

C E 4 5 1 5 : Proactive Ministry in a Media Culture

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GH107

Tuesdays
1:10 pm – 4:00 pm
NW 232

Course rationale:

Emerging scholarship within media studies, particularly that focused on a cultural studies approach, has begun to discard an instrumentalist perspective on the mass media — one which emphasized a picture of media as trucks carrying messages — in favor of a culturalist perspective which emphasizes the ritual aspects of communication, and perceives mass media as providing elements from which, and within which, people construct meaning in myriad ways.

Among the consequences of such a shift in paradigm is an appreciation both for the meaning-making resources resident within popular cultural contexts, as well as for the ways in which mass mediated commercial popular culture can flatten and constrict our symbolic inventories and narrow the focus of our attention.

This “postmodern” shift in sensibility highlights new opportunities for communities of faith within media culture. In the past religious communities have been quite adept at situating themselves, particularly through the embedding of faith practices from a tradition, within a specific cultural context. Our deepest and most powerful resource in this postmodern context may be precisely our ability to construct context, to embed our beliefs in ways of knowing and being that support them. Such embedding occurs not simply in doctrines, or other “content-oriented” frames, but within body postures, ritual practices, and other multi-sensory experiences.

Yet how do we share these richly varied religious interpretations with people immersed in a mass-mediated context in which “Will and Grace” is a sitcom and “angels” look like Roma Downey and Della Reese, or in which the ritual of watching a soap opera has more community continuity for many people than Sunday morning worship? How can we awaken each other to God’s presence in a wired world?

This course proposes that part of the answer lies in taking seriously the spiritual resonance of people’s experiences within popular cultural practices, and then using that resonance as a bridge into a renewed and transformative understanding of explicitly religious practices.

This course will take a three-pronged approach to engaging these issues. First we will begin by exploring a cultural studies approach to the mass media, as well as to the construction of religious meaning. The middle third of the course will engage various

“texts” from popular culture, among them popular films, music, television commercials, and news. This engagement will be facilitated through the tools of media education, and will be paired with various Christian practices that have been identified through the Valparaiso project on the “Education and Formation of People in Faith.” The final third of the course will explore pragmatic ways to foster faith formation in a media culture, culminating in exploring projects that students have developed over the course of the term that put the theories we have been studying to practical use in their particular contexts.

Course goals:

1. Provide an intellectual and experiential context in which the encounter with God in the midst of mass mediated popular cultural practices is respected, honored, and critically engaged.
2. Provide conceptual and experiential connections between the emerging scholarly discourse at the intersection of “media, religion, and culture” and theologies that take culture seriously.
3. Investigate pedagogical strategies which foster an encounter with God within mass mediated popular cultural practices.
4. Explore practices of faith that can be engaged in on a daily level and that provide entry into historically grounded religious communities, but that are accessible to people whose primary socialization has been within media culture.
5. Locate and analyze denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith resources and programs for engaging in media education.
6. Generate specific resources for education within communities of faith that integrate the theories and practices of the course, and make these resources accessible via the WWW.

Course requirements:

1. Development of personal learning goals, formulated at the beginning of the term, revisited at mid-term, and submitted a final time at the end of the term. These goals, in concert with the goals of the course as stated in the syllabus, will be an important part of the final evaluation process.
2. Completion of reading in time for class discussion, and submission of any weekly assignments noted in the syllabus.
3. A short reflection paper (no more than 4 pages, or 1500 words) on your experiential module (see further information in Appendix One).
4. A short paper using themes from our readings to engage at least two films, due on April 8th. This paper should identify at least one theological theme that the films evoke for you, and should draw on at least three readings from the course. The paper should

be no more than 5 pages, or 2000 words long. You may choose a pair of films from the list in Appendix Two, or suggest alternatives to me.

5. Participation in your assigned small group. These groups will meet for one hour every week of the course (during the regularly scheduled course time), and will provide a context in which you can learn various skills in small group work, as well as explore further integration of the materials under consideration. While I will evaluate your efforts from the small groups in part through what your group shares with the larger group, the more significant piece of evaluation will be that which each group member will do prior to the last session of the course.

6. A significant final project that incorporates the theories and practices explored in this course into a pragmatic proposal for use in your community of faith (broadly construed, this does not have to limit you to a particular site/institution). This final project can take many shapes, and will most likely require some writing to fulfill, but could incorporate a web site, an experiential encounter, a liturgy, a curriculum, and so on. Students will present their final projects to each other on May 6th and 13th, and we will make some portion of them publicly accessible through the web (more information on this will be available in class). Final versions of final projects are due no later than May 16th. Collaborative proposals are welcomed. A proposal for this project will be due March 25th. Several possible project ideas can be found in Appendix Three.

Texts

The following required texts are for sale at the bookstore, and are on regular as well as e-reserve through the library.

Anderson and Foley.
Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals
(Jossey-Bass)

Gladwell, M.
The Tipping Point.
(Perseus)

Bass, D.
Practicing Our Faith.
(Jossey-Bass)

Johnston, R.
Reel Spirituality.
(Baker)

Bevans, S.
Models of Contextual Theology
(Orbis)

Palmer, P.
To Know As We Are Known.
(Harper)

Chideya, F.
Don't Believe the Hype.
(Penguin)

Tyner, K.
Literacy In A Digital World.
(Lawrence Earlbaum)

Weinberger, D.
Small Pieces, Loosely Joined.
(Perseus)

In addition, there are several books that you might find helpful, and which are listed

throughout the syllabus as “additional recommended reading”:

Anderson, E. and Morrill, B.
Liturgy and the Moral Self.
(Pueblo)

Morgan, D.
Visual Piety.
(University of CA Press)

Hoover, S. and Clark, L.
*Practicing Religion in the Age of
Media.*
(Columbia University Press)

Nakamura, L.
Cybertypes.
(Routledge)

McCloud, S.
Understanding Comics.
(Harper Perennial)

Sample, Tex.
*The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired
World.*
(Abingdon Press)

Tanner, K.
Theories of Culture.
(Fortress Press)

The following **multimedia texts** will also be used. Those marked with an * must be viewed outside of class.

California Newsreel.
The Ad and The Ego.

Phil Pateris.
The Iraqi Campaign.

*Warner Studios.
The Matrix.

American Bible Society.
Out of the Tombs.

*Warner Reprise Video.
The Immaculate Collection.

Adán Medrano.
The Soul of the City.

Lyrick Studios.
VeggieTales.

A note about class process and method:

This course is divided into four basic modes, or modules. The first is what might be termed the “social learning” component of the class, and includes the time we will spend at the beginning and at the end of the term in introductions, orientation, conclusion drawing and benediction. The second is what I term “theoretical background,” for lack of a more precise term. There will be theoretical pieces and theological pieces scattered throughout our work together, but there are three weeks in particular where we will be focusing on background or foundational ideas that shape the whole of this learning experience. You are no doubt familiar with the reality that our rich diversity includes a range of learning styles and abilities. Some

of you enjoy theoretical work, and some do not. I urge you to try to stick with these weeks of the course so that you can glean the information you need. The third mode is what I am calling “case in point” examples. We will consider five genres of media text (or object), looking at specific examples of these genres, considering theoretical frames that inform them, and exploring theological resources for engaging them. The final mode moves us toward true proactivity -- experiential and pragmatic skills that support constructive media engagement in the context of communities of faith.

Within each of these modules you will have to make some choices about how best to engage the materials for your own learning. I have tried to put together a wide menu of choices, but you should always feel free to propose alternatives.

Three of the modes (social learning, theoretical issues, and case in point examples) will be scheduled into our regular meeting times. The fourth, or proactive component, will be much more under your control. You will need to make some clear choices early on about how you meet the proactive mode requirement, and communicate those choices in writing to me through your learning goals.

Part One:

11 February: Introductions and orientation

Background reading (assigned within EDI). If you haven't already read this, please be sure to do so: Palmer, P. (1993). *To Know As We Are Known*. (HarperSanFrancisco).

Resources:

Information about small group work:

<http://www.rsu.edu/faculty/mhaulmark/CAL/discussion.htm>

Information about writing learning goals:

<http://www.celt.uno.edu/c8.htm>

<http://ruby.fgu.edu/courses/sstans/81469/learn.html>

<http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfvc/wiu/storyhour.html>

18 February: teaching and learning in an age of information

Assignment: please bring to class a first draft of your personal learning goals for this course. Please note whether or not you have some basic ideas of where you'd like your final project to focus.

Required reading:

Tyner, K. (1998). *Literacy in a Digital World*. New Jersey: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Additional recommended reading:

The Ad and the Ego study guide/transcript.

25 February: Theology and culture: An introduction to contextual theologies

Required reading:

Bevans, S. (1992) *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Tanner, K. (1997) "The nature and tasks of theology," pp. 61-92, in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

4 March: Culture and media: An introduction to questions of representation and identity through the insights of cultural studies

Required readings:

Horsfield, P. (2002). *The Mediated Spirit*, a CD-ROM (available for sale in the bookstore, and on reserve in the library).

Hoover, S. (2002). Introduction: The cultural construction of religion in the media age, in *Practicing religion in the age of the media*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 1-6.

Clark, L. (2002). The "Protestantization" of research into media, religion and culture, in *Practicing religion in the age of the media*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 7-34.

Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural studies, multiculturalism, and media culture," in *Gender, Race, and Class: A text reader*. edited by G. Dines and J. Humez. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, pp. 5-17.

White, Robert. "Religion and media in the construction of cultures," in *Rethinking media, religion and culture*, edited by Hoover, S., and Lundby, K., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 37-64.

Part Two: Case in point examples

11 March: Advertising and media economics

Required reading:

Gladwell, M. (2002). *The tipping point*. Back Bay Books.

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapters 4, 8.

Recommended additional reading:

Bogart, L. (1991) The American media system and its commercial culture. *Gannett Foundation Media Center* (Columbia University). Occasional Paper #8, March 1991.

Sora, Joseph. (1998). Corporate Power in the United States. The Reference Shelf Series, Volume 70. Number 3. H.W. Wilson Company.

Hayakawa, S. I. (1990). "Poetry and advertising" from *Language in Thought and Action*, Harcourt Brace: New York, 1990. p. 134-143.

Resources:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/cool/>

18 March: The construction of “reality” through the news and shaping of attention

Assignment in preparation for class:

Pick one of the following to do in preparation for your small group:

a/ Watch (and record, if possible, to bring to class) two 30 minute national newscasts, and one local newscast on Sunday, March 16th. CBS and ABC often broadcast a half hour apart, for instance, but the cable channels also do frequent newscasts.

b/ Read (and bring to class at least notes from them) two national newspapers and one local newspaper for Sunday, March 16th. You might consider the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Star Tribune*, or the *LATimes*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Pioneer Press*, for example. If at all possible (a good library will help here), please read these *in paper!*

Required reading:

Chideya, F. (1995). *Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans*. Penguin Books.

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapters 7, 9

Additional recommended reading:

Bondi, Roberta. (1998) “Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Truthfulness, intercessory prayer, and formation in love,” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self*, edited by Anderson, E. and Morrill, B. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, pp. 153-167.

FAIR. “How to read a newspaper: a reader’s guide”, Vol.4, No. 7, October 1991.

Gerbner, G. “Television violence and the art of asking the wrong question,” *The World and I*. July 1994.

Meyrowitz, Joshua. “The power of television news,” *The World and I*. June 1992. pp. 453-473.

Ramshaw, Gail. “Pried open by prayer,” in *Liturgy and the Moral Self*, edited by Anderson, E. and Morrill, B. (1998). Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, pp. 169-175.

Rocky Mountain Media Watch. “Not in the public interest: Local TV news in America, 3/11/98.”

Thoman, Elizabeth. “Break the circle of blame,” in *Better Viewing Magazine*, May-June 1995.

25 March: Pop music: singing our lives

Assignment: Please bring in one of your favorite songs that is publicly available (this can mean commercially, but also via MP3, or in some other publicly accessible format). We will have a CD player, a cassette player, and a VCR available in class.

Please note: final project proposals are due today.

Also, please be sure to hand in a revised version of your learning goals today.

Required reading:

Aaron, Charles. "Black like them," in *Utne Reader*, March-April 1999, pp. 68-73. Originally printed in *Spin Magazine*, November 1998.

Anderson, E. Byron. "O for a heart to praise my God": Hymning the self before God." In *Liturgy and the Moral Self*, edited by Anderson, E. and Morrill, B. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1998. pp. 111-1125.

Cook, Nicholas. "Credit where it's due: Madonna's 'Material Girl,'" in *Analyzing musical multimedia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Scott, Ronald. B. "Images of race & religion in Madonna's video *Like a Prayer* : Prayer & Praise," in *The Madonna connection: Representational politics, subcultural identities, and cultural theory*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapter 13

For those of you who have never seen the following Madonna music videos -- "Like a Prayer," "Material Girl," and "Oh Father" -- I have a copy of *The Immaculate Collection*. (Warner Reprise Video). We will find a way for you to watch the videos in advance of class (otherwise the reading won't make a lot of sense.)

Additional recommended reading:

Sample, Tex. (1998). *The spectacle of worship in a wired world*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Werner, J. Ritter. (1997). "Musical mimesis for modern media," in *From one medium to another: communicating the bible through multimedia*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, pp. 221-227.

1 April: The conventions of film, and aesthetic issues

Required reading:

Johnston, R. (2000). *Reel spirituality: Theology and film in dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Matrix (Warner). (You must watch this film before coming to class.)

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapters 2, 5

Recommended additional reading:

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics*. Kitchen Sink Press. Chapter Two is on reserve.

Morgan, D. (1998). *Visual Piety*. University of CA Press. The introduction and first chapter are on reserve.

8 April: The World Wide Web

Short reflection paper on films due today (see Appendix Two for more information).

This week we will be meeting entirely in cyberspace, not in our regular classroom. I will give you a URL ahead of time that will direct you to my presentation for that day, and we will all engage the week's ideas via an e-mail listserv.

Readings for this week will be available via links from the main class web site, with the exception of the following:

Weinberger, D. (2002). *Small pieces, loosely joined*. Perseus.

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapter 3

Additional recommended reading:

Nakamura, L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, ethnicity and identity on the internet*. New York: Routledge.

15 April: no class today (time for experiential modules and final project work)

These two weeks the class will not meet jointly, but rather this time can be used for your experiential modules if you have not already met that requirement. (See Appendix One).

There will be an "html" workshop during our regular meeting time in the Lilly lab on April 15 for those who are interested in taking that experiential module.

22 April: no class today due to Spring break

Part Three:

29 April: Aesthetic practices, the intertwining of narrative and ritual

Assignment due in class today: Be prepared to describe a religious ritual that has profoundly moved you. How has your experience in media culture shaped you in relation to this ritual? (Note: I deliberately did not use the word "liturgy" because I do not want to constrain you to choosing official liturgical forms, although you are free to do so.)

Required reading:

Anderson & Foley (1998). *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapters 11, 12

Recommended additional reading:

Goizueta, R. (1995). *Caminemos con Jesús*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Anderson, E. and Morrill, B. (1998). *Liturgy and the Moral Self*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.

6 May: Religious education in a media culture, and final project presentations

Assignment due in class today: What kind of media education does your own faith community practice (if any)? Be prepared to talk about resources available at the national or international denominational level, as well as at the local, congregational level.

Required reading:

Bass, D. (1997). *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Chapters 6, 10

Recommended additional reading:

Hobbs, Renee. "How to use TV in class... NOT!", in *Cable in the Classroom*, June 1993.

"Media education in 1990's Europe," Section Two.

Thoman, Elizabeth. "Skills and strategies for media education," *Educational Leadership*, February 1999, pp. 50-54.

Tyner, Kathleen. "Active viewing techniques," in *Cable in the Classroom*. January 1992.

UNESCO Declaration on Media Education

13 May: Final projects, final concluding notes, celebration, and benediction.

Assignment due in class today: Please bring food or beverages to share with the group. (We'll have a sign-up sheet so that we can ensure a range of offerings.) Please also bring in a final version of your learning goals.

Please note: a final version of your project is due to me by Friday of this week (May 17).

Appendix One

Experiential Module

The purpose of this module in the course is to provide you with an experience of proactive ministry that takes digital culture seriously. There are two opportunities that we will provide, but you are free to suggest others. Everyone in the class must successfully complete **one** experience. Each student, however, is free to participate in all of them. Once you've completed a module, you should write a short (no more than 4 pages) reflection on the experience, incorporating insights from some of the texts we've read to sustain your reflection.

"html" workshop / This is a three hour workshop geared toward basic web page development. It teaches the basics of "html" and should make it possible for you to develop your own minimal web page by the end of the session. Students will also have a brief tour of interesting websites connected to proactive ministry in a media culture.

Spirit Garage / This is a contemporary community, "the church with the really big door" that does a lot of GenX and beyond outreach (more information available at: www.spiritgarage.org). Students may choose the Sunday that they will participate in worship at this site.

Something you find and nominate as a possibility to me. I would also welcome proposals that could involve more than one member of the class. There are many opportunities available throughout the Twin Cities area, so please don't hesitate to be creative!

Appendix Two

The purpose of this paper is to experiment with theological reflection amidst mass mediated popular culture. Choose one of the sets of films listed below (or propose alternatives to me in advance). Watch the films. Write an essay on the films that engages them theologically. As this assignment is also an incentive to do required reading, please make sure that you use at least three of the readings from the course to inform your argument. You will need to be clear about the theological theme you are addressing. It does not have to be a theme that is explicitly addressed by the films, but it does need to be a theme that can be explored using the films.

The Merchants of Cool and *Josie and the Pussycats*

EdTV and *The Truman Show*

City of Angels, *What Dreams May Come*, *The Sixth Sense*

What Women Want and *Kate and Leopold*

About a Boy and *Notting Hill*

Bicentennial Man and *A.I.*

K-Pax and *Phenomenon*

Chicken Run, *A Bug's Life*, and *Dinosaur*

Dead Man Walking and *The Apostle*

Harry Potter and *The Lord of the Rings* (any version of either)

October Sky and *The Little Princess*

Appendix Three

Here is a list of some possible final projects. Use it as leaven for your own imagination. The goal is to create a project that will meet the goals of this course (as defined both by the teacher and yourself), and that will be useful to some group of people beyond this class. Every final project should have some public component to it (eg. a web page, a poster that presents the research, a curriculum unit that could be shared, etc.).

- Pick a genre of popular culture that we are not covering in this class, and pay careful attention to how it constructs religious experience and/or theological meaning. You could analyze a soap opera, for instance, or a sporting event, a kid's cartoon episode, or one hour of talk radio, several grocery store magazines, and so on. Use some of the frames of analysis we have explored and/or invent your own, but be sure to provide theological/conceptual grounding for your analysis, and be sure to include examples of the genre you are exploring.
- Choose one of the recent "Gospel according to..." books (there is one available on the *Harry Potter* books, as well as on the *Simpsons*). Read the book, read/watch the pop media associated with it, and then review the book in light of your own theological stance, as well as the media theories we have engaged in this class. Your paper should be approximately 15 double-spaced pages, or 3500 words in length.
- Choose a theological concept that is important to you (grace, redemption, sin, etc.), and then choose three films that evoke that concept for you in some way. Write a short lesson plan that would be based on exploring that concept through film. Be sure to describe the context in which your plan would be implemented.
- Choose one television commercial and develop a unit for an adult education experience around that text, using resources and frames of analysis that we have discussed in class.
- Develop a web site for your own community (however defined) that lays out a conceptual framework for engaging mass mediated popular culture, and provides a rich set of resources (this could be done via links to other existing web resources).
- Develop a one semester curriculum that incorporates media literacy tools and analysis into the regular subject matter that you teach.
- Using a text from the Sunday lectionary, pick a current film or television show episode and use it to explore the themes raised by the biblical text in a sermon. Once you've done this, develop a "meta-analysis" for how to go about using popular culture in preaching.
- Write a research paper that takes seriously Kellner's description of media culture and explore the challenges that description poses to religious educators or other pastoral ministers. What kinds of theological questions does such a description raise, and how might you respond to those questions from within your own denominational/faith setting?

- Research the media statements issued by your community of faith (either nationally, or globally) and assess them using the cultural studies frame of analysis we've invoked in this class. How would you change them, if at all, in light of our analyses?
- Develop an annotated bibliography of all the materials we've engaged in this course as well as several other resources that is geared towards the needs of pastoral workers in your community. (This option is particularly appropriate for students who come from contexts other than the US.)
- Develop an annotated videography or discography (ie. a list of videotapes or CD's) that have themes relevant to the Christian practices explored in the Bass book, with annotations that are geared towards the needs of pastoral workers in your community. Such a resource should have at least 30 items on it.
- Put together an audiotape of contemporary commercial pop songs (that is, pick and choose songs from various artists and various albums) with an accompanying study guide geared toward a particular level of religious education and situated in your context.