



# On-Campus Course Syllabus

## HUM 404a

### Faith and Culture

### Spring 2020

#### Class Information

**Day and Time:** Tues 7:00 – 9:30 pm

**Room Number:** E201

#### Contact Information

**Instructor Name:** Kirk Spencer

**Instructor Email:** kspencer@criswell.edu

**Instructor Phone:** 469.834.5211 (Please Text First)

**Instructor Office Hours:** Tuesday 10:30am – 11:00am, 12:00pm – 2:00pm and Thursday 10:30am – 11:00am, 12:00pm – 2:00pm

#### Course Description and Prerequisites

Faith and Culture is a capstone course that will attempt a Biblically based critique of the ongoing integration of theology and modern thought. The various facets of western culture (music, art, literature, theater, etc.) will be examined, evaluating the strengths and deficiencies of each from the perspective of a Judeo-Christian worldview. Throughout this survey of art and ideas, the student will develop the analytical skills necessary to recognize and evaluate the contributions that modern (and postmodern) culture has made to the church, as well as our individual lives. (Prerequisites may be taken concurrently: THS 203 or THS 301)

#### Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course the student should be able:

- A. To demonstrate a reasoned Biblical and theological understanding of culture.
- B. To analyze differing expressions of culture and identify the subtle and overt ways they convey differing views of reality, truth, morality (ethics) and beauty (aesthetics).
- C. To demonstrate an ability to recognize and interpret the symbolic nature of much of the visual arts. In other words, to exegete culture with the intent of bringing the Christian community into the theological dialog found in much of recent cinema.
- D. To evaluate and appreciate human achievements in the arts while maintaining a clear witness for Christ that is within and unto a secularized modern culture without becoming a part of it.

## Required Textbooks

Purchase from Professor Spencer

Spencer, Kirk. *Faith and Culture: Essays on Life in Modern Times*. Unpublished Manuscript: Criswell College. 2015.

## Selected Texts (Only two of the books below will be read. Choose only two)

Purchase Online (not at DTS Bookstore) Amazon Used Will Probably Be The Best Deal

Veith, Gene. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 1994. ISBN: 0-89107-768-5

[Landmark work about postmodernism written from a modernist perspective by a Christian author.]

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Penguin Books: New York, 1985. ISBN: 0-14-009438-5

[Landmark work about image based media culture in a postmodern context from a modernist perspective by a Christian author]

McGrath, Alister. *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. Doubleday: New York, 2004. ISBN 0-385-5006-0

[A very interesting and concise history of atheism written by a Christian who once was an atheist.]

Richards, E. Randolph & Brandon J. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. IVP Books: Dowers Grove, Illinois, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8308-3782-3

[Survey of how our cultural location and history affects our interpretation of scripture. Much anecdotal evidence to illustrate how our western interpretation differs from a more ancient and eastern perspective.]

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids Michigan, 1996. ISBN: 0-8026-0864-6

[Landmark work about postmodernism written from a postmodern perspective by a Christian author.]

Turner, Steve. *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2001. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2291-1

[A book on Christianity and the Arts from a Christian artist addressing Christian artists who want to compete with non-believing contemporary artist, frustrated by the fact there is little Christian content in contemporary art and embarrassed at the low quality of what is called "Christian Art."]

Anderson, Walter. *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World*. Harper Collins Publishers: San Francisco California, 1990. ISBN: 0-06-250017-1

[Landmark work about postmodern world written from a postmodern perspective by a non-Christian author.]

Groothius, Douglas. *Truth decay: defending Christianity against the challenges of postmodernism*. InterVarsity Press, Downer Groves, Illinois, 2000. ISBN: 0-8308-2228-3  
[Apologetics against postmodernism from a Christian perspective.]

Taylor, Barry. *Entertainment Theology: New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy*. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8010-237-0  
[Overview of various theological issues within postmodern pop culture, from the edgy perspective of an artist incorporating art into a philosophical and historic analysis.]

Vanhoozer, Kevin. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8010-3167-0  
[After two chapters on the mechanics of cultural hermeneutics (cultural interpretation) there are a series of essays on various specific cultural phenomenon to show how the principles of cultural hermeneutics are applied to specific cases.]

## Course Requirements and Assignments

### Class Attendance, Department and Participation.

Since class participation is vital to learning, absences should be taken only when absolutely necessary. Granting of excused absences is permitted at the discretion of the professor.

Three instances of either being tardy to class, or departing before the end of class will be considered one absence. You will receive a participation grade based upon attendance and informed participation in class discussion. The participation grade will be reduced by four points for each unexcused absence.

Discussion is based on the amount and quality of questions asked or answered and comments made during classroom discussions.

The participation grade will constitute **25%** of your course grade.

### Textbook Reading Assignments

Under the course textbooks section, you will find a list of possible textbooks. You should choose two books from the list of selected texts to read during the first eight weeks of the course (or you can get approval for other texts from the professor). You will also be required to read the collection of essays entitled "Faith & Culture" as part of the course required reading assignments. It will be best to do this reading in the second eight weeks of the course. The two selected texts will be collected and graded at the midterm. The "Faith and Culture" text will be collected at the end of the course. A reading grade will be determined based upon the how you have marked up the text and commented in the margin. There may be additional reading assigned during the course. Your reading grade will constitute **25%** of the course grade.

## Critical Response Essay:

CR Essays will constitute **25%** of the course grade.

### Instructions

Choose one doctrine from the following list of doctrines and one issue from the following list of significant contemporary issues and write a critical response essay. You are free to choose any of the issues listed, but issues have been grouped by disciplines for students wanting to address issues more pertinent to their fields of study. Upon permission of the professor, you may address a doctrine not included in the list below, as long as you choose a doctrine and not merely a Biblical theme or concept. The essay will reflect on how a specific theological position or perspective related to the doctrine applies to the contemporary issue. The general question that will frame the essay will be, “How does the doctrine of \_\_\_\_\_ relate to the contemporary issue of \_\_\_\_\_?”

Doctrine	Contemporary Issue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical inspiration</li> <li>• God’s triune nature</li> <li>• Divine sovereignty</li> <li>• Virgin birth of Christ</li> <li>• Incarnation of Christ</li> <li>• Holy Spirit</li> <li>• Imago dei</li> <li>• Original sin</li> <li>• Regeneration (new birth)</li> <li>• Justification</li> <li>• Local church</li> <li>• Universal church</li> <li>• Baptism</li> <li>• Lord’s Supper</li> <li>• Kingdom of God</li> <li>• Doctrines concerning Christ’s second coming</li> </ul>	<p><i>Biblical Studies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historicity of Adam and Eve</li> <li>• The ethics of holy war in ancient Israel</li> <li>• Slavery in the Bible</li> <li>• New perspective on Paul</li> <li>• Role of women in the Church</li> </ul> <p><i>Christian Ministry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious pluralism/diversity</li> <li>• Ethnic/racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and the church</li> <li>• Urbanization/globalization and the church</li> </ul> <p><i>Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public education of children of unauthorized immigrants</li> <li>• Teaching transgender students</li> <li>• School choice/Homeschooling</li> <li>• Classroom technology</li> </ul> <p><i>Philosophy, Politics, and Economics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalism</li> <li>• Sexuality and gender identity</li> <li>• Universal health care</li> <li>• Religious freedom</li> <li>• Net neutrality</li> <li>• Environmental protection</li> </ul>

### Essay Form

- Papers should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font.
- Papers should be 7-10 pages in length.
- Papers need not conform to any particular writing style manual, but should include a title page, and sources cited in the body of the essay should be properly identified within the body itself.

### Essay Content

- Papers should follow the outline below

#### 1. Introduction to Contemporary Issue (1-2 pages)

This section will introduce an issue and place it within its contemporary context. The section should explain the following:

- What is the nature of the issue?
- How has the issue unfolded/played out in recent times?
- Why is the issue important?

#### 2. Identification and Explanation of Doctrinal Perspective (2-3 pages)

This section will identify and explain a particular theological doctrine. Explanations of the doctrine should assume readers are unfamiliar with the doctrine and should demonstrate how the doctrine is reflected in Scripture.

#### 3. Application of Doctrine to Contemporary Issue (3-4 pages)

This section will apply the doctrine discussed in the second section to the contemporary issue identified in the first section. The section will demonstrate how the doctrine is pertinent to the issue and how it should affect the way Christians respond to the issue. The section should demonstrate a deep grasp of the doctrine and an awareness of the complexities of the contemporary issue.

#### 4. Conclusion (1 page)

This section will summarize the reflections of the previous sections.

### A Journal of Cultural Criticism:

Journals will constitute **25%** of the course grade.

During the course, you must complete a collection of essays in journal format of a total of at least 4 thousand words. In terms of formatting, this will be approximately 10 full pages, single spaced, with one-inch margins and using a 12 point Times New Roman font. This journal will include descriptions, analysis and evaluation of different elements of modern and post-modern culture. It is expected that you will draw on information and analytical skills you have learned in your college education. This includes content from general education as well as bible and theology courses. Questions will arise in classroom discussion which can be answered as part of journal entries. The professor may also assign

projects, which must be answered as part of the journal as a specific mini-essay. However, most sources for material of journal analysis will come from:

During the course, you must complete a collection of essays in journal format of a total of at least 4 thousand words. In terms of formatting, this will be approximately 10 full pages, single spaced, with one inch margins and using a 12 point Times New Roman font. This journal will include descriptions, analysis and evaluation of different elements of modern and post-modern culture. It is expected that you will draw on information and analytical skills you have learned in your college education. This includes content from general education as well as bible and theology courses. Questions will arise in classroom discussion which can be answered as part of journal entries. The professor may also assign projects, which must be answered as part of the journal as a specific mini-essay. However, most sources for material of journal analysis will come from:

Watching TV, especially sitcoms and commercials;  
Watching movies and plays;  
The internet;  
Attending concerts, art exhibits, museums;  
From news reports and magazines;  
Having conversations with others;  
Remembering conversations you have had with others;  
Over-hearing the conversation of others;  
Interviewing lost people;  
Billboards, Cloths, Jewelry, Language, Hairstyles, Etc. Etc.  
And anything else you can think of.

Approach all of these experiences with the intent to uncover the messages that each is communicating and how it reflects particular elements of modern (post-modern) culture. What are the elements of modernity (post-modernity)? This course is designed to answer that question. The supplemental material found on Canvas and in "Faith and Culture" will give a summary of modern and post-modern ideas. These elements are a starting point for what can be explored in the journal of culture critique. However, other aspects of modern and post-modern culture can be gleaned from readings, class discussions and personal research.

The journal of cultural critique provides an opportunity for you to observe closely the culture that surrounds and influences you—to think about the messages that can be found in the medium of each form of cultural expression and to evaluate the impact these messages have had on ministry and upon life in general. This cultural analysis will be communicated in a series of mini essays of more than one page in length and no more than three pages.

It is critical that you do not treat the journal as a diary to simply record daily thoughts. Faith and Culture is a senior level class. The professor will assume that you have at least three years of college level class work to draw upon in your analysis. Journal essays are not simply what comes to mind, but rather a

serious attempt to review and integrate elements of your education into a clear and well-reasoned analysis and evaluation.

#### THINGS TO DO

You will be required to include these things in your Journal:

- Each page of the journal should be numbered.
- Each essay in the journal should begin on a new page.
- Each essay should be given a clever title which both entices the reader to take time to read the essay and also quickly defines the subject matter.
- Each essay in the journal should be longer than one page but no longer than three pages.
- Each essay should include each of these components:
  - **The Artifact**  
A brief and interesting description of a cultural object or incident or thought or...
  - **The Message**  
A clear analysis of the message contained in this cultural artifact and how this relates to more formalized philosophical classification (isms) of modern or post-modern thought (or other philosophies if present).
  - **In The Church**  
Discussion with examples of how this philosophy/message of culture has influenced the church and Christian ministry and whether this is Biblical (use scriptural or theological support).
  - **In My Life**  
Self-critique with examples of how this philosophy/message of culture has impacted your life and whether this is a positive or negative influence.
- You should integrate content gleaned from general education, bible and theology courses as part of the cultural analysis of the journal essays.

[The student will have all semester to complete the CR Essay, it would be best to attempt to complete this assignment before the midterm.]

#### **Graduating Senior Journals and CR Essays:**

In the spring semester, graduating seniors must have their journals and CR Essays completed and submitted to the professor at least two weeks before graduation.

#### **Grade Weight**

Informed Class Participation	25%
Textbook Reading	25%
Critical Response Essay	25%
<u>Journal of Cultural Criticism</u>	<u>25%</u>
Total	100%

## Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they anticipate being able to attend every class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any information missed. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades.

## Grading Scale

Assigning grade definitions (i.e., above average, average, below average) is optional. Please delete the last column below if not assigning definitions. Additionally, delete these instructions when completing syllabus.

			Grade Definitions (optional)
A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour	
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour	
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour	
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour	
B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour	
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour	
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour	
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour	
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour	
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour	
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour	
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour	

## Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An "I" may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their professors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar's Office. The "I" must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the grade was assigned, or the "I" will become an "F."

## Academic Honesty



Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and
- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

## **Institutional Email Policy**

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students' institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

## **Disabilities**

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

## **Intellectual Property Rights**

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the professor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

## **Resources and Support**

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at [studenttechsupport@criswell.edu](mailto:studenttechsupport@criswell.edu).

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or [studentservices@criswell.edu](mailto:studentservices@criswell.edu). Pastoral and certified counseling services are also available to Criswell students. Appointments are scheduled through the Dean of Students, at [deanofstudents@criswell.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@criswell.edu).

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, go to the library website, or email the Wallace Library at [library@criswell.edu](mailto:library@criswell.edu).

Writing Center: Students are encouraged to consult with writing tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence by practicing techniques of clear and effective writing. To consult with a tutor, students can visit the Writing Center located on the first floor near the Computer Lab, or they can schedule an appointment by emailing [writingcenter@criswell.edu](mailto:writingcenter@criswell.edu) or calling 214.818.1373.

## Course Outline/Calendar

### Weekly Session

### Assignment

#### **Week 1**

(January 20-24)

Introduction and Syllabus  
Journal Examples

Purchase Textbooks

#### **Week 2**

(January 27-31)

Modern Culture  
Post-Modern Culture

Work on CR Essay Research  
What is “Culture” & “Faith”?

#### **Week 3**

(February 3-7)

What is Culture?  
What is Faith?

Work on CR Essay Research  
Textbook Reading

#### **Week 4**

(February 10-14)

Medieval Art and Ideas  
Baroque Art and Ideas

Work on CR Essay Research  
Textbook Reading

#### **Week 5**

(February 17- 21)

Romantic Art and Ideas  
Impressionist Art and Ideas

Write CR Essay  
Textbook Reading

#### **Week 6**

(February 24-28)

Expressionist Art and Ideas  
Futurist and Cubist Art and Ideas

Write CR Essay  
Textbook Reading  
Begin Journal Essays

#### **Week 7**

(March 2-6)

Movie “All Quiet on the Western Front”

Write CR Essay  
Textbook Reading

Begin Journal Essays

#### **Week 8**

(March 9-13)

Surrealism, DaDa, Abstract Art

Journal Work  
Textbook Reading

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**SPRING BREAK** (March 16-20)

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**Week 9**

(March 23-27)

Anti-Art Art: Found Art & Pop Art

Finish Textbook Reading

**Textbook Reading Assignments Due****Week 10**

(March 30 - April 3)

Anti-Art Art: Op Art & Mega Art

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 11**

(April 6-10)

Critique of Compositions by Spencer

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 12**

(April 13-17)

Critique of "The Wizard of Oz"

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 13**

(April 20-24)

Messianic Images and Christ Figures

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 14**

(April 27-May 1)

Critique of "Forest Gump"

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 15**

(May 4-8)

Critique "Forest Gump"

Journal Work

Read "Faith & Culture"

**Week 16**

(May 11-15)

Turn in All Reading Assignments

Turn in Journal

Turn in Critical Research

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**THOUGHT QUESTIONS:****Culture and Scripture**

How did Joseph's faith function in an Egyptian culture?

How did Daniel's faith function in Babylonian culture?

How did Paul's faith function in Athenian culture?

What does it mean to be "in the world" but not "of the World"?

What is Art?

What is beauty?

Is beauty subjective or objective

What is art and why do we need it, what does it do?

Is the quality of a work of art determined by its form or its content?

Can a beautiful idea be depicted in an ugly way?

Can an ugly idea be depicted in a beautiful way?

Must art copy reality to be true?

Toward a Christian Aesthetic

Can art be a divine calling?

Can a Christian affirm the beauty of art and yet abhor its content?

Is God an artist? What kind? Abstract, Symbolic, Realist, etc.

What is Christian art?

How do you feel about cross-over artists?

The Culture of Heaven on Earth

Why is so much avant-garde art directed at conservative Christians?

Why has God allowed Modern art to flourish in America?

Should we sing the great hymns (modern) or praise choruses (post-modern)?

Are we experiencing and emotional inquisition?

What is the message in the medium:

“Marketing the Church,”

“Greeting the Guest”

“Seeker Churches”

Praise Songs That Give Stage Direction such as “we lift our hands.”