

4ST 718 : Postmodern Approaches to God
January 2012 : Course Syllabus

Instructor: William C. Davis, Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology, RTS;
Professor of Philosophy, Covenant College
davis@covenant.edu
10 Krupski Loop; Lookout Mountain, GA 30750-4503

Catalog Description: This course examines recent theological responses to the postmodern condition. The course will include an explanation of the theoretical, ideological, and existential influences shaping the postmodern conversation; and a Reformed analysis of the responses from deconstructionists, revisionists, and radical orthodoxy.

Texts, Required:

- Smith, James K.A., *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism* (Baker Academic, 2006), ISBN **978-0801029189**
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), ISBN **978-0521793957**
- Ward, Graham, *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), ISBN **978-0631201410**
- Westphal, Merold, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?* (Baker Academic, 2009), ISBN **978-0801031472**

Paper:

Charitable Analysis Essay: a 2500-3000 word edifying and appreciative summary and critical analysis of an article-length contribution to postmodern theology published since 2000. An **Essay Specification** is due by midnight on **January 6, 2011** indicating the article to be treated. (No article may be treated by more than one student. First come, first served.) The completed essay is due by midnight on **February 4, 2011** or *ten days after the return of a rough draft if the draft is submitted by January 28, 2008*. [Note: students willing to explain the principal claims of their article in class on Saturday, Jan. 7, will (a) have the benefit of class ideas about content, and (b) earn a minimum grade of A- for the essay if completed in a satisfactory manner.]

Project:

Students will complete one of the following. A **Plan** for the project is **due by midnight on January 14, 2011**. **Final Draft is due February 11, 2011** at midnight (by e-mail or postmark). [Note: students may work in pairs to prepare a more extensive version of one of the following.]

- A. Sermon/Edifying Discourse Text:** a 1500-2000 word exhortation applying God's Word to a body of believers striving to take responsibility for their place in the postmodern theological conversation. (Must work from a specific text and focus on the considerations favored by one of the "schools" of postmodern theology. [Pairs of students may prepare two connected discourses.]

B. Interview and Analysis: a 1500-2000 word description and analysis of an interview with a knowledgeable enthusiast about one of the leading “schools” of postmodern theology. The enthusiast may be a graduate student, a bookstore owner/worker, or a blogger who shows solid familiarity with the issues. Electronic interviews are permitted, but should be conducted with the expectation that the interviewee will post the entire conversation on line. [Pairs of students may prepare a 3000-3500 word report on a jointly-conducted interview.]

Participation: In-class activities (quizzes, debates, puzzle solutions, role-playing, etc.) will contribute to this portion of the grade, along with attendance.

Grading: Grades will be calculated using the following percentages:

Project (Final Draft).....	35%
Project (Plan).....	5%
Paper	35%
Project (Plan).....	5%
Participation/Attendance.....	20%

Schedule of Topics, Recommended Readings & Assignments:

Note about the readings: the compressed meeting format and the conceptual density of some of the texts militate against requiring that the readings be completed prior to class meetings. Familiarity with the readings will be a consideration when the paper and project are assessed. Reading groups of no more than four members (for mutual support on the written assignments) are permitted, even encouraged.

Jan. 5 (Thu.) ***The Postmodern Condition and Deconstructivist & Revisionist Theologies*** (The theological situation in the wake of disillusionment about modernity.)

Reading (ideally before the first meeting):
 Vanhoozer, chap. 1, 3, 5
 Smith, all.

Jan. 6 (Fri.) ***Feminist Theologies, Radical Orthodoxy & Reformed Theology in the Postmodern Context***

Reading:
 Vanhoozer, chaps. 2, 6, 7, 8, 12
 Ward, chaps. 2, 3, 6, 8-11,13, 14

Written: Paper: Essay Specification

Jan. 7 (Sat.) ***Theological Hermeneutics, Narrative Theology, and the current problematic***

Reading:
 Vanhoozer, chaps 9, 10, 11, 15
 Westphal, all

Jan. 14 **Plan for the Project**

(Jan. 28 Rough Draft of Essay: optional)

Feb. 4 Final Draft of Essay (unless Rough Draft Comments received later than Jan. 31)

Feb. 11 Final Draft of Project

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Student Services Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 42 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 14)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 42)