Christianity and the Postmodern World
Dr. Richard Lints
Reformed Theological Seminary – Charlotte
January 21-25, 2008

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We live in a post-Christian and religiously-ambiguous culture, which is now by consensus referred to as “Postmodernism”. It is profoundly committed to a deep pluralism and yet is ambivalent about how wide that pluralism extends. Its central thinkers have trumpeted the death of the self and the irrelevance of God, even while a nebulous spirituality is on the rise. It is increasingly wrestling with its global identity and its intersection with the pervasive power of the consumer markets.

The course will also examine themes across a wide swath of contemporary concerns – from the impact of globalization upon the missionary identity of the church, to the clash of world cultures in postmodern times. Specific theological themes of human identity, the uniqueness of Christ and competing truth claims will be evaluated in the light of postmodern pressures. Finally the course shall sketch some strategies for faithfully thinking and living out the Christian faith in these postmodern times.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Complete the Required reading
Book review of each Required Reading listed below (Due March 7, 2008)
Final reflection paper (Due March 7, 2008)

Required Reading:

1. David Lyon, Postmodernity (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999)
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Antichrist
3. Either:
   - Richard Rorty, “Religion in the Public Square” and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “An Engagement with Rorty”
   - Stanley Fish and Richard John Neuhaus, “Why We Can/Can’t Get Along”
   (Access these articles on Blackboard)
6. One from among the list below or one other approved by the professor

Carson, D.A. Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church. (2005)
Dockery, David S. , ed., The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement
(Victor Books, 1997)
Erickson, Millard, Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism. (Baker, 1998)
Gaede, Stan, When Tolerance is No Longer a Virtue (Eerdmans, 1995)
Guinness, Os, Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype & Spin. (Baker Books, 2000)
Harvey, David, The Condition of Postmodernity (Blackwell, 1989)
Lyon, David, Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times (Polity Press, 2000)
Middleton, J. Richard & Brian J. Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age. (IVP 1995)
Stan Grenz, Primer on Postmodernism (Eerdmans, 1998)
Wells, David, Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World (Eerdmans 2006)
Woods, Tim, Beginning Postmodernism (Manchester Univ Press, 1999)

Book Reviews
Students will prepare a brief (1-3 pages) book review of each of the texts and shall present a list of discussion questions. These reviews shall count as 12% of the final grade. All book reviews are due March 7.

Final Reflection Paper
The final requirement shall consist of writing a reflection paper, which shall interact seriously with one of the figures and/or themes of relevance to the course. Students may choose a topic particularly concerned with their own ministry context or research interests. You should interact with the theme critically and constructively from the vantage point of your Christian faith. After briefly outlining the purpose of the paper, you should then examine the primary claims or assertions in the topic followed by some critical and constructive engagement of the topic from your own perspective. Papers should be 8-10 pages in length, typed and double spaced. The final paper shall count as 88% of the final grade. The final paper is due March 7.
Outline of Course

Day One - Setting the Stage
  Culture, Ideology and Christian Faith
  Postmodernism and Postmodernity

Day Two – The Rise of Postmodernism in Historical Context
  The Legacy of Friedrich Nietzsche
  Early Movements of Postmodern Protests

Day Three – Central Postmodern Theorists
  Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty

Day Four - The Social Realities of Postmodernity
  Pluralism, Democratization, Commodification
  Tolerance, Globalization, Image Construction

Day Five: The Church in the Age of Postmodernism
  Issues: Confessional, Ecumenical, Great Tradition, Emerging