

BHT 521NE: Being in the Story



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Introduction to the Learning Environment

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the primary written witness to the revelation of God. Hence the Scriptures have, since the beginning of the church, been read in public worship, studied in private devotion, and employed as the final authority in theological debate. More recently, Christians have come to understand that the Bible embodies a distinctive worldview or vision of life that challenges both the ideals of contemporary western society and also many of the traditional/inherited perspectives of the church. This worldview is interwoven into the warp and woof of Scripture, but is especially communicated through the overarching story told in its pages.

Course Description

The entire biblical story or metanarrative stretching from creation to eschaton articulates a vision of God's intentions for this world, beginning with creation, and continuing after the fall, as the Creator works through Israel, Jesus, and the church for the world's redemption, until that day when there will be a new heaven and new earth, in which righteousness dwells. This narrative vision of the *missio Dei* provides a non-negotiable framework within which we live out our faith.

A clear understanding of this biblical vision is of great value for interpreting individual biblical texts, especially for those engaged in pastoral leadership, which typically involves interpreting Scripture in various contexts. Without a solid grasp of the foundational biblical vision of reality we are in danger of (mis)reading Scripture in light of our own contemporary assumptions. This course, therefore, aims to help Christian leaders grasp the basic contours of the overarching story the Scriptures tell, with a focus on exploring the logic of salvation as holistic—for the whole person, and even the entire created order.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Students will develop an understanding of the contours of the biblical worldview as a basis for holistic Christian life and ministry.
2. Students will have critically analyzed the church's dualistic tradition concerning the relationship of the "sacred" to the "secular" in light of biblical faith.
3. Students will gain a basic understanding of key shifts in the development of the Western worldview from its roots in the early synthesis of Christianity with Greek philosophy through its transmutation into modern secularism and contemporary postmodern society.

4. Students will develop discernment for critically evaluating the idolatries that shape and guide contemporary Western culture and that impinge on our lives.
5. Students will reflect on how the Christian faith relates both positively and critically to the whole of life.
6. Students will engage in self-evaluation concerning the scope of their calling to serve God and participate in his redemptive purposes in a broken and hurting world.

Required Reading

Walter Brueggemann. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd ed; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. ISBN-13: 978-0800632878

Andy Crouch. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0830837557

J. Richard Middleton. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. ISBN-13: 978-0801048685

Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton. *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1984. ISBN-13: 978-0877849735

A number of journal articles and book chapters will be assigned as reading throughout the semester; these will be placed on the course website in digital form.

Assignment Overview

1. Active Participation in the Course, including in-class, Zoom classes, online discussion, and reading (10%)
2. Worldview Interview Assignment, with Online Responses (10%)
3. Four Reflection Papers (80%)
 - Creation, the *Imago Dei*, and the Cultural Task (20%)
 - The Exodus as Israel's Founding Story (20%)
 - The Redemption of Creation and Culture (20%)
 - Holistic Salvation in a Broken World (20%)