Welcome to this seminar! I’m very much looking forward to working with you in our examination of modern Christian thought. In this course, we will identify crucial issues raised by modernity and examine a number of theological attempts to meet those challenges. We’ll have fun working through a series of classic texts as well as examining some new works that, if not classics, are certainly signs of the times. In light of the recent popularity of The Passion of the Christ (which most have you have already seen), we’ll also be screening films that examine the meaning of suffering, loss, death, and community in modern Christianity. When you leave this class, you will be pleased at how much you’ve grown intellectually.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is, above all else, dependent upon your careful preparation for, and willing participation in, our class conversations. It is not a lecture course, but is reading intensive and discussion intensive.

The most important expectation I have of you is that you will: do the readings, bring a copy of the readings with you when you come to class, and participate in class discussions. Do not come to class without the readings; if you do, I will ask you to leave.

The books for this class are available at Fine Print Book Store. E-reserve readings should be printed out from Blackboard.

Each week, you will either write a short paper or give a class presentation. I will divide the class into two groups. On Tuesdays members of the first group will bring to class a 1-2 page paper written in response to the question posed in the syllabus for that assignment; members of group 2 will bring papers with them on Thursdays. Be prepared to share your papers aloud.

In addition to writing weekly short papers, students will also sign up for class presentations (see syllabus for topics). On weeks in which you present, you are excused from the paper assignment. Presenters should come to class with a 1 page précis (and no longer) to hand out to each class member. The précis will include the following: (1) a statement of your own thesis (argument) about the material, (2) a summary of the reading’s argument, (3) an assessment of that argument (e.g.: is it coherent? what are its dis/advantages? why is it significant?), and (4) questions for class discussion.

Presentations should last 5-10 minutes (and no longer), and presenters should plan to lead and direct the subsequent class conversation. Don’t plan to talk longer than ten minutes; you have to organize your material so that you can fit your analysis into that time period. But don’t plan simply to read your précis and then disappear into the woodwork after you present. Your questions should guide our discussion. Please note also that presenting doesn’t mean merely summarizing material. The directions also ask you to “assess” critical points of interpretation. Confused about a presentation? Come talk to me! I’ll be happy to work with you so that you’re confident about the material.

Finally, there will be year-end group presentations. Groups will consist of 2-3 students. The point of the presentation is to allow you to make an argument to the class regarding some critical thinker or issue in the interpretation of Genesis 1-3. This is a good time to explore topics that we didn’t have time to
consider earlier, and you may choose any topic you wish. The first group to turn in a list of members will be awarded the topic and presentation date of its choice. Each group will be responsible for a 45 minute class session, in which they assign reading materials, present the class with a one page precis, and lead a class discussion on its topic. See the syllabus for various deadlines. A detailed sheet regarding group presentations follows the schedule of readings in this packet.

GRADING

Your grade will be determined as follows:

1. Class participation: 20% of your grade. Doing a good job in class discussions doesn’t mean talking constantly, or even every class session. It means coming to class prepared to discuss the readings and providing thoughtful comments on a consistent basis.

2. Altogether you will do 10 regular papers/presentations. I’ll drop the two lowest grades (unless one of them is a zero for failing to make a scheduled presentation). Your papers/presentation average will count for 60% of your grade.

3. A group project worth 20% of your grade.

Course Requirements to Receive S Credit

Your grade will not be calculated differently because this is an S class, but if you wish to receive S certification for this class, you must satisfy the following criteria:

1. You must average at least an 80 in class participation. That means you must attend class regularly and contribute to class discussion regularly. Your weekly papers will tell me how well you are preparing before you come to class; there should not be a huge discrepancy between careful preparation and contributions to class discussions. In short, writing good papers but remaining largely mute will not constitute a satisfactory progress toward S certification.

2. You must average at least an 80 in class presentations. Everyone will have the opportunity to present 3-4 times; by the end of the term, you should have demonstrated your ability to organize material coherently and present it to your peers in such a way that you can initiate and guide intelligible discussion. Taken as a whole, your class presentation grade must represent B work; obviously, that means is possible to overcome one poor presentation by superior work in others.

Grading scale:

90-100 A (90-92 = A-)
80-90 B (88-89 = B+ / 80-82 = B-)
70-80 C (78-79 = C+ / 70-72 = C-)
60-70 D (68-69 = D+ / 60-62 = D-)

OTHER STUFF

Absences: You are allowed 2 cuts. Each additional absence will result in the deduction of two points from your final average. Being tardy counts for half an absence. You're tardy if you arrive in class AFTER I shut the door to begin, but BEFORE 15 minutes have expired. Leaving before the end of class counts as half an absence as well.
You can use your cuts for anything you wish, but you only get 2. If you have to be out of town for a varsity game, if you need to go home for your grandmother's birthday, if you are sick in bed, or just don't feel like getting out of it, it's all the same. Those of you who are involved in campus activities (sports, newspaper, theater, etc.) may need to use your cuts for commitments in those areas. That's fine, but you don't get three cuts in addition to "school related" absences. No one is entitled to extra cuts because of participation in extracurricular activities.

Policy on late papers: no late papers will be accepted.

Academic integrity: I will observe the University policy on academic integrity, and urge you to consult the Student Handbook to familiarize yourself with that policy. Cheating in any form (on exams, papers, etc.) will result in reductions of grade or in your failing the class.

Required texts:


Schedule of Readings

8/24 Introduction to the course

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO READ THE BIBLE AS SCRIPTURE? THEORETICAL APPROACHES

8/29 RESERVE: Origen, De Principiis (Paulist Press, 1979), IV, chapters 1-3 (pp. 171-205); Origen, “Homily IV on Genesis,” in Homilies on Genesis and Exodus (Catholic University, 1982), pp. 103-111.


Presenters: 1. Explain and assess Origen’s “method” of interpretation in De Principiis.¹
2. Assess how Origen applies his “method” in his “Homily on Genesis.”²
**Class:** assess what he means (and does not mean) when he says the “scriptures are divinely inspired” (p. 171), and come to class ready to discuss your point of view.


--“The Wit and Wisdom of Martin Luther” (Ziegler); Grant, “The Bible and the Reformation,” *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 92-99.

**Presenters:** 1. Assess “On Translating,” particularly Luther’s discussion of the ways to render Latin into German and his notion of the “Word.” 2. For “Preface to the OT”: assess how theology drives interpretation, especially his understanding of “law” and of the ways in which the OT reveals Christ. 3. Assess the other readings in comparison to the first two, in particular how Luther decides what is “noble and best” in Scripture, and how his theory of interpretation matches his exegesis in her sermon on the catechism.

**Writers:** How does Luther’s theology drive his biblical interpretation? (You’ll need to identify his theological agenda to show how it influences his theology.)


--James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* 1, selections from ch. 10 (“The Encounter Between Science and Theology”), 237-250; selections from ch. 4 (“Christianity and Romanticism”),105-112.


**Writers:** Identify the central thesis for each writer and comment on what you find most/least persuasive about one of them.

--Livingston 1, finish ch. 10, 250-266, ch. 12 (“Movements of Recovery.”), 299-323.

Presenters: 1. Hodge (“Intro to ST”) says that theology is a science. Assess what he means and what implications this claim would have for theology. 2. For “Inspiration”: what is new about this understanding of what makes the Bible “true”? (You might start with the fallacious claim on p. 231: “this doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture…has always been the doctrine of the Church.”) 3. Finally: compare and contrast the threat/opportunity of evolution for the message of Scripture in the last 3 readings from Mathisen and Gaustad.

Writers: These authors of the Princeton School helped create modern American fundamentalism. Answer one of the following: (a) what theological innovations do you see in their work? (b) compare and contrast Warfield’s view of the interpretation of scripture to Luther’s or to Jowett’s (c) compare and contrast the understanding of theological truth of either Hodge to Bushnell.

CHRIST AND CULTURE

9/12 H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (entire)
--Livingston, 2, ch. 6 (“Christian Realism”), pp. 165-175.

Presenters: Explain and assess: 1. X of culture 2. X against culture 3. X above culture 4. X and culture in paradox 5. X transforming culture. Please note: don’t get bogged down in details and don’t expect to cover every thinker he mentions. Instead, try to figure out the heart of each position.

Writers: which position do you find most consistent with your own understanding of Christianity? Explain.


--Livingston 2, ch. 6 (“Christian Realism”), pp. 175-191.

Presenter: 1. Niebuhr argues that the church should not be pacifist, even though Jesus was. Assess this claim in light of Niebuhr’s views of sin, love, justice, and NT.
Writers: Niebuhr argues that the church should not be pacifist, even though Jesus was. Why does he say that, and how do you assess his claim?

For everyone to consider: In The Irony of American History, Niebuhr was writing about the perils the United States faced in the Cold War confrontation with communism. “Irony” in history means that national policies and actions always entail unforeseen (and unintended) consequences. How might Niebuhr apply this concept to the current war in Iraq?

INITIAL SUBMISSION OF GROUP PROJECTS: Groups should make appointments to meet with the instructor to discuss their choices.


Presenters: 1. Assess Yoder’s critique of Niebuhr.xvii 2. Assess Yoder’s theological ethic in the last 2 articles.xviii

Writers: did you find Yoder’s defense of Christian pacifism convincing? If so, explain the parts of his argument that persuaded you. If not, delineate the weaknesses of his argument.

CASE STUDIES: CHRIST, CULTURE, AND SCRIPTURE


Presenters: 1. Assess Boswell.xix 2. Compare and assess the principal positions in the remaining readings.xx

Writers: you just read a lot of theories about what scripture might say regarding homosexuality. Is this an issue, in your opinion, that scripture addresses or answers? If so, lay out the principal texts and interpretation. If not, explain why you don’t find a coherent explication of this issue in scripture.

Please note: these readings were used in group projects in REL 271 (Fall 2000) by Catherine Bosin, Kaelen Lynch, Kate Hinkle, and Julia Demske.


Writers: respond to one of the following: 1. Using H.R. Niebuhr’s typologies, how would you assess the ways in which the Christians in the first 4 readings construct gender roles? 2. Did the readings convince you that weight was a topic worthy of theological concern? Explain.


Writers: Martin is writing at a time when many American Christians assume that Christian sex is the best sex, that family values are Christian values, and that Jesus was heterosexual (or asexual). Respond to one of Martin’s chapter theses (that Paul argues for passionless marriages; that several different methods of interpretation in addition to historical criticism are equally legitimate for discussing Jesus’ sexuality; and that “traditional family values” represent a form of cultural idolatry, not Biblical values).

NOTE: TOPICS FOR GROUP PROJECTS MUST BE APPROVED BY THIS DATE

THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS


--Livingston 1, ch. 4 (“Christianity and Romanticism: Schleiermacher”), pp. 93-112.

Presenters: 1. Explain and assess Schleiermacher’s method in writing a biography of Jesus. 2. Relate Schleiermacher’s work on a biography of Jesus to his theory of the three stages of human consciousness.
Writers: Schleiermacher says that “if a historical presentation wishes to be actual history, it cannot restrict itself only to what is externally perceptible” (p. 4). Why is it important to Schleiermacher to show Jesus’ inner life? Is such a portrayal, in your opinion, possible?


--Livingston 1, 284-286; 2, pp. 153-161.

Presenters: 1. Explain and assess Kahler’s argument against the Life-of-Jesus movement. 2. Explain and assess Bultmann’s attempt to demythologize the New Testament.

Writers: both writers make a distinction between the figure of Jesus in the New Testament text and the “real” Jesus who stands behind the text. Answer one of the following: (A) is Bultmann right when he says that to understand the New Testament readers must separate the first-century prescientific world view from the text’s essential message? (B) are you convinced by Kahler’s claim that knowledge of the historical Jesus is irrelevant to Christian faith?


Presenters: 1. Consider Oursler, Barton, Borg, and the Jesus Seminar rules of evidence and assess how well they reconstruct and reveal the significance of the historical Jesus to modern readers. 2. Compare and contrast Crossan and Johnson on the usefulness of reconstructing the historical Jesus.

Writers: In what ways, if any, does your reading lead you to conclude that the historical Jesus matters to Christian faith? In what ways, if any, is the historical Jesus irrelevant to Christian faith?


Class: be mindful for the ways in which the film depicts Christian suffering, loss, and death. What seems to be the film’s theological point?

PLEASE NOTE: VIEWING THIS FILM WILL REQUIRE TIME BEYOND THE NORMAL CLASS PERIOD.

FALL BREAK

10/24 Film: Bonhoeffer.
Class: as an ungraded assignment, type up (and turn in) 3 questions you would like to ask Bonhoeffer about the theological meaning of Christian commitment, suffering, and death. Turn in your assignment by 4/3. [NOTE: EVERYONE should do this assignment; there is no Tuesday writing assignment.]

CRITICAL TURNING POINTS

--RESERVE: Barmen Declaration, online at http://www.christian-bible.com/Exegesis/Confessions/barmendc.htm
-- LIVINGSTON 2, 63-76, 140-152.

Presenters: 1. Explain and assess Barth’s “dialectical” theology in his Epistle to the Romans.xxxiii
Explain and assess Barth’s view of scripture in “Strange New World of the Bible” and his understanding of the church’s relationship to culture in the Barmen Declarations.xxxiv 2. Explain and assess Tillich’s theological method.xxxv

Writers: What is the strange new world within the Bible, and how does it relate to Barth’s critique of religion in his work on Romans? Or: assess Tillich’s method of correlation—what are its advantages and disadvantages?

-- LIVINGSTON 2, pp. 92-93, 111-128, 500-503..


Presenters: 1. Assess Bonhoeffer.xxxvi 2. Assess “death of God” theologians, including this claim (from “Further reading” above): Bonhoeffer insists that Christians, working alongside nonbelievers, are “challenged to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world.”xxxvii

Writers: explain and assess what these theologians meant when they spoke of the death of God.

Note: project and bibliographies, thesis statements, and outlines must be submitted by this date

**Presenter:** 1. Assess Cone (what’s his central argument, what are his strengths/weaknesses, what does he seek to accomplish with this book)\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

**Writers:** how did this book make you angry, and how did it make you think?


--Livingston 2, pp. 417-438, 460-466.

**Presenters:** 1. Explain and assess Saiving’s critique of traditional theological discussions of anthropology.\textsuperscript{xxxix} 2. Explain and assess the ways in which the clergy wife and Johnson critique traditional Christian understandings of the significance of gender for redemption.\textsuperscript{xli} 3.Explain and assess Japinga’s critique of traditional Christian language about God.\textsuperscript{xli}

**Writers:** what common themes do you see among these writers? Do you see any significant differences?

11/9 Livingston 2, ch. 8 (“Vatican II”), 233-247.


**Presenters:** 1. Explain the historical background and principle reforms of Vatican II, and assess *Dignitatis Humanae*’s attempt to balance religious freedom with what it calls the Christian duty to proclaim Christ.\textsuperscript{xlii} 2. In days of old, Catholicism claimed that there was no salvation outside the church. What do *Nostra Aetate* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* say?\textsuperscript{xliii}

**Tuesday Writers[NOTE: Thursday writers will do a paper on 4/25]:** Pick one of the following: (a) the Vatican II writers faced the challenge of reforming a tradition that in theory could not “change” because it was inspired and guided by revelation. How do you assess the writers’ ability to “reform” but not “change” the tradition? Point to specific examples. (b) Assess the documents’ analysis of Judaism (is it a legitimate religion?) and of Christianity’s relationship to Judaism (is anti-Semitism theologically legitimate?)

11/14 Topic: Intelligent Design. All readings are on reserve and are arranged into 3 sections.


**Presenters:** 1. Using the *New Yorker* article for background, assess Dembski’s theological claims and strategic plan in his intelligent design work. 2. Answers in Genesis is a Young Earth creationist group; Murphy is writing as a mainline Protestant; Krauthammer is talking about science. Assess each of their critiques of intelligent design. 3. Consider the satirists in group 4 above. Is “intelligent falling” theory comparable to intelligent design? Does the Great Spaghetti Monster have, according to intelligent design theory, a right to claim equal time in public school biology discussions of the origins of the universe?

11/16 Film: *Babette’s Feast*

**Note:** Project thesis statements, outlines, and bibliographies must be approved by this date

Presenter: 1. Given what you know from CT about the “postliberal” understanding of theology developed at Yale, how well (or not) does Placher’s article about “narrative” allow him to avoid fundamentalist (Lindbeck’s “cognitive propositionalists”) and liberal (Lindbeck’s “experiential-expressive”) readings of the Bible? What, exactly, is a “narrative” reading of the Bible that sees a “pattern” that lays out “the shape of the world” and the “character of God”? ...

[Note: Tuesday AND Thursday writers should do this essay] Writers, choose one: (a) What theological points does the film seek to make about Christian loss, suffering, and community? (b) Explain and assess Placher’s claim that only “in reflecting both on the world described in the story and on the character of a life lived in that world, both on the God depicted in the story and on the nature of a life lived in response to that God, can we begin to sort out what kind of truth claims the story calls us to make.” What kind of reading of the Bible is he rejecting, and what alternative is he proposing?

THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/28  Group Projects
11/30  TBA
12/5   Group Projects
12/7   Group Projects
Group Presentations and You: A Guide

**TOPIC**
Your first step is to decide upon a topic. Pick something that interests you; there’s no sense being bored to tears. Remember that your topic should be directly related to the subject matter of this course.

**NARROWING THE TOPIC**
Your next step is to narrow down your topic. No one can talk about everything. What about this subject interests you? What’s your angle?

**RESEARCH**
Are you sure you know what you’re talking about? What do the major authorities have to say? Which scholars are you agreeing with? Who disagrees? Why?

No one is saying that you have to read everything ever written, but you do need to know the major lines of interpretation. You need to know what view you’re representing and what view you’re opposing. And you need to be able to explain why.

**PRODUCING A THESIS**
Now you’re ready to decide exactly what argument you want to make about your topic.

**CHOOSING CLASS READINGS**
Pick readings that represent the major issues you want to discuss in your presentation. Don’t assign so much material that no one will finish it. If your topic is controversial, be sure to assign readings that represent all the relevant points of view.

Be sure that you:

1. indicate the name of the author, the publisher, and the date of publication on the first page of each assigned reading.
2. place one copy of each assigned reading on reserve in the library at least one class meeting before your presentation.
3. give 1 copy of the assigned readings to the instructor at least one class meeting before your presentation.

**PLANNING THE PRESENTATION**
How will you use class time? If you’re part of a group, who will be responsible for what? Points to remember:

--**TIME:** you cannot go overtime. How will you structure your time?

--**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** the point of a presentation is **NOT** for you to talk nonstop. Presentations are no different than any other class session--learning best occurs when class members
interact with reading materials and each other.

--/DISCUSSION OF ASSIGNED READINGS: decide how you will work those elements into your presentation.

--INTEREST: how will you make the class interested in your project?

**PREPARING YOUR PRECIS**

As you begin your presentation, you will distribute your precis to the class. Make a copy for every member of the class and two copies for the instructor.

A precis is a one-page, typed document distributed to each class member at the beginning of the group presentation. It consists of the following parts: (1) a *thesis statement* presenting the principal argument the team wishes to make about the topic, (2) a section summarizing the primary points the group intends to present (3) a section summarizing the principal points from the assigned reading[s] and relating those points to the presentation and, if applicable, to one another and (4) a section raising questions (usually 2-5) to guide class discussion of the topic and the assigned reading[s].

Team responsibility for the precis is as follows: the entire team is responsible to work together to produce a coherent whole. If there are 2 group members, ultimate responsibility for producing a readable final draft for parts (1) and (4), as well as for typing, copying, distributing, and presenting the finished product to the class go to Group Member 1; responsibilities for parts (2) and (3) go to Group Member 2. If there are 3 members of the team, Member 1 is responsible for producing a readable final draft for parts (1) and (4), as well as for typing, copying, distributing, and presenting the finished product to the class; Group Member 2 is responsible for part (2); and Group Member (3) is responsible for part (3).

**DO'S AND DONT'S**

**DO:** Start your presentation by introducing the topic and explaining the particular angle you are interested in pursuing. Give the class a general overview of what you expect to happen. Point out the significance of the topic.

**DON’T:** Lecture for more than ten minutes at a time. This is a presentation, not a monologue! Don’t bore people to death. Instead, get them involved.

**DON’T:** expect that lively conversations will spontaneously erupt. **DO** have specific questions planned to guide the discussion. Remember that you’re responsible for the quality of the entire experience; you may have to work hard to get a good discussion going.

**DO:** expect that people will ask you for background information. You should be able to provide it--that’s part of doing good research.

**DO:** coordinate the tasks of each member of your team. Before you start, you should have a vision of how each person’s part fits in with the overall game plan.

**DO:** feel free to be creative. Use audiovisual materials, slides, role plays--anything that makes the material come alive. But **DON’T** allow such devices to take the place of your analysis and class discussion.

**DO:** feel free to come by my office (102A Harrison) if you want to talk about your project. We’ll have fun.
GRADING

I will take into account the factors listed above in evaluating your presentations. I’ll consider the quality of the assigned readings, the clarity of your thesis, the adequacy of your research, and the quality of the classroom experience.

Presentation Evaluation

Title:

Presenters:

Topic:
--Sufficiently Defined?
--Significance made clear?

Thesis:
--Made Clear?
--Of relevance?

Assigned Readings:
--Relevant to the topic/thesis?
--Provided the necessary information?

Group Preparation: Research adequate?

Use of Class Time:
--Group members worked together well:
--Necessary information was presented clearly:
--The presenters sparked discussion among the class:
--The presentation/discussion was interesting:
--The presentation/discussion used the readings well:
--The presenters managed their time well:

Presentation Grade:

Presentation Assignments

1
2
3
4