Course Description and Objectives

The cultural shifts over large parts of North America have placed the church into a new relationship with its culture(s). The church now finds itself displaced. It no longer carries cultural respect. In some cases, the church is now viewed negatively in culture. This has resulted in a church that finds itself on mission in a society which has an ambivalent or antagonistic relation to Christianity. MN 433 will examine the church’s life in a post-Christendom post Christianized society. We will examine how the church must be reordered from being an institution which takes care of existing Christians to becoming a way of life which engages the world for God’s Mission in Jesus Christ.

MN433 will start by examining the cultural shifts known as postmodern/post-Christendom. The course acknowledges that not everyone or every culture will have been shaped by the emerging postmodern/post-Christendom culture of N. America. Nonetheless, we all must be able to discern in order to see whether and how these shifts are present in our own contexts. The course will then deconstruct current practices of being church rooted in Christendom assumptions. After this process, we will seek to develop an ecclesiology that engages Scripture, practical concerns as well as the challenges posed by postmodernity and post Christian culture. The class aims to prepare pastors/leaders to lead churches into Mission amidst the various cultural challenges of the North American continent.

After introductory lectures on ecclesiology, postmodernity and post-Christendom, each class session will explore a critical function integral to being the Body of Christ (worship, evangelism, catechesis, spiritual formation, justice ministries etc.). In regard to each of these functions, the class will:

- Explore the theological, historical and Scriptural basis for this function in the Body of Christ.
- Explore ways that Evangelicalism/other forms of church have relied on assumptions based in modernity in order to carry out this function in being the Body of Christ.
- Explore the postmodern/post Christendom critique that undercuts these ways of carrying out these functions in American Evangelicalism.
- Propose new practices for the invigorating of old practices so that each function can be recovered for the church. Each practice is engaged on a practical level with materials actually used in planting a postmodern church.

Through this course the student will:
• Gain a foundational understanding of the doctrine of the church, its role in God's salvific plan for humanity, and the historical articulations of what the church is and called to be in society.

• Gain a thorough understanding of postmodern thought and its manifestations in culture.

• Come away with a framework for actually planting and or leading a church into postmodernity/post-Christendom.

**Course Organization**

The class will be comprised of (A.) a first half lecture on the basics of postmodernity both in terms of philosophy and culture. Then a brief summary of the chapter of the Great Giveaway that forms the basis for discussion in second half of class, (B.) a second half of the class focused on discussion based upon the readings, lecture and student presentations of research. There will be a specific focus upon the application of the lectures and reading to concrete situations doing church in the post Christian world.

**Course Requirements**

**Required Texts** (for Purchase):


Each student will be responsible for the following:

1. **Students must read** the required texts as a foundation for understanding the church. In addition the student must read an additional 500 pages from the additional readings offered in an area the student would like to explore for the writing of a paper. These readings will also inform the student so as to bring added input for classroom discussion.

2. **A Short One-Half Hour Exam on Readings.** An exam will be given at the beginning of the 7th week. There will be one essay question and a series of multiple choice questions in order to test the student on his or her overall comprehension of the readings and lectures of the first six weeks.
3. **Mission-shaped church paper (15 pages):** This paper will give the student an opportunity to work out his/her theology of the church in relation to cultural challenges posed by post-modern/post-Christian culture. The paper should:

- Describe the most prominent challenge the student believes his/her church faces in being the church in the midst of a postmodern/post-Christain culture. Describe why this is such a significant challenge.
- Describe an essential mark/practice of the church (i.e. evangelism, worship, fellowship, Eucharist etc.), how this mark is practiced in his or her church, and the cultural (ala post-Christendom etc.) assumptions undergirding this practice.
- Propose how the student would lead and reshape this practice for the cultural challenges the church is facing. (Perhaps critique/engage the Great Giveaway’s proposal for this function).
- Describe how the implementation is being faithful to the Scripture and the history of the church.

The paper will be graded on the following factors:

1. **Basic understanding** of the content of this class.
2. The **coherency, logic, format and flow** of the writer’s paper.
3. The writer’s **original contribution** as revealed in the paper’s ability to critique and creatively use the class materials in carrying out his or her task in the paper.

Except for severe illness, no papers will be accepted after last day of the quarter (June 9th 5:00 p.m.). Papers can be received via e-mail at fitchest@gmail.com. Late papers will automatically receive a ½ reduced letter grade per day that the paper is late.

4. **Reading List:** that lists all reading the student did for the class. Students are required to read a total of 800 pages for this class.

The student grade will come from 30% theology paper, 30% practical paper, 10% reading list and 10% class presentation.
Schedule and Readings:
*Note all readings referenced in the Bibliography

Apr 3 - The Cultural Shifts of Post-Christendom

QUESTIONS: What is post-Christendom? What is postmodernity? How do these cultural shifts change the way we think about the church?

Required Reading:

Optional:
Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*. Ch. 2
Smith, James, K.A. *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* Ch. 1
Beach, Lee

Apr 10 - Defining What it Means to be the Church
The Marks of the Church/Scriptural Models of the Church/Visible-Invisible Church Debate Through History/The Church as the Social Space of His Lordship
QUESTIONS: What is central to the practice of being God’s People, without which we can no longer say we are “the church”? What is the relation between missiology and ecclesiology? Before? After? Equal? Other?

**Required Reading:**
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, Ch. 2

**Optional:**

**Apr 17 The Trinity, The Church, God’s Mission in the World.**

QUESTION: How does our view of God as Trinity Affect the Way we see God at work in the world? How does our view of the Trinity shape the way we see the church’s relationship to God’s work in the world.

**Required Reading**
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, Apdx 3

**Optional:**
**Apr 24 - Worship Amidst Post-Christendom**

QUESTIONS: Why do we structure worship the way we do? In what ways do we undermine worship in these ways of practicing it? What forms should worship take in our new contexts?

**Required:**
Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, Ch. 4  
Yoder, Body Politics ch. 2  
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, ch. 3  

**Optional:**
Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping*, Ch. 4  
Sweet, Leonard *From Tablet to Table*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2015

**May 1 - Evangelism Amidst Post-Christendom**

QUESTIONS: In what ways have we undermined evangelism in our culture? Why have we fallen into these habits? What forms should evangelism take in the new contexts?

**Required:**
Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, Ch. 2  

**Optional:**

**May 8 - Leadership/Ordained Ministry Amidst Post-Christendom**

QUESTIONS: How does leadership function when the traditional cultural authority given clergy is no longer accepted? Is ordination still important for today’s post Christendom society? How are we to understand it?

**Required**
Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, Ch. 3  
Yoder, Body Politics, ch. 4, 5  
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, Ch. 8
May 16 - Justice Ministries Amidst Post-Christendom

QUESTIONS: Is it possible to be the church in the world and not nurture justice? Is it possible to have a justice “program” at your local church and not be doing evangelism? Not be doing mission? How does making the poor into a project work against the ways God is bringing justice into the world?

Required:
Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, Ch.6
Yoder, *Body Politics*, Ch. 1
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, Ch. 6

Optional
Yoder, John H. "The Biblical Mandate for Evangelical Social Action." In *For the Nations*.

May 22 - Preaching in Postmodernity

QUESTIONS: Is preaching still valid for the new contexts? Why? For what purposes?

Required:
Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, Ch .5
Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, Ch. 5

Optional:
Pagitt, Doug. *Preaching Re-Imagined*.
Wright, John W. Telling God’s Story (Downers Grove IL: IVP Press, 2007)
May 29 (Mem. Day – Alternative arrangements to be made) – Community/Diversity Among Post-Christendom

QUESTIONS: In what ways has the church in North America lost its essential function as “fellowship” community? Why has this happened?

Required
Fitch, The Great Giveaway. Ch.1
Fitch, Faithful Presence, Ch. 4

Optional:

June 5 - Discipleship/ Christian Education/Catechesis Amidst Postmodernity

Question:

QUESTIONS: Is discipleship a program or a way of life? Can discipleship be separated from evangelism? What are the cultural assumptions undergirding a mentorship model of discipleship (one on one) versus a communal process of discipleship built around the (Roman Catholic) sacraments?

Required:
Fitch, The Great Giveaway, Ch. 7 , Ch. 8
Fitch, Faithful Presence, Ch. 7

Optional:
BIBLIOGRAPHY

What is Postmodernity? What is Post-Christendom? Cultural and Philosophical Origins


**Christian/Philosophical Responses to Postmodernity**


______. *Selling Out the Church.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997.


MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982. (difficult)


**POLICIES FOR ALL MASTERS CLASSES**

NOTE: All communications from the seminary will go to your seminary email account. Contact All Covered at (877) 224-8911 if you need help forwarding your seminary email address to your personal email address.

As a seminary community we hold integrity/hospitality as core values. Individuals are able to do their best work and thinking when their peers are fully present and engaged. We expect each person to both participate in class and carefully listen to others with the belief that everyone’s contribution is equally important. Therefore, the following policies have been established in order to provide clarity in regard to attendance expectations and relationships in the classroom.

**Diploma/Certificate Student Course Requirements**
The amount of work required of Diploma/Certificate students will be at the discretion of the professor. Students will be responsible for contacting the professor about what assignments are required.

**Class Attendance Policy**
It is expected that students will attend and participate in all class sessions. Failure to attend at least 80% of class sessions is grounds for automatic failure. A professor may set other more strict attendance expectations for a given course. Students are always expected to communicate with a professor in advance if they will be absent. Attendance expectations are higher for online and intensive courses (see syllabus for specific requirements).

**Class Tardiness Policy**
The third time a student is late to the start of class, it will be counted as a class absence. It is also expected that students will return from a break by the time specified by the professor.

**Late Work Policy**
If a student cannot complete the work for a course by the due date listed on the syllabus, they must submit a “Request for a Grade of Incomplete” form to the Registrar by 4:30 of the last day of the term. The form must be signed by the instructor and Dean of Students. The professor may set
stipulations and grade reductions. In the absence of a formal request form, the student will receive a grade based upon work completed by the last day of the term.

**Turabian Format**
All papers, including footnotes and bibliography, must be submitted in the correct format according to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed., 2013.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one’s own the words or ideas of someone else without providing proper acknowledgement or documentation. See the “Academic Honesty Policy” in the Seminary Catalog for more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

**Electronic Format**
Unless otherwise specified by the professor, all work submitted electronically must be in a Word document format (.doc, .docx).

**Technology Use in the Classroom**
Unless it is directly tied to note-taking or research for the class, students are expected to refrain from using cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices during class.

**Course Evaluation in Moodle**
Students must complete an online course evaluation using the seminary Moodle system at [http://moodle.seminary.edu](http://moodle.seminary.edu). The evaluation will be open at the end of the course. If you need assistance connecting to Moodle or accessing the evaluation, please send an email to moodlehelp@seminary.edu.