

BIBLE 471: CHRIST AND CULTURE
Milligan College, Fall 2011
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Office: FOB #112
Office Hours: TuTh 9:30-11:00; 2:00-3:30; and by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Catalog description: *"An examination of how contemporary Western cultures shape how Christians understand and embody their faith, and an exploration of how Christians might respond to these challenges."*

Christ and Culture is what has conventionally been called a "capstone course." The purpose of such a course, taken during the last year of one's undergraduate work, is to provide a forum for integrating much that has been learned in separate disciplines. Because the goal is to integrate, the course is necessarily interdisciplinary. Moreover, because Milligan strives to integrate learning and the Christian faith, most of our efforts in this course are aimed at reflecting on how what we have learned and what we believe might fit together to form a unified vision of the Christian life.

This is an enormous and difficult task, and not one which can be realistically achieved in a single semester. Our goal is to begin asking some key questions that will encourage a life of reflection and integration. Because our goal is not so much to answer every question that arises, but to develop and/or sharpen the skills necessary to work through such questions in critical and faithful ways, good questions will often be more important to us than quick or easy answers.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of their work in this course (and by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit), students will be able to:

1. Deepen their desire to love God and neighbor with all that they are and do, as well as understand more concretely what such love entails in daily life.
2. Articulate and begin to internalize both what it means to be a Christian and the vital role God has given the church in embodying the gospel in the midst of the world.
3. Identify and analyze some of the challenges to and opportunities for living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in all areas of contemporary life.
4. Listen more attentively to God, Scripture, Christian tradition, other people, and the world around them.
5. Communicate more effectively and confidently with other people (both orally and in writing) about matters of Christian faith and practice.
6. Analyze carefully and critically some of the formative desires, assumptions, stories, practices and institutions of contemporary life in light of the central convictions of the Christian faith.
7. Evaluate their own lives, including their vocational goals and aspirations, in light of God's deepest desires for all of creation.

APPROACH

As suggested above, this course has specific aims that build on your work in other courses but which remain unique to this course. Different aims call for different strategies for accomplishing them. For this reason, much about this course may seem somewhat unconventional. As the semester progresses, some of the reasons for proceeding in these different ways should become more evident. For example, this course is designed to encourage the class to function as a community of learning. In such a community, each person is both student *and* teacher. Although some students may have thought more about some of these issues than others, and some may seem better equipped with the skills required to probe these matters deeply, each person is capable of contributing for the benefit of all.

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

To accomplish the above learning outcomes, we will be reading and discussing together a number of texts, watching several videos, and engaging in considerable writing. You are expected to complete all required reading and journal writing by the assigned date. Because an enormous amount of our work takes place during class, in both small and large group discussions, it is imperative that you be present each time the class meets. There is no way to make up a missed discussion. You should also realize that if you are absent, the discussion that does take place will be a different (and usually less-interesting) discussion than if you were present. Hence, when you are absent you are not the only one affected. If you believe an absence is necessary, it is your responsibility to inform both the professor and your small group (ahead of time if possible). *It is also your responsibility to make sure that the journal rotation is not disrupted by your absence.*

*Please note: one half percentage point is automatically subtracted from the small group participation grade for each absence—regardless of the reason. Attendance is also factored into the large group discussion grade. No one with **seven** or more absences for the semester can earn a final semester grade above C. No one with **ten** or more absences will pass the class.*

Following are the six components of the class that will be evaluated and their relative weight in your final semester grade. Each of these components offers significant opportunities for students to make progress toward the learning outcomes. [Listed in brackets are the criteria on the basis of which you are being evaluated for each component.]

- 1) Small group participation (15%; Outcomes 1-7). [Faithful attendance and active participation]
- 2) Group journal (30%; Outcomes 1-7). [Consistent, thoughtful, and sensitive engagement with readings and peers; insight; punctuality. A full grading rubric is available online through Angel.]
- 3) Other required written assignments (10%; 5% for Hiking Report [Outcomes 4, 5] and 5% for Stewardship of Gifts essay [Outcomes 1, 2, 5, 7]). [Following assigned directions; quality of written expression; insight.]
- 4) Large group discussions (5%; Outcomes 1-7). [Faithful attendance, active listening, insight, ability to comment for the good of all.]
- 5) Small group project (15%; Outcomes 1, 2, 4, 5). [Sensitivity, level of insight, participation and excellence in all three components of the project: planning/research/interview (5%), written report (5%) and oral presentation (5%). A full grading rubric is available online through Angel.]
- 6) Final exam (25%; Outcomes 1-7). [Insight, ability both to analyze and synthesize, quality of written expression, persuasiveness.]

Here is the grading scale for the course:

A	94% and above	C	74-77%
A-	91-93%	C-	71-73%
B+	88-90%	D+	68-70%
B	84-87%	D	64-67%
B-	81-83%	D-	61-63%
C+	78-80%	F	60% and below

Please note: We will not talk much about grades during the semester because our focus will be on more important matters. If, however, you ever want to know how I think you're doing, please don't hesitate to ask; I'll be happy to sit down with you and talk about it. I also post assessments to Angel on a regular basis for those of you who want to see how you are doing.

SMALL GROUPS AND GROUP JOURNALS

You will be assigned to a small group for the entire semester and most days will have some time set aside for directed small group discussions about the assigned readings. In addition to these discussions, another series of conversations is carried on at a different pace in the group journals. As you might expect, this kind of journaling is rather different, primarily because our goals and purposes for doing so are different. Some of these goals and purposes are as follows:

- 1) To encourage more thoughtful reading by requiring each student to reflect upon the readings in the journals.
- 2) To encourage a broader, deeper, slower and more sustained conversation than is possible in the small group discussions by requiring students to respond in the journals not only to the readings but also to each other. Some small group members have actually found themselves (accidentally, no doubt) discussing some of the questions raised by this course outside of class time.
- 3) To encourage students to hold one another accountable for the quality of their thinking.
- 4) To encourage students to engage one another at a critical level without alienating each other.

The mechanics of the group journals and their rotation are a little odd at first, but will be explained thoroughly during the first two weeks of the semester. *Please remember: group members are responsible for responding both to the readings for the next class period and to all those who have written in that journal since they last had it (usually 3 people).* These reflections on and response to the thoughts of your peers must of necessity be selective (you won't be able to respond to everything), but they should show evidence that you have thoughtfully considered what your peers have written. This means you will need to say more than "I liked (or did not like) what you wrote." If you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with one of your peers, do your best to articulate what you understand the basis of this agreement (or disagreement) to be.

CHRIST AND CULTURE “LABS”

Since there is much about American cultures and the Christian faith that cannot be explored adequately from the safe confines of the classroom, you are required to participate in two “lab” experiences outside of class time with your small group. The first “lab” involves taking a hike together with your small group sometime during the first month of the semester. Instructions for the hike and the hiking report may be found on Angel and through links on the online daily schedule.

The second lab requires your small group to arrange a conversation with a small group of people (ideally 2-3) in the community who are in some way different from you. Again, detailed instructions for this second exercise and the reports associated with it are available on Angel and through links on the online daily schedule.

EXTRA CREDIT: IN-CLASS BULLETIN BOARDS AND ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

A total of 100 points (worth up to 2.5% added to your final grade) of extra credit may be earned during the semester by making insightful contributions to the in-class bulletin boards (up to 50 pts) and online discussion forums (up to 50 pts). These available points are distributed evenly throughout the semester into five blocks with the following due dates: Sept 8, Sept 27, Oct 18, Nov 8, and Dec 1. To be considered for credit, you must submit to me by the above dates anything that you would like to post on the in-class bulletin boards. Contributions to the online discussion forums must be posted no later than 11:59 p.m. on the above dates. Please note: I am not responsible for the reliability of the computer network; please do not wait until the last minute to post contributions. Additional guidelines for posting material in-class or online can be found in the “Assignment Guidelines” section of Angel and on the last page of this syllabus.

One additional opportunity for extra credit is available during the semester. Students may attend the Senior Forum on Christ and Culture (Thursday, Nov 3, 5:30-7:00 pm) and earn 10 points toward their 100 points available for the semester.

CELL PHONE AND LAPTOP POLICY

One important habit we are trying to cultivate daily in this course is the practice of truly being present to each other. This isn't easy, particularly given the distractions we have all around us. Scientific research has demonstrated that the human mind can only fully attend to one thing at a time. For these reasons, I insist that all cell phones and laptops be turned off and put away during class unless I have granted permission for their use (this includes during story time, small group, videos, etc.). Students whose phones ring/vibrate audibly or who are observed texting, emailing, web-surfing, etc., any time during class will be marked absent for that session.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Milligan College provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To receive accommodations, students must make a formal request according to the policy outlined in the current college catalog. Once your request has been evaluated, a list of accommodations will be prepared for distribution to your professors. If you have additional questions, please contact Tony Jones, director of disability services. You may contact him by phone (8981), email (tjones@milligan.edu) or appointment in the McMahan Student Center.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The Bible (Any translation; no paraphrases, please.)

Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*
(HarperCollins, 1990).

Numerous articles and readings available electronically via the Online Daily Schedule and Angel.

ONLINE DAILY SCHEDULE

The Online Daily Schedule is the official site for all reading assignments. Here you will find listed all the assigned readings for a given day in addition to links to those that are available electronically. You will also find journal prompts here that may help you write about the readings for the day.

The Online Daily Schedule is designed to be dynamic; that is, it allows me the ability to tailor the readings to our discussions as they unfold during the semester. Nevertheless, all assigned readings will be posted no less than two weeks ahead of their due dates so that you have adequate time to secure access to those that are available only electronically. Please note: you are responsible for securing access to these readings in a timely manner, so please do not wait until the last minute and then blame whatever problems you have on your tools (i.e., technology).

The Online Daily Schedule—as well as all assignment guidelines—can be accessed both through my home page (www.milligan.edu/bible/pkenneson/kenneson.htm) and through Angel (<http://angel.milligan.edu>).

DAILY SCHEDULE

(Below is a list of topics and due dates for written assignments; [links to readings for each day are online.](#))

PART ONE:

LISTENING AS A PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND MATURITY

Aug 25 Introductions: "Listening to Strangers."

Aug 30 [Learning to Listen \(1\)](#)

Sept 1 [Learning to Listen \(2\)](#)

Sept 6 [Learning to Listen \(3\)](#)

PART TWO:

LEARNING TO GET A HANDLE ON THE BIG PICTURE

Sept 8 [What's the Story? \(1\)](#)

Sept 13 [What's the Story? \(2\)](#)

Sept 15 [What's the Big Picture? \(1\)](#)

- Sept 20 [What's the Big Picture? \(2\)](#)
- Sept 22 [Who is a "Christian"? What is the "Church"?](#) [Turn in Hiking Report](#)
- Sept 27 [What's Going On? \(Or Not Going On . . .\)](#)

**PART THREE:
LEARNING TO BE STEWARDS OF GOD'S GOOD GIFTS**

- Sept 29 [Learning to Participate in God's Economy](#)
- Oct 4 [Learning to be a Community of Faith](#)
- Oct 6 [Learning to be a Community of Worship](#) (1)
- Oct 11 [Learning to be a Community of Worship](#) (2) [Turn in Small Group Project Proposals](#)
- Oct 18 [Learning to be a Community of Reconciliation](#) (1)
- Oct 20 [Learning to be a Community of Reconciliation](#) (2)
- Oct 25 [Learning to be a Community of Forgiveness](#) (1)
- Oct 27 [Learning to be a Community of Forgiveness](#) (2)
- Nov 1 [Learning to be a Community of Hospitality](#) (1)
- Nov 3 [Learning to be a Community of Hospitality](#) (2)
- Nov 8 [Learning to be a Community of Care and Generosity](#) (1)
- Nov 10 [Learning to be a Community of Care and Generosity](#) (2) [Turn in Stewardship of Gifts Essays](#)
- Nov 15 [Learning to be a Community of Good Work](#) (1) [Turn in Small Group Project Written Reports](#)
- Nov 17 [Learning to be a Community of Good Work](#) (2)
- Nov 22 [Learning to be a Community of Good Rest](#)
- Nov 29 [Learning to be a Community of Hope](#)
Distribute Final Exam Questions
- Dec 1 Small Group Oral Reports
- Dec 6 Small Group Oral Reports
- Dec 8 Small Group Oral Reports
- Dec 12 FINAL EXAM
Monday, 10:30 am—12:30 pm (Second Floor Derthick Hall; 207-210)

Additional Guidelines for Extra-Credit Submissions

A. Guidelines for In-Class Bulletin Board Submissions

The in-class bulletin boards, entitled “Windows on American Cultures,” are designed to be precisely that: windows into the cultures in which we live. Material posted on these boards, along with accompanying commentary on them, should help us see something about American cultures to which you think we need to pay greater attention. Such material might include: news stories, advertisements, cartoons, song lyrics, pictures you’ve taken, etc.

You can receive up to 5 points for each item submitted. (Points are awarded on the basis of how illuminating I take the item to be). You can also receive up to 5 points for each commentary on or analysis of your own (or another’s) item. (Again, points are awarded on the basis of how insightful I take your analysis to be). You may submit as many items and commentaries as you would like, though you can only earn a maximum of 10 total points of extra credit for the in-class bulletin boards during each of the five periods of the semester. Please see syllabus for due dates. [50 points total for semester]

Please submit your items to me before or after class, making sure that your name is either on the front or back of your contribution.

I reserve the option not to post any item or commentary that I regard as inappropriate, though I imagine that these occasions will be rare. The material on these bulletin boards is not intended to make us comfortable; quite the contrary. It is intended to help us understand a little more clearly the cultures in which we are immersed, since these cultures have tremendous power to shape our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

B. Guidelines for Online Discussion Forum Submissions (Angel)

The online discussion forums are designed to facilitate discussions about important matters outside of class time and across different Christ and Culture sections.

You can receive up to 5 points for each submission to the discussion forums. (Points are awarded based on how insightful—and respectful of the views of others—I take your submission to be). You may contribute to these discussion forums as frequently as you like, though you can only earn a maximum of 10 total points of extra credit for the online discussion forums during each of the five periods of the semester. Please see syllabus for due dates. To receive credit, submissions must be posted to Angel by 11:59 p.m. on the due dates. [50 points total for the semester]

Please be considerate and respectful of others on the discussion forums. These are difficult matters to discuss and nearly everyone has deeply-held views. Please do your best to honor the views of others even (or especially) when you disagree with them. I reserve the option to remove any posting that I consider to be inappropriate, though I hope the need to do this will never arise.