.

Required Learning Resources

NOTE: Required textbooks may be purchased through the Erskine Theological Seminary Virtual Bookstore at <http://www.ecampus.com/erskine>.

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.

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

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.

Course Learning Experiences

General Assignment

This class is a “hybrid course.” This means that there is an online classroom where I will house extra class resources including power point slides and other materials. In addition, students will be able to view the syllabus, view the course calendar, submit prayer requests, and participate in threaded discussions with me and other students. Given the long hiatus between classes of at least a month, the online classroom affords us an opportunity to stay in contact with one another and continue our learning outside of class. Every student is expected to follow the in-class instructions for getting connected to the online classroom and participate weekly by submitting a post or responding to a post from another student. A grade will be assigned on the basis of your regular participation in the online classroom and the quality of your posts and responses to other students. The expectation is that students will critically engage with one another concerning the issues and concepts addressed in the course.

Assignment One

Due: The week after the first class

Read *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*, William D. Romanowski. Revised and Expanded Edition, before the first class. Based upon your reading of this text I want you to particularize the concepts and principles set out in the book by identifying specific ways in which you can have your “eyes wide open” as you critique American culture. Using Romanowski’s book as a model, write a 3-5 page (double-spaced) general critique of American culture covering primarily popular culture (music, music videos, television, movies, and technology – select one or two of these). What principles or techniques from *Eyes Wide Open* 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. Come prepared to share the results of your reading and analysis with the other members of the class. Post your paper to the online classroom during the week following our class session so that other class

members may read it and respond to it. Each student should read at least one other student's paper and react to it in the online forum provided.

Assignment Two

Due: 2nd class session

Read and study *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, Robert K. Johnson. 2nd Edition, prior to our second class meeting. Team up with one other class member and find one movie you are going to critique from a Christian perspective. You and your teammate must come prepared to perform a version of *Siskel and Ebert At The Movies*. You must decide among yourselves whether you will take a pro or con position toward the movie. If you assume the role of champion or promoter of the movie use Johnson's book to both affirm values and techniques that you liked in the movie. If you are assuming the contrary position, use Johnson's book to level valid criticisms of the movie in response to your fellow movie critic. Go online to our Mirrors of Modern Culture classroom and post the members of your team and the movie you are using so that we avoid duplication. Your grade will be based upon the composite scores derived from the written evaluations performed by your fellow students as well as the professor. My evaluation will be equally weighted with those of your fellow students. Each student will receive a separate evaluation and separate score based upon his/her ability to accurately use Johnson's information and respond to criticisms and attacks about the movie from your fellow presenter. The total time for your combined presentation should be no more than 20 minutes. Going beyond the 20 minute time limit will result in a grade reduction. We can plan on two presentations an hour (allowing time for set up and cuing). The afternoon session will follow this schedule:

First team will be set up to start at 1:00

1:00 – 1:20	Presentation # 1
1:20 – 1:30	Set up for second group
1:30 – 1:50	Presentation # 2
1:50 – 2:00	Break and set up for third group
2:00 – 2:20	Presentation # 3
2:20 – 2:30	Set up for fourth group
2:30 – 2:50	Presentation # 4
2:50 – 3:00	Break and set up for fifth group
3:00 – 3:20	Presentation # 5
3:20 – 3:30	Set up for sixth group
3:30 – 3:50	Presentation # 6
3:50 – 4:00	Debriefing exercise

Assignment Three

Due: the week following the 3rd class

Read 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. Bring a VCR or DVD of a television show to class and show a short clip (no more than 10 minutes). Using whichever book you choose, critique your television show using the material in your book of choice. You may select a show you like or one you dislike. Using your selected text, explain why you like or don't like the show. Select a clip of the show that best

illustrates the points you are trying to make. During the next week after class, post a written critique and analysis of your show to the online classroom and read one other post from another student and respond to it.

Assignment Four in Three Parts

See due dates below

Part I - Read *Understanding Evangelical Media* and the research report "Faith Online" produced by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, prior to the last class session. This report will give you a good overview of how the Internet is being used for religious purposes. Post your reaction and responses to your reading of the report in the space provided in our online classroom for the course. Come prepared to the final class session to discuss the role of faith in virtual online communities. **Due: one week before the final class**

Part II - Using information contained in *Understanding Evangelical Media*, visit a digital church campus (see list provided in the online classroom) and critique its approach to digital church ministry. Write up a one-page, singled-spaced summary of your evaluation and come prepared to the last class to share your observations with the class. Once you have decided which online church campus you plan to visit and critique, post that information in the space provided to reduce the number of duplicates. No more than two students may report on the same site. **Due: the written summary can be sent to me via email the week after the class.**

Part III - In preparation for this final session, soon after the first class session, enroll in and participate (at least once per week for one-half hour) in one online Christian community. This can be any Christian online community that offers those who join an opportunity to engage other members in online interaction including blogging. But it must be an online community of which you are not now a member. Come prepared to the final class session to report on your experience in your online faith community. The week following the final class, submit a written report (3-5 pages double-spaced) of your experience and post it to the online classroom. Read one other student's report and respond to it. **Due: the week after the final class.**

Assignment Five

Write a comprehensive final examination. This is a take home final exam. The questions will be given to you at the last class session. Your written responses should be sent as an email attachment to me (slowe@erksine.edu) **no later than 5:00 p.m. of the Friday following our last class session.**

The doctoral seminar format is a collaborative learning environment. The instructor serves as a facilitator of the learning process but also assumes the stance of a co-learner. The assumption of the doctoral seminar format is that students enrolled in a doctoral program are capable of conducting independent research and reporting on the results of that research to colleagues. The collegial atmosphere of the doctoral seminar is intended to create an open and free exchange of ideas and opinions among honest inquirers. The net result is that students learn valuable inquiry and communication skills, increase their grasp of planning and change processes in church ministry, and develop more meaningful interpersonal relationships with fellow-students, in the context of an environment of academic freedom.

Submitting Your Assignments

I prefer that you submit 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. Your assignment should be submitted in Microsoft Word format since this is the default software for the seminary. Late assignments will be automatically reduced by one-half letter grade (i.e., from an A to an A-) for each day the assignment is past the due date. Your written assignments to me are different from the assignments that are to be uploaded to the online classroom.

Grade Criteria

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 Grade Scale:

A	95-100
A-	93-94

B+	91-92
B	88-90
B-	86-87
C+	84-85
C	80-83

Relevant Academic Policies

Drop/Add/Withdrawal

Once a student has completed, signed, and submitted his/her registration to the Registrar for this class, it is a **binding contract** and billing will be based on this registration. If the student decides not to take this class, he/she must complete a "drop/add" form and secure the appropriate signatures **prior to the drop/add deadline during the second week of the semester or term**. If one wishes to withdraw from the course after the drop/add deadline, one must complete a withdrawal form, and tuition will be refunded on a pro rated basis. Failure to withdraw from the class properly will result in the student's receiving a grade of "F" for the course and full tuition charges will apply. **No exceptions will be made to this policy.**

Incompletes

The grade of "I" or incomplete is given at the discretion of the professor. A grade of "I" is normally given when a student has substantially completed the requirements for a course but has been prevented by extraordinary circumstances from completing the remainder of the course requirements. A student who wishes to request an incomplete should normally complete an incomplete form prior to the end of the semester and ask the professor to grant the request. (Under unusual circumstances, the student may communicate with the professor by phone or email rather than in person, and the professor may then agree to fill out the form at the student's request. Under exceptional circumstances, the professor may initiate the process by filling out the form on the student's behalf.) If the professor grants the request, he/she will sign the incomplete form and turn it in with his/her final grade report. An "I" in any course must be removed by March 1 for the Fall Term, April 1 for the January Term, August 1 for the Spring Term, and November 1 for the Summer Term. Only the Dean may grant extensions of incompletes beyond the established completion date. Otherwise, these grades automatically become "F."

Language about God and Humanity

Although God transcends the distinction between male and female, the Bible and the Church's historic creeds and confessions use masculine language in reference to God. Thus, the Seminary encourages all students to retain this masculine usage when speaking and writing about God. Furthermore, the Seminary recognizes that all human beings, male and female, are created equally in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and believers of both sexes are fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Accordingly, whenever students are speaking and writing about males and females, they should use language that clearly includes

both men and women (for example, by saying/writing "humanity" rather than "man" or "people" rather than "men").

Conduct in Theological Discussions

Erskine Seminary is committed to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and it expects its students to show respect for all who identify with that one Church. In all written work, oral presentations, and discussions both inside and outside the classroom, the Seminary expects students to conduct discussions of controversial issues in a context of respect for those with whom one disagrees. Please see the Community Life Statement in the Catalog for more information.

Office Hours

My normal office hours are printed in this syllabus. However, due to meetings and unforeseen circumstances that may arise, my schedule may change. If you need to see me, I strongly recommend that you call or e-mail to schedule an appointment.

Policy Regarding Absences

Students are required to attend all class sessions. Students wishing to take a course which meets four times over the semester **must** attend the first meeting of the course. Students who cannot attend the first course meeting should not register for the course or, if already registered, should drop the course and complete the drop/add form. (If the drop/add form is not completed and turned in to the Registrar, the student will still be charged for the course and will receive an "F" grade.) If students have to be absent for part or all of another class meeting day, they are still responsible for all work missed and all work due. A student who misses as much as one full class day or its equivalent in late arrival or early departure should consult with the professor to see whether it is still possible to pass the course.

Style and Bibliographical Formatting Requirements

All papers must be typed/processed in accordance with written Doctor of Ministry style policy as contained in the Doctor of Ministry Manual and the seminary catalog.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use in writing of wording or ideas produced by others without crediting the author and/or source from which the material was taken. As the following statement indicates, plagiarism is a serious offense that undermines both the witness and integrity of the Christian community:

Plagiarism injures the community by inhibiting the recognition and cultivation of gifts imparted by the Spirit. Clearly unattributed use of the words and/or ideas of others fails to give appreciative recognition of their gifts. But this illegitimate appropriation of the gifts of others also blocks the recognition and cultivation of the actual gifts of the person engaged in plagiarism.

Plagiarism creates an atmosphere of falsehood in the community's discernment and cultivation of gifts, both within the Christian community and in God's larger creation.

Christian Commitment and Excellence in Learning

Since freedom comes only by way of truth (Jn. 8:32), such falsehood can only result in captivity, and therefore has no place in the Christian community.

On this basis, the Seminary adheres to the following general requirements for the acknowledgement of sources of academic work. These requirements apply to both print and electronic media.

1. Quotations. Any sentence or phrase that a student uses from another source must be placed in quotation marks or, in the case of longer quotations, clearly indented beyond the regular margin. Any quotation must be accompanied (either within the text or in a note) by a precise indication of the source.

2. Paraphrasing. Any material that is paraphrased or summarized must also be specifically acknowledged in a note or in the text.

3. Ideas. Specific ideas that are borrowed should be acknowledged in a note or in the text, even if the idea has been further elaborated by the student.

4. Bibliography. All the sources consulted in the preparation of an essay or report should be listed in a bibliography.

In addition to plagiarism, the following related practices are also unacceptable compromises of the truth requisite to a free community:

1. Multiple submission. Failure to obtain prior written permission of the relevant instructors to submit work which has been submitted in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any other academic requirement at any institution.

2. False citation. The deliberate attribution to, or citation of, a source from which the material in question was not, in fact, obtained.

3. Submission of work done by someone else, either with or without that person's knowledge. Neither ignorance of the regulations concerning academic violations nor personal extenuating circumstances are an adequate defense against charges of plagiarism. The Seminary's provisions for "due process" apply in cases of alleged plagiarism.

Occurrences of plagiarism shall be considered "documented" when the instructor is able to produce documentary evidence that plagiarism has occurred, and when the instructor has reason to believe that the plagiarism was motivated by a deliberate attempt to receive credit for ideas or work not the student's own. Where such plagiarism involves the theft of the academic work of another student, whether at Erskine or any other institution, it shall be designated 'documented theft of another student's work.'

The instructor involved, in consultation with the Dean, may recommend measures deemed appropriate. In cases of documented plagiarism or documented theft of another student's work, the offending student will automatically receive the following penalties:

Failure of the course(s) in which plagiarized or stolen work is submitted

Dismissal from the Seminary for a minimum of one semester

Forfeiture of the right to tuition refunds during the semester(s) affected

Before such penalties are imposed, a committee of at least three faculty members must agree that they are appropriate to the case. Appeals in such cases may only be addressed, in writing, to the President of Erskine College and

Theological Seminary.

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.
- Hesselgrave, David J. (1978). *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. Grand Rapids:
- 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.
- 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

Christian Commitment and Excellence in Learning

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.marshillreview.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.