Course rationale:

Increasingly people who live in the United States are receiving more of their religious education within mass mediated contexts and using materials that originate outside of historically grounded communities of faith, than they are within traditional parish and seminary settings. This shift has enormous consequences for the shape and sustainability of religious identity in our diverse communities of faith. CE3517: Media and Technology in Parish Education will introduce students to the latest scholarship on the interrelationships of media, theology, and culture. It will also highlight foundational educational concepts by way of introducing students to effective pedagogical strategies for incorporating media awareness into parish education contexts, and for supporting faith development beyond the parish walls.

Course goals:

1. Introduce students to the emerging scholarship at the juncture of media, theology and culture

2. Support students in articulating a theological framework in which to engage media culture constructively

3. Provide a range of pedagogical strategies for supporting the development of media awareness amidst religious education

4. Engage the central theological questions that arise when taking media culture seriously, and provide resources for supporting faith in that engagement

A note about class process:

Six sessions is far too short a time to do more than briefly introduce you to the central problematics and potential resources for addressing them that live at the intersection of media, theology and culture in the United States context. I intend to provide a very rich menu of learning opportunities, structured in a variety of ways. No one student will be able to process all of them during this short period of time. Instead I hope – and assume! – that you will take into account your own
learning styles and engage the course as best fits your own journey. Choose judiciously from the menu offered, but do not use it as an excuse not to choose anything at all.

My basic assumption is that each student will spend approximately six hours each week outside of class in preparation (this is the Luther Seminary standard: two outside hours for every hour of class). Those of you who learn best by reading and writing should avail yourselves of the opportunities to do so set out below. Those of you who learn best by visual modes and/or in dialogue should focus on those pieces of the course. If you prefer frequent feedback from me you ought to choose the first of the two final options. If you prefer to work at length on a particular topic, then the second of the two final options would be more appropriate.

Given my assumptions here, I take very seriously your own learning goals. If you have never written learning goals for yourself, or find the process confusing, please don’t hesitate to contact me via e-mail for more clarification. I have also put up on the course web page a number of resources to which you can refer.

We will only have time to consider four genres of media text (or object) this session. We will look at specific examples of these genres, consider theoretical frames that critique them, and explore theological resources for engaging them. The major assignment for this class (explained below) will provide you with an opportunity to choose a different genre or complex of issues to address.

I intend this course to be a space in which you can pursue your own compelling questions about media and religious practice in our contemporary context. Please do not hesitate to approach me with alternative assignments or other ideas for ways to support your own learning. You will get out of this class what you put into it!

**Texts:**

The following texts are for sale at the Bookstore, and on reserve in the library. All other readings in the syllabus are on reserve at the library. The films are contemporary and should be available for rental at any good videostore.

Bevans, S.  
*Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books)

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

CD-ROM  
*Ministry in a Multi-cultural World: Beyond Borders* (MACC)
7 February: Introductions and orientation

Reading:

Bevans, Stephen / *Models of Contextual Theology*
Anderson and Foley / *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals* (pages 3-54)

In-class exercises:

Media mapping introduction exercise
Media and reality video clip exercise

14 February: Advertising culture... what are our yearnings? What are the rituals and stories that bind us?

In-class exercise:

The Ad&Ego film
More information on this film is available at: http://www.newsreel.org/

Readings:


The Ad&Ego study guide/transcript.


Films:

EdTV
Pleasantville
The Truman Show
21 February: Constructing the reality of news... What is the reality we live within? How do we construct a different one?

Note: Please hand in today a brief (no more than two paragraph) statement of your learning goals for this course.

In-class assignment:

The Iraq Campaign video
More information on this film is available at: http://www.moderntv.com/

Readings:


Films/television:

The West Wing
MadCity
The Insider

28 February: Popular music.... Singing our lives faithfully...

Note: If you plan to do a final project other than a personal learning resource, please give me your proposal by today.

In-class exercise: “like a prayer” and “hymning our lives”


Scott, Ronald. B. / “Images of race & religion in Madonna’s video Like a Prayer:

Films/television:

Madonna: The Immaculate Collection
Almost Famous
Billy Elliott

7 March: The World Wide Web... embodied communities, shifting realities

Please note: This class session will take place entirely on the web, therefore you do not need to come to Bochman Hall today. Instead, please go to the course web page for presentations, course dialogue, links to reading and viewing assignments, and so on.

Assignment: Please post by March 4th on the web a short statement that explains your theological framework for engaging media culture. At a minimum this statement should situate your ideas within the Bevans spectrum, and contain appropriate biblical and doctrinal support for your position. It should also be no more than 750 words!

Reading/viewing:


Other readings will be available through hyperlinks on our website for this week.

Films:

The Matrix
Contact
Quicktime trailers of The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter

14 March: Final class session: Pragmatic projects and ideas for further work...

Assignment: Final projects and personal learning resources will be presented in class today, although they are not due until March 21st. During this class period you will have approximately 10 minutes to present what you have been working on, and to engage your colleagues around your ideas. You should use this time to strengthen your project.
Course requirements:

1. Development of personal learning goals, formulated at the beginning of the term and then revisited 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 assessment process.

2. A carefully formulated statement that incorporates a theological rationale for your approach to mass mediated popular culture. This statement should be no more than 750 words and should include at least some biblical and doctrinal support for your position. Each student will post a draft of their statement to the class website by Monday March 4th, and then we will dialogue from there.

3. Weekly posts to the class dialogue, found on Fisher’s Net. You must post an original message (approximately 250 words) that responds in some way to the assigned readings or visual pieces you’ve engaged, and one substantive (again, approximately 250 words) response to one of your colleague’s posts. You are always free to respond to more than that!

4. A significant final project that incorporates the theories and practices explored in this course into a pragmatic proposal for use in your context. There are two primary ways in which you can pursue this project.

The first is simply to build up a personal learning resource of your own, using as a foundation a two to three page paper that you will write for each session of the course except the final one (ie. five short papers). These papers will be due at the session following the one upon which you’re reflecting. The first paper, for example, will be due on February 14th and would respond to the readings listed for the first week of class. The final paper will be due on March 14th and will respond to the readings/films from the March 7th session. I will then return them to you and you can collect them in a 3 ring binder along with any other resources you pick up along the way: news clippings of interest, references to web sites, bibliographic citations, and so on. You may use the substance of your original post to the class web discussion as the center of such a paper, but you must then move beyond it to incorporate readings or filmic insights from the assigned texts. You should bring your personal learning resource to class on the 14th to share in some way with your colleagues.

The second option is to develop a project that seeks to embody both your theological commitments and your pedagogical responses to a specific context. Such a final project can take many shapes, and would most likely require at least ten to fifteen pages of writing to fulfill. It could incorporate a web site, an experiential encounter, a liturgy, a curriculum, and so on. You will present your final projects to each other during our last meeting. A proposal for this project will be due on February 28th. You will share something from your project with the class on March 14th, and the final version of your project will be due on March 21st. Some ideas for such a project can be found in Appendix One.
Appendix One

Final Project Ideas

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 by the teacher, your own personal learning goals, 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 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.

- Research the statements issued by your community of faith (either nationally, or globally) on issues related to media literacy or other forms of media awareness, and assess them using the cultural studies and/or theological frames of analysis we’ve invoked in this class. What do you think of these statements?

- Develop an annotated bibliography of all the materials we’ve engaged in this course as well as several other resources found either on the additional bibliographies I can provide to you or which you discover through your own research, that is geared towards the needs of pastoral workers in your community.