

Associated Canadian Theological Schools of Trinity Western University

THS 680 A: Christianity and Culture

Instructor: J. Pepper, Ph. D.
Summer 2019
3 credit hours

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604-888-7511 ex. 3127
May 1—August 12
Campus class days: June 17-21
8:30 a.m. - 12:30 noon

I. Course Description

This course is designed to help students understand the ongoing relationship between Christianity and culture, and how cultural awareness along with critical skills for critiquing culture from a Christian perspective enhances ministry and leadership effectiveness both in the church and within society at large. The purpose of the course is to help students obtain an integrated understanding of God, humanity, world, mission, and kingdom, and then apply this perspective to specific occupational and ministry contexts. Biblical, theological and socio-historical foundations are laid for understandings of culture, alongside practical exploration of specific spheres of Christian involvement in local and global societies. The course will feature an interdisciplinary range of lectures, readings, and group discussions.

II. Objectives

This course aims to help students to:

1. Identify different ways in which the relationship between Christianity and culture has been understood by Christians throughout the life of the church.
2. Understand the place of cultural analysis for identifying and responding to contemporary issues and challenges facing the church and Christian leadership today.
3. Recognize ways in which culture has shaped evangelical expressions of Christian faith
4. Obtain a broader cultural awareness, to become more sensitive and critical interpreters of culture.
5. Identify and respond from a Christian perspective to tensions between Christianity and culture which surface in vocational and leadership contexts.

III. Course Textbooks

Required (any two of the texts below):

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013.

Johnston, Robert K. *Deep Focus: Film and Theology in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019

Keller, Timothy. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*. Viking, 2017.

Long, Stephen D. *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

Raschke, Carl. *GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Synder, Howard A. *Models of the Kingdom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

Usselman, Nancy. *A Sacred Look, Becoming Cultural Mystics: A Theology of Popular Culture*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2018.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., and Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.

Van Opstal, Sandra. *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Woodward, J. R. *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Read any two of the books above prior to the first day of the course. Come to class prepared to integrate key ideas addressed in these works into class discussions.

Note that while two of the above texts are required reading, students will also need to obtain access to a third book—from the above list—or from the list appended in the book review assignment.

IV. Course Assignments

1. Reading/Listening/Observing and Responding to Popular Culture (20 % of final grade): Due June 17 (bring a hard copy with you, on the first day of the on-campus class)

Popular culture powerfully shapes cultural attitudes and perspectives in most global cultures. (For example, in North America, the enormous influence of pop-culture is not surprising considering the fact that most people spend the majority of their recreational time watching television or engaging with social media). It is vital that Christians develop skills in evaluating mediums of expression and communication used by popular culture.

Choose some facet of contemporary pop-culture—a *technological innovation, a literary or art genre, a form of education, a form of entertainment (e.g. movie, television show, music), a pastime, hobby, or sport activity, an educational or social program, a practice in private or public business enterprise (e.g. a series of advertisements, a form of marketing) etc.*—that has emerged as a popular force in the last five years and that has exercised significant influence within your first-culture milieu. (Please note: For most students, this will reference North American society—but for other students, it may be another global culture).

Then, formulate a written response of approximately 1250 words (5 typewritten double-spaced pages) based on the following criteria:

- a. Briefly describe the particular pop-culture phenomenon. (5%)
- b. Interpret its general influences upon and values for society—at-large. (8%)
- c. Explain why a seminary student/pastor/missionary/counsellor etc. should be knowledgeable about this facet of pop culture. (7%)

2. Integrative Response Paper (20% of the final grade): Due July 5

Write an approximately 1000-1250 word (4-5 typewritten double-spaced pages) integrative response paper—this is like an open-book exam—that identifies and reflects upon what you considered to be the most important themes (minimum of three) addressed by the course. A well-formed paper will be that which integrates specific insights from your readings of course texts and/or recommended texts, class lectures, and classroom discussions/debates into your response. The paper should end with a brief summary of your preferred model(s) for understanding the relationships between the Christian faith and culture, and an explanation of why the model(s) may be helpful in your ministry.

3. Book Review (20% of final grade): Due July 19

We are living in a time of rapid cultural change. The following books explore particular aspects of these changes along with offering a Christian response. Read one of the required textbooks you did not read in preparation for the course, or read one of the following books—or propose for approval by the course instructor another title of particular interest in the study of Christianity and Culture—and write a review of 1000-1500 words (4-6 typewritten double-spaced pages) in which you introduce and critique the key

ideas of the book you have selected and discuss their application to your unique ministry context.

Bessenecker, Scott, ed. *Living Mission: The Visions and Voices of New Friars*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Bock, Darrell L. and Daniel B. Wallace. *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.

Caputo, John D. *What would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernity for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker: 2007.

Das, Rupen. *Compassion and the Mission of God*. Langham Global Library, 2015.

Detweiler, Craig. *Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018.

Detweiler, Craig and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003.

Driscoll, Mark. *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.

Friesen, Duane K. *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers Seeking the Peace of the City: An Anabaptist Theology of Culture*. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2000.

Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.

Garrett, Greg. *The Gospel According to Hollywood*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Guder, Darrel L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Hoang, Bethany & Kristen Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion meets Perseverance*. Grand Rapids: Brazos 2017

Jewell, John P. *Wired for Ministry: How the Internet, Visual Media and Other New Technologies can serve your church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004.

McNeal, Reggie. *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2009.

Miller, Donald, *Blue Like Jazz*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.

Miller, Vincent J. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Piper, John. *Living in the Light: Money, Sex & Power: Making the most of Three Dangerous Opportunities*. The Good Book Company, 2016.

Ramachandra, Vinoth. *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Romanowski, William D. *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007.

Smith, James K.A. *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Take Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Smith, James K.A. *You are what you love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, Brazos 2017.

Taylor, Barry. *Entertainment Theology: New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Van Gelder, Craig, ed. *Confident Witness--Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

**4. Research Essay (40% of the final grade):
Due August 12**

Each student will prepare a research essay of approximately 2500 words (10 typewritten double-spaced pages).

The assignment may be approached from a variety of perspectives, but must examine some point of intersection between Christianity and culture.

Listed below are some suggestions that might help identify an interest or focus. It may also help to browse the selected bibliographies contained in our textbooks. Note that the subject should be concise enough to be investigated in some detail, and must be related to a subject or theme applicable to our course. For example, possible essay topics might focus upon:

- a) an historical Christian leader (e.g. St. Augustine; Francis of Assisi; C.S. Lewis; Martin Luther King; Mother Teresa; Billy Graham; Desmond Tutu; Bono...) and a critique of how this person simultaneously influenced his or her cultural context and was influenced by it;
- b) a particular worldview paradigm (e.g. pre-modernism or modernism or post-modernism, etc.; a fear culture or a shame culture or a guilt culture, etc.) and the way in which it effects one's understanding of culture, along with a biblical critique of such a paradigm;
- c) a topic in theology with an examination of the way in which specific cultures and communities have contextualized this topic in particular ways; (Because topics in this option may vary greatly, the student is asked to consult with the instructor in advance of undertaking research for the paper).
- d) the development of a theological response to a specific area of culture (e.g., science, psychology, economics, the environment, literature, music, technology, media).

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Standard	Grade Point
A+	Superior	4.30
A	Excellent	4.00
A-	Very Good	3.70
B+	Proficient	3.30
B	Good	3.00
B-	Average	2.70
C+	Adequate	2.30
C	Acceptable	2.00
C-	Needs Work	1.70
F	Below Standard	0.00

Supplement: Important Academic Notes from ACTS**Web Support – Student Portal** <https://www1.twu.ca/services>

All students at TWU have a TWUPass username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application or can be managed through the computing services help desk or the link on the student portal. Your student email account is also available through this student portal and is vital for communication about grades, account statements, lost passwords, sign-up instructions, etc. If you do not know your account or password, there is a link at the login area called “I forgot my password.” When you click on that link, you will be walked through the process of retrieving your account information.

Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to the following radio stations: CKNW (980 AM), CKWX (1130 AM), STAR FM (107.1 FM), PRAISE (106.5 FM) and KARI (550 AM). As well, an announcement will be placed on the University’s campus closure notification message box (604.513.2147) and on the front page of the University’s website (<http://www.twu.ca> – also see <http://www.twu.ca/campus/campus-notification.html> for more details).

An initial announcement regarding the status of the campus and cancellation of classes will be made at 6:00 a.m. and will cover all classes that begin before 1:00 p.m. A second announcement pertaining to classes that begin between 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. will be made at 11:00 a.m. A third announcement pertaining to classes that begin after 5:00 p.m. will be made at 3:00 p.m.

Paper Formatting

Students need to adhere to Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format except in counselling courses, for which APA format is used, and in CanIL courses.

Students are strongly encouraged to use EndNote Basic/Web (available through the library home page www.twu.ca/library - lower left) as their bibliographical manager and as a tool for formatting bibliographies. It is free. The link to EndNote from the library home page provides detailed instructions. Students will need to be aware that it is necessary to “clean up” most bibliographies generated by this program. Students are encouraged to view the documents on the following websites for format samples:

http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html or

www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/. In EndNote Basic/Web the available formatting styles are those of Turabian Bibliography, and APA 6th edition. For Turabian, there are two formats – Notes (Bibliography) and Reference List (a short format citation style). ACTS uses the Notes (Bibliography) format, not Reference List.

Counselling students are expected to purchase the APA Publications Manual. More information may be found at the following website: <http://www.apastyle.org/pubmanual.html>.

For free online programs that will enable students to create properly formatted bibliography citations, they should go to <http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/> (“Chicago” stands for “Turabian”) or <http://www.sourceaid.com/citationbuilder/>

CANIL students can locate this on the CANIL intranet, under the “student” side. More information is given to incoming students in the fall.

Please check with your professor to find out which style he/she recommends you use.

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are important for improving teaching outcomes, faculty professional development, and the student learning context. Completion of course evaluations is, therefore, considered to be a course expectation. Professors will schedule time for students to fill out online course evaluations (20-30 minutes) on their personal laptops or a collegium computer during the last scheduled class of the semester. Students who are absent that day or who are otherwise unable to complete the online course evaluation during the last class will be expected to make every effort to do so by the last day of exams. Information about how to access online evaluation forms will be provided to the faculty and students prior to the last week of classes by the ACTS Administration.

Research Ethics

Please note that all research projects involving human participants undertaken by members of the TWU university community (including projects done by ACTS students to satisfy course or degree requirements) **MUST** be approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board. Information and forms may be found at <http://www.twu.ca/research/research/research-ethics/default.html>. Those needing additional clarification may contact the ACTS Academic Dean’s office. Please allow at least three (3) weeks from the date of submission for a review of the application.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU

Christian scholars at TWU regard academic integrity to be a core value. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and are required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship. This means that all members of the TWU academic community must avoid all forms of plagiarism and cheating in scholarly work. ACTS uses the TWU Student Handbook as a guide for our seminary

students. Though some features in the handbook are focused on the university's undergraduate population, it provides the essential student life information for ACTS students as well. It can be found online at: <http://www.twu.ca/studenthandbook/>.

Learning what constitutes plagiarism and avoiding it is the student's responsibility. An excellent resource in this regard has been prepared by TWU Librarian William Badke and is freely available for download (PPT file) or can be viewed in flash (self-running) tutorials of different lengths:

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/plagiarism.ppt>

<http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism.swf> (14 minute flash tutorial)

http://acts.twu.ca/library/Plagiarism_Short.swf (8 minute flash tutorial)

Equity of Access

Students with disabilities who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Equity of Access Office upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All disabilities must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and such documentation should include a statement regarding the educational impact of the disability along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Equity of Access Office outlined on the TWU website at <http://twu.ca/life/wellness/learningresources/disabilities-and-equity-of-access/steps-to-attaining-disability-services.html>.