

#3115 Postmodernism in Church and Culture
Western Reformed Seminary (<http://wrs.edu>)
John A. Battle, Th.D.
Fall 2015

COURSE INFORMATION

Course description and goals

This elective course will examine the relationship of postmodern philosophy and theology to various important issues in the contemporary church and culture. You will learn the basic history and principles of postmodernism and its critiques of modernism. The class will examine and evaluate both its good insights and its false positions and harmful tendencies from a biblical perspective. You will be able to discern and demonstrate its impact in various important issues and controversies that face the Christian today, including issues in the church and in society at large. You will formulate a biblical response that will be relevant for your future ministry. The class will study this subject through lectures, readings, quizzes, and student presentations.

Lectures and quizzes

The first few classes will include lecture material on the history, definition, and leading features of postmodernism. The lectures also will survey the major areas of thought and practice impacted by postmodern theology. There will be quizzes over this material.

WRS Journal reading

Read the entire issue of the *WRS Journal* that deals with postmodernism, *Postmodernism's Assault on Absolute Truth* (6:2, August 1999).

Leading postmodern thinker assignment

- Read one book written by a postmodernist. Select a work written by one of the postmodern thinkers listed in the Wikipedia.com article "Postmodern Christianity":

Marcus Borg, Rob Bell, Tomáš Hail, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, John D. Caputo, Stanley Grenz, Tony Jones, Richard Kearney, Mario Kopic, Jean-Luc Marion, Brian McLaren, Françoise Meltzer, John Milbank, David Tracy, James Olthuis, Carl Raschke, John A.T. Robinson, Peter Rollins, Robert P. Scharlemann, James K.A. Smith, Mark C. Taylor, Gabriel Vahanian, Gianni Vattimo, Charles Winquist

- Write a critical review of this book, at least two pages in length

- Make a 20-minute presentation in class concerning this thinker and the book you have selected, summarizing his life and influence, and the content of the book, and a criticism of the book from a biblical perspective

Student presentations on postmodernism, the church, and culture

During the semester you will give two presentations, about 40 minutes each, using either distributed notes or PowerPoint. Each presentation will describe one particular postmodern writing on a topic related to postmodernism, chosen from the list below. One presentation will concern a topic of church doctrine and life, and the other a topic of social and cultural life. Other topics may be chosen with the professor's permission. You may select the writing from printed literature or from the Internet. Carefully describe the position of the author and his or her reasoning. Offer a biblical response that can be used.

Suggested topics related to postmodernism

Church doctrine and life

- Theology of God
- Theology of man
- Theologies of paradox
- Ecumenism
- Subjectivism
- Charismaticism
- Mysticism
- Worship
- Church government

Social and cultural life

- Definition of truth
- Sexual identity
- Homosexuality
- Marriage
- Individual rights vs. collective rights
- Abortion and right to life
- Euthanasia

Grading

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Quizzes | 15% |
| • WRS Journal reading | 10% |
| • Postmodern thinker assignment (reading, review, presentation) | 25% |
| • Doctrine and life presentation | 20% |
| • Social and cultural life presentation | 20% |
| • Attendance and class participation | 10% |

Class schedule

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|-------|----|--------------------------|
| Sept. | 8 | |
| | 15 | |
| | 22 | |
| | 29 | |
| Oct. | 6 | (ARTS meeting; no class) |
| | 13 | |
| | 20 | |
| | 27 | |
| Nov. | 3 | |
| | 10 | |
| | 17 | |
| | 24 | |
| Dec. | 1 | |
| | 8 | |
| | 15 | |