

Ministry in a Postmodern Context: 6HT610/01
Summer 2011, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

Instructor: Stephen J. Nichols
E-mail: snichols@lbc.edu
Home: 717-445-4102
June 20-22, 2010: 9 am - 5:00 pm.

I. Course Description & Objective

One writer put it this way: Ozzie and Harriet don't live here anymore. What started as a movement among philosophers and literary scholars has trickled down to impact American life and the church. We are living in postmodern times. This course explores what postmodernism is and where it came from, while also surveying the spectrum of responses from evangelicals. We'll pay special attention to the impact of postmodernism on hermeneutics, theology, and preaching.

II. Texts

Required Texts:

Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way beyond Emergent and Traditional* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009).

Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequence: The Promise and Peril of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

Myron B. Penner, ed., *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

David F. Wells, *The Courage To Be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

III. Evaluation

1. Paper, 60%.

Write a ten-page (or so) paper on a specific way the postmodern turn impacts Christianity. You could write on the way we read texts, the way we express and form our beliefs, the way we approach and practice theology, and the way we preach. If you are in a particular ministry, such as youth ministry or campus ministry, please feel free to relate the paper to your ministry context.

Due August 6.

2. Sermon evaluation, 40%.

Track down and listen to or watch three postmodern sermons. Offer a written summary and a critique.

Due August 6.

IV. Course Schedule

Day One, 9:00-12:00: Where are we & how did we get here?

Lectures:

- introduction to the course
- overview of postmodernism: from modernity to postmodernity

Reading:

NOTE FOR EACH DAY'S READING: Bring the books mentioned with you to class each day. We will devote significant time to discussing the reading in a seminar format.

- Erickson, 1-109. This will give you the sketch of the context leading up to postmodernism. We'll finish Erickson on Tuesday.
- Penner, 1-34. This is a much more concise sketch of the context leading up to postmodernism. You'll also get a thumbnail sketch of postmodernism here. We'll return to this book on Thursday.

Day One, 1:00-5:00: What is postmodernism?

Lectures:

- Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty: a trio of postmodern philosophers, and some of their friends
- meaning, truth, and God: a trio of postmodern ideas

Reading:

- Erickson, 113 - the end. Here you'll get an in-depth take on the philosophers, issues, promises, and problems of postmodernism. Try to get through as much of it as you can.

Day Two: How are others responding?

Lectures:

- the impact of postmodernism on hermeneutics
- the impact of postmodernism on theology
- the impact of postmodernism on church life, evangelism, and preaching

Reading:

- Penner, 37 – the end. Here we'll see the spectrum of evangelical responses to postmodernism. These essays should spark some good conversation.

Day Three: How do we respond?

Lectures:

- cultivating habits in modern or postmodern contexts
- What's theology got to do with it?
- ministry in a postmodern context
- assignment review

Reading:

- Wells, entire. Here we get some healthy perspective on our current context. Wells helps us think theologically about these cultural and sociological shifts occurring around us.
- Belcher, entire. Belcher forges a third way between traditionalists (and a modernist paradigm) and emergents (postmodernist paradigm). This book should spark some conversation as we think of the implications of the discussions and readings of the last four days for church life and ministry.