

God and Culture
TH 3XC3/5XC5/6XC6
CC/CT/CW/PS

McMaster Divinity College
Winter 2019
Monday 11:00-12:50
Office: 216

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Hours: Mon 1:00–2:00 & 1:00–2:00

I. Description:

The West and its church are in decline. How should Christians respond? This course explores ways to navigate the postmodern and post-Christian culture. It considers the different ways Christians negotiate the path of being 'in,' but not 'of' the world. It studies select historical examples such as the early church response to Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, the monastic reaction, medieval Christendom, the Protestant Reformation alternatives, the liberal, neo-orthodox, fundamentalist, and evangelical responses to modernism, as well as current responses to the contemporary postmodern and post-Christendom culture of the West.

II. Course Objectives:

A. Knowing:

1. Know a variety of biblical, historical, and contemporary ways Christians have understood the relationship between Christianity and culture.
2. Know the distinct historical-cultural contexts of Christianity and the variety of Christian responses to those cultural conditions.
3. Know the contemporary evangelical alternatives to postmodern and post-Christian culture.

B. Being:

1. Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. Embrace a deeper sense of your own Christian identity vis-à-vis contemporary culture

C. Doing:

1. Analyze contemporary culture from a Christian perspective.

2. Be able to develop responses to culture that are both credible within the culture and authentic to the Gospel.
3. Develop skills in academic analysis, writing, and presentation of research.

III. Required Texts:

1. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragdey, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
 2. Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008).
 3. Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2007). We will read the first chapter and select additional chapters for the purpose of illustrating the way to complete assignments.
- Additional reading may be assigned
 - For additional resources, see Appendix 2 for bibliographies according to specialization

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

❖ **Research degree students, see Appendix 1 for advanced program requirements** ❖

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due</u>
A. Culture Snapshot:	20%	10/6
B. Church & Culture:	20%	11/3
C. God & Culture Paper/Projects:	55%	One week after presentation
1) Presentation	20%	
2) Paper	35%	
D. Reading:	5%	12/14
E. Participation:	X	
	Total: 100%	

V. Assignment Descriptions (advanced degree students consult appendix 1):

General Guidelines:

- Submit papers to the assignment folder on Avenue to Learn. Use the following format for file names: your last name.assignment name.docx [Studebaker.InterpretingCulture.docx]. PDF files may not receive electronic comments.
- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.
- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form attached to the syllabus
- All papers and assignments should conform to (and will be marked against) the MacDiv Style Guide

1. Culture Snapshot:

Christian Worldview, Church and Culture, and Pastoral Studies:

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to give ministry leaders practice in interpreting culture. Developing cultural hermeneutics is important to discern appropriate ways to follow Christ in the specific cultural matrix in which we live and to assess cultural influence on our understanding of the Christian faith.

b. Description:

1) Students select a cultural artifact and describe the cultural values and worldview assumed and advocated by the item.

2) The essay should:

- *Describe* the cultural world assumed and advocated by the artifact
- *Identify* whether the item reflects or critiques a dominant cultural myth/value. For example, some films may portray one set of cultural values and critique another set.
- *Reflect* on the artifact from a Christian perspective.

3) Length: 5–6 pages.

4) See Appendix 3 for a sample of this assignment.

c. Examples of cultural artifacts:

- A film.

- A song or several songs, or a band's/artist's work that reflects a similar perspective.
- Television show or series—e.g., SuperWhoLock (Supernatural, Doctor Who, Sherlock), House, Big Bang Theory, Walking Dead.
- Wal-Mart
- Tim Horton's or Starbucks
- An organic, local produce grocery store
- Chapters or a smaller “traditional” or retro-style bookshop
- A subdivision and its house architectural styles

Christian Thought and History:

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to consider and evaluate past cultures with significant ties to the development of Christianity. Developing cultural hermeneutics is important to discerning the impact of culture on the development of Christian thought. Looking at past examples provides constructive/cautionary examples for contemporary Christians to discern appropriate ways to follow Christ in the specific cultural matrix in which we live and to assess cultural influence on our understanding of the Christian faith.

b. Description:

- 1) Students select a cultural artifact from the past (distant or recent). They describe the cultural values and worldview assumed and advocated by the item.
- 2) The essay should:
 - *Describe* the cultural world assumed and advocated by the artifact
 - *Identify* whether the item reflects or critiques a dominant cultural myth/value. For example, some films may portray one set of cultural values and critique another set.
 - *Reflect* on the artifact from a Christian perspective.
- 3) Length: 5–6 pages.
- 4) See Appendix 3 for a sample of this assignment.

- c. Examples of cultural artifacts suited to this specialization:
 - A book/body of work (e.g., *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Works of Plotinus*, *Beowulf*, and other classic/representative works)
 - A Roman Coliseum
 - A Roman triumphal procession
 - A Greco-Roman residence
 - An Aztec temple

2. Church and Culture: How does your church relate to culture?

Christian Worldview, Church and Culture, and Pastoral Studies:

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to develop the ability to exegete our church culture and its response and relationship to its broader cultural environment. What is the church's implicit and explicit posture toward traditional Christianity and the wider culture?

For example, does the church intentionally attempt to engage people through contemporary cultural forms, does it perceive itself as an isolated bastion for the faithful, and do its ministries and church "values" reflect accommodation to culture? This requires careful discernment. For example, a Christian organization on the surface may appear counter-cultural (e.g., oppose abortion), but use the same methods of money and power politics as the culture and, thus, be both counter-cultural in one sense and accommodated to culture in another sense.

b. Description:

- 1) Select a church or Christian ministry organization and interpret its response to culture. Ideally, the church/organization is one you attend and/or in which you are involved.
- 2) Use your observations of the church (website, ministries, sermons, etc.) and, if possible, interviews with staff members.
- 3) Although not determinative for grading, students will share their interpretation of their church in a small group and/or full-class setting.

- 4) Length of the essay is 5–6 pages.

Christian Thought and History:

- a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to assess and evaluate a historical incarnation of the Church in relation to its surrounding culture. What is the church's implicit and explicit posture towards neighbouring expressions of Christianity and the wider culture?

For example, did the church in question intentionally attempt to engage people through contemporary cultural forms, does it perceive itself as an isolated bastion for the faithful, and do its ministries and church "values" reflect accommodation to culture?

- b. Description:

- 1) Select a historical church in a certain era and interpret its response to culture. Make sure sufficient information exists on the church you are examining. For example, you could select the church where John Calvin or some other major figure served as pastor. You could even examine a prior era of the church you attend. In such a case, draw from church records and the recollections of long time members. Another option is to examine a broader church tradition in a given time and place, such as the Donatist church in North Africa at the time of Roman persecution.
- 2) Although not determinative for grading, students will share their interpretation of their church in a small group and/or full-class setting.
- 3) Length of the essay is 5–6 pages.

3. God & Culture Project/Paper:

- a. General guidelines:

This assignment constitutes the "major paper" and presentation of the course. The purpose of the paper/project is vocational development. It should advance your vocational trajectory. Selecting whether to prepare a project or a paper is an important step in the process. If you anticipate further graduate work or writing a thesis as part of your MTS or MDiv, then an academic research-thesis paper is an excellent option. A research-thesis paper provides skill development in conducting the concentrated study on a particular research topic necessary for advanced academic work. If your vocational track is vocational ministry or an alternative professional field, then a project may be an effective option. Completing a project provides skill development in contextualizing and applying the fruit of theological research and reflection.

If you have an idea for a paper or creative project that does not neatly fit into the parameters of the assignment, please come and discuss your idea with me. I am open to papers/projects that cohere with the essence of the course and are suited to your research field and interests.

b. Specialization focus:

1) *Christian Worldview*

This specialization relates to the intellectual environment—historical, contemporary, and global—of contemporary Christianity. Engage a topic related to God and culture that addresses an element of Christian worldview. The paper/project should be constructive and not only descriptive. The heart of this assignment is your creative interaction with a way culture impacts Christian worldview.

Possible topics: New Atheism, Canada's Supreme Court ruling on euthanasia.

2) *Church and Culture*

This specialization focuses on the intersection of the church and its cultural setting. Developing the ability to interpret culture *and* to specify an appropriate Christian response and interaction with it is the purpose of this assignment. Discerning appropriate ways to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in terms of our specific cultural location is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship and ministry and this assignment seeks to facilitate this process. The paper/project analyzes an element of contemporary culture from a Christian perspective. Careful and accurate description of the cultural area, as well as thoughtful assessment and response from a Christian perspective is essential. This paper/project should be prepared for your particular vocational venue—if you anticipate further graduate or thesis work, then a thesis paper is a sensible option; if you anticipate professional ministry, then a paper/project geared toward a ministry application is appropriate.

Possible topics: The role of the church in the public sphere in the context of post-Christendom and multiculturalism?

3) *Pastoral Studies*

This specialization focuses on vocational ministry. The paper/project should address an issue related to God and culture from the perspective of vocational ministry. The paper/project should emphasize the impact of the cultural issue on Christian ministry. Theological reflection is essential, but the focus of the

paper/project is the concrete and practical way the cultural issue shapes, challenges, and provides an opportunity for the practice of Christian ministry.

Possible topic: what does Canada's Supreme Court ruling on euthanasia mean for chaplains and pastors providing end-of-life counsel and care?

4) *Christian Thought and History*

Considering the contribution of past figures and movements in the history of Christianity for the church today is essential to this specialization. This paper/project draws on a select a figure or movement within the history of Christianity and shows its importance for contemporary Christian thought, life, and/or ministry. This constructive project includes two major elements: 1) Accurate and fair description of the resource person/movement and 2) thoughtful contextualization to the church today.

Possible topic: How does Augustine's idea of the 'City of God' and the 'City of Man' or Luther's theology of the two kingdoms apply to Christians in post-Christian and multicultural Canada?

c. Description of presentation and paper:

1) Class presentation:

You will present and facilitate a discussion of your paper/project (I encourage multi-media, audio, audio-visual methods when appropriate). Length of presentation and discussion will be determined based on final class roster. Normally presentations are 15-20 minutes followed by 5-10 minutes of class discussion (for a total time of 20-30 minutes)

2) Paper:

- The paper should be attentive to the following categories of assessment (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric):

a) Content:

- A detailed description (e.g., broad and thick descriptions) of the cultural values and worldview(s) assumed, advocated, and/or critiqued by the artifact.
- A careful and thoughtful *Christian* interaction with the artifact (see the essays in Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology* for samples).

b) Argument:

- 1) Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports).
Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.
- 2) Describe your topic under consideration.
- 3) Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.
- 4) Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms of the position and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.

c) Presentation:

- 1) Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., avoid colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active). Research-thesis papers must have a thesis statement (stated in the introduction), and introduction, content, and conclusion sections of the paper.
- 2) Use and document a *minimum* of ten scholarly resources.
- 3) Accurately document sources according to the College’s Style Guide. [Link](#) to Style Guide.
- 4) Paper length: 10–12 pages.
- 5) Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).

4. Reading:

- Please read the texts books assigned or in cases such as Vanhoozer the chapters specified.
- The professor may at times assign supplementary readings.
- Submit a reading report that states the percentage of reading completed for each assigned book.

VI. Lecture Outline (*tentative*):

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Assignment & Presentation Schedule
1	1/7	Introduction to the Course	

		I. Faith & Culture in the Bible A. Old Testament Case Studies (e.g., the creation accounts)	
2	1/14	B. New Testament Case Studies (e.g., implications of the Incarnation for a theology of culture)	Vanhooser, <i>Everyday</i> , 15-60
3	1/21	II. Faith & Culture in the History of the Church A. The Emergence of Christendom B. Responses to Christendom 1. Monasticism 2. Protestant Reformers (Magisterial, Militant, and Anabaptist) • Group discussions of Interpreting Culture assignment	
4	1/28	C. Models of Faith & Culture 1. Augustine’s Two Cities 2. Luther’s Two Kingdoms 3. Niebuhr’s Five Models • Guest: G. Heath case study on Christians and culture: The Canadian Church and Empire (50 minutes)	
5	2/4	III. Faith & Culture in the Evangelical Tradition A. Modernism & Evangelicalism B. Postmodernism & Evangelicalism • Group discussions of Church Case Study	During this segment of the course be prepared to discuss Smith, <i>Awaiting</i> , and Ramachandra, <i>Subverting</i>
6	2/11	1. Postmodernism & Post-Christendom	
7	2/18	<i>Reading Week</i>	
8	2/25		

		2. Contemporary Church & Culture (e.g., emergent church) 3. Servants of Christ, Servants of Caesar • Group discussions of Cultural Engagement Project							
9	3/4	IV. Grace & Culture: A Proposal for a Theology of Culture	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>1.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	1.	Paper:		2.	Paper:	
1.	Paper:								
2.	Paper:								
10	3/11	V. Theology & Popular Culture • This section includes lectures, viewing segments from <i>Eyes Wide Open</i> (video), and discussions of contemporary culture	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>3.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>4.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	3.	Paper:		4.	Paper:	
3.	Paper:								
4.	Paper:								
11	3/18	V. Continued							
12	3/25	V. Continued	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>5.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>6.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	5.	Paper:		6.	Paper:	
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6.	Paper:								
13	4/1	Film Discussion (Film TBD)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>7.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>8.</td> <td>Paper:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	7.	Paper:		8.	Paper:	
7.	Paper:								
8.	Paper:								
14	4/8								

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. Academic Honesty:

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty.

C. Gender Inclusive Language:

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

D. Style:

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus.
- C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late, the grade will be reduced to 85).
- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.
- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with

school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Appendix 1: Advanced Degree Requirements

I. God & Culture Paper/Project:

A. Description:

Advanced degree students will write an academic thesis paper or prepare a cultural engagement project. If you have an idea for a paper or creative project, please come and discuss your idea with me. I am open to papers/projects that cohere with the essence of the course and are suited to your research field and interests.

B. Purpose:

This assignment gives you experience writing article, essay, and chapter length theological papers and presenting research in an oral form similar to that performed at academic conferences.

C. Guidelines for the Paper:

The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .

1. Content and argument:

a. Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports).

- Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.

b. Describe your topic.

c. Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.

- d. Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.
2. Presentation:
 - a. Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid excessive first person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).
 - b. Use and document a *minimum* of fifteen scholarly resources.
 - c. Accurately document sources according to the College's Style Guide ([link](#)).
 - d. Paper length: 20–25 pages. Not to exceed 7,000 words.
 - e. Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).
 - f. Use footnotes.

D. Guidelines for the Class Presentation:

1. Time:

The paper presentation takes a thirty-minute segment of the class. Each presentation includes two parts:

- a. The paper presentation (15–20 minutes)
- b. The response and facilitation, which is led by another student (10 minutes, see below for more details on the response and facilitation).

2. Presentation content:

You should articulate the paper's thesis, topic, and argument. You can use PowerPoint, etc. if you wish. The purpose of this assignment is to give you experience with presenting papers as might at an academic conference. You should prepare and present your paper for that type of venue. I encourage you to consider presenting your paper for this class at a conference and/or the Theological Research Seminar of the Divinity College.

II. Response and Facilitation (due day of presentation):

A. Purpose:

Provides experience in responding to and moderating academic presentations and discussions, such as one might do at an academic society meeting.

B. Description:

Each student *prepares a critique* and *facilitates a discussion* of a thesis paper presentation.

1. The critique:

- a. Remember to be charitable; not only Christian, but since academia is a small guild, it is self-preservation.
- b. Critical (includes highlighting and discussing problems *and* strengths):

The critique should explore the following sorts of issues:

- Does the paper have a thesis?
- Does the content develop and support the thesis?
- Does it use appropriate sources?
- Does it interact with the relevant secondary literature?

2. The discussion:

You should keep the presentation to time limit and effectively manage student discussion (do not let one person dominate the interaction; move on to a new issue if discussion begins to go off on tangents and run down rabbit trails). Be sure to elicit comments from all people present. You might want to have some prepared questions and discussion prompts to facilitate the initial discussion.

C. Guidelines:

1. Each student paper presentation will take approximately fifty minutes (one segment of a class session).
2. The presentation and discussion typically includes the following items:

a. Presenter presents the paper: approximately thirty minutes.

b. Response: approximately fifteen minutes.

You can go through point by point as a monologue or start by raising and offering your thoughts on the paper's primary contributions and arguments and invite discussion based on your remarks and interaction with the paper and then so forth through the rest of the points you have identified.

c. Class discussion of the paper and response: approximately five to ten minutes.

3. A written submission/outline is not required, but is encouraged as it may be beneficial to other students in the course.

II. Lecture & Discussion: (due day of scheduled presentation):

A. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to give students experience with developing and presenting lectures.

B. Description:

You will present a lecture on one of the topics listed in the course outline (or an approved alternative topic). Lecture topic and major paper topics can be coordinated.

- Lecture topic and major paper topics can be coordinated

C. Guidelines:

1. Research:

- a. Research for the lecture will account for the supplemental reading for advanced degree students (approximately 5,000-6,000 pages)
- b. Documentation of reading:

Please provide an annotated bibliography of the reading consulted in the preparation of the lecture (the annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text).

2. Lecture:

- a. The lecture should present and discuss the primary content points of the topic (or sub-topic)
- b. Lecture handouts/outlines and PowerPoint/Prezi are helpful, but not required
- c. Length:

The lecture and discussion will take a fifty-minute period of the course.

D. Evaluation:

Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following . . .

1. Please submit to the professor a copy (electronic or hard copy) of your lecture notes and annotated bibliography used to develop the lecture.
2. Does the lecture accurately present and discuss the topic?

3. Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation/discussion of the content?
4. Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it have value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry?
5. Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?

III. Class Leadership:

A. Purpose:

A significant part of your future or current work will likely include teaching in an academic and/or church context. Taking a leadership role in the course will provide an opportunity to develop teaching skills for your current/future vocational work.

B. Description:

1. Group discussions:

- a. The course will have regular in-class group discussions of the assignments and readings.
- b. Advanced students will have the opportunity to facilitate these group discussions. You do not need to play the role of expert, but facilitate the discussion by asking questions, offering short insightful thoughts on the subject, and drawing on course readings that will relate to the discussion and spark group discussion.

2. De-brief meetings:

- a. Advanced students will meet three times (probably weeks four, nine, and twelve) during the semester with the professor to discuss teaching style, content, purpose of chosen content, rationale of approach, experience leading the group discussions, evaluation of lectures, etc.
- b. I envision these meetings as times when we can prompt each other to consider and hone our teaching styles, approach to teaching the content for this course, and theological viewpoints
- c. Length: approximately thirty minutes.

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due</u>
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A.	God & Culture Paper/Project: (a.k.a. presentation and paper)	50%	One week after presentation
	1. Presentation	20%	
	2. Paper	30%	
B.	Lecture and Discussion:	30%	Day of lecture
C.	Annotated Bibliography: * See lecture assignment	5%	Day of lecture
D.	Response and Facilitation	15%	Day of presentation

Total: 100%

Appendix 2: Web Resources and Bibliographies for Christianity and Culture

Web Resources

Restoring Eden: Christians for Environmental Stewardship (<http://www.restoringeden.org/index.html>)

Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and Arts (<http://www.brehmcenter.com>)

The Journal of Religion and Film (<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf>)

Sojourners: Faith, Politics, Culture (<http://www.sojo.net>)

The Gospel and Our Culture Network (<http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm>)

The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture (<http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/index.html>)

The Ooze: Conversation for the Journey (<http://www.spencerburke.com/TheOOZE/>)

Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity (<http://www.touchstonemag.com/>)

The Wittenburg Door (<http://www.wittenburgdoor.com>)

Yale Center *for* Faith & Culture (<http://www.yale.edu/faith>)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk>)

Evangelical Environmental Network and Creation Care Magazine (<http://www.creationcare.org>)

Allelon: A Movement of Missional Leaders (www.allelon.org)

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
(http://www.virginia.edu/iasc/publications_hedgehog_review.php)

The Center for law and Culture (http://www.lawandculture.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk/>)

Emergent Village (<http://www.emergentvillage.com/>)

Reginald Bibby: <http://www.reginaldbibby.com/>

Bibliography

1) *Christian Worldview*

Anker, Roy. *Dancing in the Dark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

Banks, Robert. *Redeeming the Routines*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book. 1993.

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

Clapp, Rodney. *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000.

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008.

Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Dawson, John. *Taking our Cities for God: How to Break Spiritual Strongholds*. FL: Creation House, 1991.

Dempster, Murray. "Evangelism, Social Concern and the kingdom of God" in Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, *Called and Empowered, Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.

Dennison, Jack. *City Reaching, On the Road to Community Transformation*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999.

Greenway, Roger S. *Together Again*. Monrovia, CA: MARC. 1998.

Hsu, Albert. *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006.

Myers, David G. *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

O'Malley, John W. *Four Cultures of the West*. Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2004.

Otis Jr., George. *Informed Intercession*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000.

Sider, Ronald J. *Good News and Good Works, A Theology for the Whole Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

Book House, 1993.

Stott, John. *The Contemporary Christian*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

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Appendix 3: Interpreting Culture Assignment Sample

Interpreting Culture Assignment:
A Vanhoozerian Examination of Sweatshopwatch.org

by

Nikola T. Caric

Introduction

Every Christian individual, church, and denomination exists within the milieu of human culture. These Christian agents cannot help but interact with the worldviews, presuppositions, metaphors, ideologies, theologies, images and archetypes of the surrounding culture. The interaction may be rejection, accommodation, integration, critique, or embrace, but there is no question that an interaction occurs. Kevin Vanhoozer argues that understanding the “texts” of the surrounding culture is crucial for the Christian church.¹ Christians must be adept at interpreting their surrounding culture because they need to determine if the cultural worldview/s are negatively shaping Christian thought and practice, if their own embodiment of the Gospel can be effectively communicated within the culture, and if the presence of God can be seen within culture.

The first step in interpreting culture theologically is to understand a particular cultural text or artifact on its own terms. This short paper is an exercise in this first step, as it will examine the NGO (non-governmental organization) Sweatshop Watch as expressed through the website sweatshopwatch.org.² NGOs have become an important part of Western culture in the last few decades, the exploits and ideals of organizations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International now form part of the cultural fabric. Additionally, the reality that much of our clothing products are made in factories with substandard working conditions (i.e. in sweatshops) permeates the culture — from academic conferences to jokes on late-night talk shows.

Vanhoozer’s method of analysing cultural texts through the tripartite framework of the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text will be used to interpret sweatshopwatch.org. This

¹ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 32-35.

² Sweatshop Watch, "Welcome to Sweatshop Watch." In order to reduce clutter in the bibliography, only reference to this homepage on sweatshopwatch.org will be made. All the “articles” referred to in the footnotes are listed on the homepage in the navigation bar.

paper will let the cultural text speak for itself in presenting its own worldview, as opposed to listing what other sources argue concerning sweatshops and our proper response to them and the economic policies and forces involved. First, a broad description of the cultural artifact is necessary to orient the reader.

Sweatshopwatch.org: A Broad Description

Sweatshopwatch.org is the website of Sweatshop Watch, an NGO that is a coalition of organizations working in such areas as labour, civil rights, immigrant rights, women's issues, etc. These organizations share a commitment to ending the "exploitation" and "inhuman conditions" of sweatshops.³ Sweatshop Watch works with factory workers around the globe, but focuses on sweatshops in California. The website functions as a source for information, a call to action, an income generator, and a gateway to myriad sites concerning sweatshops, labour issues, and globalization.

The majority of pages within the website disseminate information about sweatshop working conditions, the work of Sweatshop Watch, and stories of successful worker action against corporations (e.g. unionization). Some of the pages encourage readers to get involved in the mission of the organization through purchasing non-sweatshop made clothing or petitioning political leaders to take action. The website also generates income for Sweatshop Watch through a donation page and a section where browsers may purchase merchandise. Many of the pages contain links to other websites, including the member organizations and websites reporting the labour practices of multi-national corporations (MNCs). The information on the website is primarily in English language text, although there are also videos, pictures, a slideshow, and Spanish text.

³ Sweatshop Watch, "Mission."

The World “of” Sweatshopwatch.org

Vanhoozer defines the world “of” the cultural text as the specific way of “doing life” proposed by the text, and “into which it invites us to enter and participate”.⁴ What is Sweatshop Watch trying to accomplish with the text of its website? What kind of worldview is it presenting and proposing?

The overarching theme of sweatshopwatch.org is one of struggle against oppression, but also the possibility of succeeding in that struggle. Sweatshop Watch was formed in response to a particular case of oppression in El Monte, California in 1995. A sweatshop was discovered where dozens of “Thai immigrant workers were forced to sew clothes behind razor wire and armed guards” for less than two dollars and hour.⁵ Sweatshop Watch organized campaigns against the retailers and manufacturers and as a result the workers received compensation.

The story of Sweatshop Watch’s first successful campaign can be viewed as a template for what the text as a whole (the website) is communicating. Foremost, there is the reality of injustice. The text clearly communicates that sweatshops are places of exploitation, abuse, health and safety hazards, unfair wages, intimidation, and (sometimes) child labour. Furthermore, there are powerful human organizations and forces at work in creating and/or exacerbating sweatshops and the concomitant oppression. The website singles out transnational clothing corporations that are only interested in how cheaply factory owners can make the products, economic structures such as free trade and the IMF that place the bulk of power in the hands of corporations over against workers, and governments that are unwilling or unable to enforce or create labour laws to prevent the injustice.⁶

The way of “doing life” proposed by sweatshopwatch.org is at odds with the existence of sweatshops and the structures that create them. The harsh conditions of sweatshops should not be a part of human life, and institutions that perpetuate sweatshops need to be held accountable. The website provides stories that narrate

⁴ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 50.

⁵ Sweatshop Watch, “History.” Sweatshop Watch, “Modern Day Sweatshops.”

⁶ Sweatshop Watch, “Why Do Sweatshops Exist?”

how battles have been won against corporations, manufactures and governments.⁷ Through lawsuits, legislation, unionization, and solidarity among workers, the world envisioned by Sweatshop Watch is possible. This is a world where workers receive a living wage for their services, are treated with respect, and hold power through their association with other workers. Furthermore, the reader is invited to enter into the struggle to make this world possible through purchasing only union made clothing or writing government representatives (for example).

The worldview of sweatshopwatch.org contains a strong sense of right and wrong or just and unjust, a desire to see power distributed fairly, and a sense of hope that oppression can be fought. This worldview makes strong ethical demands on the reader and his or her practices.

The World “Behind” Sweatshopwatch.org

The world “behind” the text “refers to the background context from which a cultural text emerges”.⁸ Vanhoozer states that this includes the attributes and biases of the author as well as certain ideological presuppositions. Since analysing all the persons involved in creating sweatshopwatch.org is beyond the scope of this paper the focus will be on a major ideological presupposition.

The website lies on one side of the debate over the process of economic globalization. It is an oversimplification to say there are only two sides to the issue, but for the purposes of this paper it will suffice. On the one side is the camp that believes economic globalization should continue along the course dictated by free market capitalism — i.e. enacting the features of free market capitalism (deregulation, privatization, intellectual property rights, free trade, etc.) across the globe. On the other side are those who argue that global capitalism (as presently constructed) results in injustice and oppression to many of the most vulnerable people

⁷ Sweatshop Watch, “Recent Accomplishments.”

⁸ Vanhoozer, “Everyday Theology,” 49-50. While Vanhoozer, in his methodology, describes the world “behind” the text prior to the world “of” the text, it was necessary in this analysis to start with the world “of” the text since it leads to the uncovering of the world “behind” the text.

in the world (the poor, the indigenous, etc.). They propose that instituting laws and structures that protect the vulnerable, distribute power, and are not focused on maximizing profit will result in a more humane process of globalization. There is an ongoing fight throughout the world between these competing claims and the way to create a better global society.

Sweatshopwatch.org is clearly in the second group and this is reflected in its stance on issues such as free trade, WTO policy, and the reasons for the existence of sweatshops.⁹ The world it wants to create is akin to the world advocated by those opposed to the dominant economic globalization in place today. Within this overarching struggle for globalization one sees Marxist themes of the workers uniting to combat the power of the capitalists. It is unclear how much the creators of sweatshopwatch.org are influenced by Marxist analysis, but language of worker solidarity and a portrayal of the multi-national corporations as, implicitly, villains is employed. However, there is no place in the text where violence against the oppressors is advocated.

The World “in Front of” Sweatshopwatch.org

Vanhoozer’s description of the world “in front of” the text is harder to pinpoint than the first two categories.¹⁰ The analysis seems to be about the affects on the reader of embracing the world of the text. What does the reader become if he or she accepts the culture of the text? What does the reader’s world look like if he or she embodies the world of the text?

An acceptance of the worldview of sweatshopwatch.org could have radical changes on the habits and practices of the reader. A person’s clothing becomes a window into their ethical standards or knowledge of global oppression. The clothing stores at the mall are no longer rooms of postmodern identity construction, but displays of the fruit of exploitation and injustice. These new realities eliminate any notion of neutrality, one is contributing to the oppression of workers or one is working against it. The story of the production of a garment

⁹ Sweatshop Watch, “Globalization and Economic Justice Project.”

¹⁰ Vanhoozer, “Everyday Theology,” 52-53.

is more important than the label sewn upon it — a person's relationship to clothing (no minor area of life) is fundamentally altered.

Additionally, one is drawn into the debates over globalization, the struggle between corporations and workers/activists for power in the globalized world. There is real injustice and wrongful action in the world, injustice that must be opposed. However, amidst the darkness there is hope, justice can be achieved for the oppressed. And being a part of that achievement is more rewarding than a new pair of cheap jeans. Therefore the ethical demands of this world are worth the perceived cost — join the fight, donate and buy union-made merchandise! This is the world “in front of” sweatshopwatch.org, the world that begins when the reader embraces the world “of” the text.

Conclusion

The cultural text sweatshopwatch.org proposes a certain way of explaining the world and a vision of what the world should be. It is influenced by the presuppositions of the anti/alternative globalization movement and, perhaps, Marxist thought. This leads to a concept of the world where power is held by corporations and the governmental institutions that support them to the detriment of the working poor — specifically, those in sweatshops. These workers face injustice and oppression, realities that prevent them from being fully human. Therefore, there is a struggle by the workers to unite and take power from the corporations in order to improve their conditions, a struggle that the reader should join in through supporting anti-sweatshop organizations, petitioning governments, and purchasing union-made clothing. A reader embracing this view enters a world of high ethical standards pertaining to how one consumes, and will have his or her previous relationship to clothing and consumption altered.

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