

THE ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING QUALITY TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE DISCIPLINED THEATRE ARTIST IN A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT THAT MODELS CHRISTIAN VALUES.

THE ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF BIBLICAL STUDIES' MISSION IS TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP PREPARATION AND RESOURCES FOR EFFECTIVE WORLDWIDE MINISTRY IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST.

The ARTS AND CULTURE: A CHRISTIAN AESTHETIC

January 2013

THEA-480 / BIBM--480 / 3 Credit Hours

INSTRUCTORS: **Jeff Berryman, Visiting Professor**

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LOCATION: WPA-B5

PRIMARY AUDIENCE:

- The class serves the fine arts student, giving attention to theological issues as well as spiritual dynamics the Christian artist inevitably faces as he/she pursues a career in artistic fields.
- The class also serves a cross-section of the university, attracting all those who wish to address the significant impact of art and popular culture on the life of the Christian.

GOAL OF THE COURSE:

To equip students to engage, analyze, reflect on, and evaluate artistic experiences, as both artist and/or patron, within the context of biblical, Christian faith.

OUTCOMES:

As a result of this course, students should be able to:

- Articulate a theological basis for the arts,
- Recognize that the making of art and its consequent enjoyment find their theological basis in the glory of God, and are central to what it means to be human, made in God's image.

- Describe the various roles art and imagination may play in the thought-life and in the construction of Christ-like character and identity, both as individuals and as the corporate body of Christ.
- Discuss, in introductory fashion, the history of the interaction between art and the life of the church; articulate ways in which a grasp of this history informs their abilities to deal with questions of art within the life of the church today.
- Identify primary philosophical movements informing our modern thinking about aesthetics and art.
- Identify and describe the differences between folk culture, pop culture, and high culture.
- Compare and contrast biblical principles with principles guiding American popular culture.
- Argue the case for the necessity of standards in art.

PRIMARY TEXTS:

- The Christian Imagination. Ed. Leland Ryken. Revised and Expanded Edition. Waterbrook Press: Colorado Springs, CO. 2002. **(Required)**
- Other potential sources:

A Christian Critique of Art and Literature. Calvin Seerveld. Toronto Tuppence Press: Toronto, Ontario. 1995.

All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes. Kenneth Meyers. Crossway Books: Westchester, Illinois. 1989.

Amusing Ourselves to Death. Neil Postman. Penguin Books: New York, New York. 1985.

Art and the Bible. Francis Schaeffer

Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic. Nicholas Wolterstorff. William B. Eerdmans Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1980.

Art Needs No Justification. H. R. Rookmaaker. Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois. 1978.

Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts. Jeremy Begbie. Baker: Grand Rapids. 2000.

Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste. Aesthetics in Religious Life. Frank Burch Brown. Oxford University Press. New York, New York. 2000.

Hollywood vs. America. Michael Medved. HarperCollins/Zondervan: New York, New York. 1992.

How Should We Then Live? Francis A. Schaeffer. Crossway Books: Westchester, Illinois. 1976.

Music and the Arts in Christian Worship. Ed. Robert Webber. Star Song Publishing Group. Nashville, Tennessee. 1994.

On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft. Stephen King. Pocket Books (Simon and Schuster): New York. 2000.

Real Presences. George Steiner. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois. 1991.

State of the Arts. Gene Veith. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois. 1991.

The Beauty of God. Ed. Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin. Intervarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois. 2007.

The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics. Alejandro Garcia-Rivera. The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota. 1999.

The Culturally Savvy Christian. Dick Staub. Jossey-Bass. 2007

The Christian, the Arts, and the Truth. Frank E. Gaebelein. Multnomah Press: Portland, Oregon. 1985.

The Evidential Power of Beauty. Thomas Dubay. Ignatius Press: San Francisco. 1999.

Theological Aesthetics: A Reader. Ed. Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen. William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan. 2004.

Through a Screen Darkly. Jeffrey Overstreet. Regal Books: Ventura. California. 2007

COURSE OUTLINE:

Section I. Art and Being Human

Exploring the central questions and possibilities for the development of a Christian aesthetic. Bridging the gap between the imaginative life of the individual in culture and the makers of art forms. Emphasizing the power of art and the imagination to shape the thought life.

Section II. Creation: Implications of God's Creative Move

Centering our approach in a theology of Creation, identifying biblical principals illuminating our experience as makers and receivers of culture and art.

Section III. The Fall, Sin, and Evil

Exploring the implications of our fallen nature for the making and experiencing of culture and art. Searching for the moral frame in which art and imagination function.

Section IV. The Incarnational Function of Art and Culture

Exploring the meaning of Christ's entry into the world for artists, and what it means to continue his work of "enfleshing" the Kingdom of God.

Section V. The Church and Art

Surveying and reflecting on the Church's historical relationship with the arts, searching for ways the historical conversation might guide our work in a postmodern climate.

Section VI. Western Aesthetics

Surveying the history of aesthetics in the West. What are the particular implications of being in the world, but not of it, in relation to our culture's historical views of artistic and stylistic life.

Section VII. Popular Culture: Imagination and Story-Telling

Surveying and critiquing the dominance of popular culture in our society's thought-life. Exploring challenges and/or opportunities in the exchanges between popular culture and the mind of Christ.

Section VIII. Practical Strategies and Tools

Exploring criteria whereby to engage and assess the imaginative thought-life of the culture as expressed in the arts of folk culture, popular culture, and high culture. The student will explore guidelines suggested by various authors, after which they will be challenged to come up with their own.

Section IX Application.

Various experiences of art will be offered during the course. Slides of paintings, music recordings, films and video, live performance, poetry reading. Critical discussions will follow each.

Section X. Final Project

This project will be due no later than **Friday, March 1, 2013.**

COURSE FORMAT:

Format will include lecture, discussion, and experiential learning facilitated by a team teaching approach.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Attendance:

Obviously, during a short course, attendance is critical. A day missed in class is equivalent to missing over two weeks during a regular semester. For this reason, short of a sudden onset of a serious illness, attendance is absolutely mandatory.

- Missing more than 3 hours of class will result in an automatic lowering of your final grade by 1 letter.
- Missing more than 6 hours will lower your final grade 2 letters.
- Missing more than 9 hours will result in a failing grade.

Punctuality:

- You will be expected to arrive on time at all class sessions.

Major Projects and Papers:

Pre-reading / Pre-writing

Before the first class--Monday, January 7, 2013--you will need to have read the primary text in its entirety.

The Christian Imagination. Ed. Leland Ryken. Revised and Expanded Edition. Waterbrook Press: Colorado Springs, CO. 2002.

Also, you will be asked to turn in **3 essays** based on material from this book. These essays are due **on the first day of class, Monday, January 7, 2013**.

The 3 essays (500-600 words each) from The Christian Imagination should cover the following readings:

1. "The Christian Imagination" by Janine Langan
2. "Beauty and the Creative Impulse" by Luci Shaw
3. "On Poets and Poetry" by Jeanne Murray Walker

The purpose of these essays is to demonstrate your comprehension and engagement of the readings assigned. In your analysis of a particular reading, answer the following, **making sure that you address each question**. (NOTE: Make sure you understand the difference between "assertion," "presupposition," "implication," and "conclusion.")

- What are the author's primary *assertions*?
- How do the author's major points illuminate the overall thesis of the anthology?
- What are the *presuppositions* of the author?
- What are the *implications* of the author's assertions?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author's assertions and conclusions?
- What practical impact does this essay have on your own thinking and action in regards to engaging art as both artist and audience?

Again, each of these 3 essays should be 500-600 words. **All essays are due the first day of class.**

Grading:

Essays on Major Text	20%
Online Forum Participation	10%
Final Exam	25%
Class Participation	15%
Research Paper	30%

Online Forum Participation:

An online forum for this class will be established in which we will discuss various topics related to the goals of the class. Grading will be based on your thoughtful participation, creative contribution, and number and quality of posts. The forum will launch in mid-December and will continue to be operative until **March 20, 2013**. You will receive notice of the launch and URL of the forum in mid-December. Details of expectations and requirements will be fully explained in class.

Final Exam

There will be one final comprehensive examination. The exam will have both objective and essay sections and will cover all material covered in class, as well as information from the texts. The final exam will be worth 25% of your final grade.

Class Participation

This will be a subjective grade based on the instructors' impression of the level and quality of attention paid to the material, your willingness to engage in question/answer and discussion, and the respect with which you treat others in the class during discussions.

Final Project

Our goal is to help you “engage, analyze, reflect, and evaluate” artistic experiences. The final project will ask you to do just this in the form of a major paper that will consist of your making each of these four moves in relation to a major piece of artistic work. Details will be given in class. **Due no later than March 1, 2013.**

NOTE: ANY LATE WORK WILL BE PENALIZED TWO LETTER GRADES. NO WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED BEYOND MARCH 20th.

Medical emergencies or death in family excepted.

Academic Integrity Policy

In line with Abilene Christian University’s policies, if you violate academic honor (cheating, plagiarism, etc.), we hold the right as faculty to reduce your grade to no higher than an F. Depending on the circumstance, we may permit a make-up assignment to avoid granting you a zero. For further clarification: <http://www.acu.edu/campusoffices/studentlife/judicialDocuments/AcademicIntegrityPolicy.pdf>