

Christianity and Culture **TH 3C03/6C06**

McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2011
Wed. 7:00-9:00pm
Office: 216

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I. Description:

The goal of the course is to develop interpretive skills that enable ministry leaders to express an authentic Christian witness within the dynamic context of contemporary culture. To facilitate this goal, the course considers various ways Christians have sought to negotiate the path between being 'in,' but not 'of' the world. It considers select historical examples such as the early church response to Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, the monastic reaction, the medieval Christendom model, the Reformation alternatives, the liberal, neo-orthodox, fundamentalist, and evangelical responses to modernism, and current responses to the contemporary postmodern culture, such as the emergent churches (with the contemporary scene receiving the greatest attention).

II. Course Objectives:

A. Knowing:

1. Know a variety of biblical, historical, and contemporary ways Christians have understood the relationship between Christianity and culture.
2. Know the distinct historical-cultural contexts of Christianity and the variety of Christian responses to those cultural conditions.
3. Know the contemporary evangelical alternatives to postmodern culture.

B. Being:

1. Appreciate that theology is a dynamic and contextual effort to discern appropriate ways to embody the redemption revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. Embrace a deeper sense of your own Christian identity vis-à-vis contemporary culture.

C. Doing:

1. Analyze contemporary culture from a Christian perspective.
2. Be able to develop responses to culture that are both credible within the culture and authentic to the Gospel.

III. Required Texts:

1. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies Series, 1 (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2009).
2. Craig Detweiler, *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008).
3. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).
4. Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2007). We will read the first chapter and select additional chapters for the purpose of illustrating the way to do the Performing Christian Cultural Engagement assignment.

●Recommended:

James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2006).

●Additional reading may be assigned

IV. Course Performance Criteria:

Assignment	Percent	Due
A. Interpreting Culture:	20%	10/5
B. Case Study: Interpreting a Church vis-à-vis Culture:	20%	11/2
C. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement: (a.k.a. presentation and paper)	55%	One week after presentation
1) Presentation	20%	
2) Paper	35%	
D. Reading:	5%	12/14
E. Participation:	X	
	Total: 100%	

●Advanced degree students, see Appendix 3 for advanced program requirements

V. Assignment Descriptions:

General Guidelines:

- I prefer electronic submissions (Microsoft Word with last name in the file name), but will

accept hard copies that are stapled.

- Papers and assignments may be submitted early for feedback from the professor and resubmitted on the due date for grading.
- All assignments marked according to the Grading Criteria Form attached to the syllabus
- All papers and assignment should conform to (and will be marked against) the MacDiv Style Guide

1. Interpreting Culture (**DUE** October 5):

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to give ministry practitioners practice in interpreting culture. Developing cultural hermeneutics is important to authentically discern appropriate ways to follow Christ in the specific cultural matrix in which we live and to assess cultural influence on our understanding of the Christian faith.

b. Description:

1) Students select a cultural artifact and describe the cultural values and worldview assumed and advocated by the item.

2) The essay should include the following:

a) A *broad* description of the artifact.

b) A *detailed* ('thick') articulation of the cultural world assumed and advocated by the artifact (and an identification of whether the item reflects or critiques a dominant cultural myth/value).

c) I encourage students to use Vanhoozer's categories: the world behind, the world of, and the world in front of the "text"; and to consider a cultural "text" according to its locution, illocution, and perlocution (see *Everyday Theology*, chapter one, the "Glossary of Methodological Terms" [pp. 247-52], and "Guidelines for Everyday Theological Interpretation of Culture" [pp. 252-53])

d) Length of the essay is 5-6 pages.

e) See Appendix 2 for a sample of this assignment.

c. Examples of cultural artifacts:

○A film (e.g., *Gattaca*, *Gladiator*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Lost in Translation*, *Radio*, *Truth is Stranger than Fiction*, *Talladega Nights*, *Borat*, *Lord of the Rings* etc.)

- A song or several songs, or a band's/artist's work that reflects a similar perspective (U2, Radiohead, Snow Patrol, Five for Fighting, Coldplay, Alan Jackson, Jimmy Buffet, etc.)
- Television show or series (e.g., American/Canadian Idol, The Sopranos, 24, House, The Office, Lost, Prison Break, Friday Night Lights, Monday Night Football)
- Wal-Mart
- Tim Horton's or Starbucks
- An organic, local produce grocery store
- Chapters or a smaller "traditional" or retro-style" bookshop
- A subdivision and its house architectural styles

2. Case Study: Interpreting a Church vis-à-vis Culture (**DUE** November 2):

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to develop the ability to exegete our church culture and its response and relationship to the broader cultural milieu. What is the church's implicit and explicit posture toward traditional Christianity and the wider culture?

For example, does the church intentionally attempt to engage people through contemporary cultural forms, does it perceive itself as an isolated bastion for the faithful, and do its ministries and church "values" reflect accommodation to culture? This requires careful discernment. For example, a Christian organization on the surface may appear counter-cultural (oppose abortion), but use the same methods of money and power politics as the culture and, thus, be both counter-cultural in one sense and accommodated to culture in another sense.

b. Description:

- 1) Select a church and interpret a church's response to culture. Ideally, the church should be the church students attend and/or in which they are involved in ministry.
- 2) Use your observations of the church (website, ministries, sermons, etc.) and, if possible, interviews with staff members.
- 3) Although not determinative for grading, students will share their interpretation of their church in a small group and/or full-class setting.
- 4) Length of the essay is 5-6 pages.

3. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement (a.k.a. presentation and paper; **DUE** one week after presentation):

a. Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to develop the ability to interpret the culture *and* to specify an appropriate Christian response and interaction with it. Discerning appropriate ways to embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in terms of our specific cultural location is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship and ministry and this assignment seeks to facilitate this process.

- This assignment constitutes the “major paper” and presentation of the course.
- If you have an idea for a paper or creative project that does not neatly fit into the parameters of the assignment, please come and discuss your idea with me. I am open to papers/projects that cohere with the essence of the course and are suited to your research field and interests.

b. Description:

1) Select a cultural artifact (different from the one selected for the Interpreting Culture assignment) and/or trend and interpret it from a Christian perspective.

2) Class Presentation:

Approximately 20-30 minutes, students will present and facilitate a discussion of their interpretation and interaction with their selected artifact (I encourage multi-media, audio, audio-visual methods when appropriate).

During the last four weeks of the course (depending on the number of presentations), the first hour of the class will consist of two student presentations and the second hour of the class of lectures and discussions of theology and popular culture

3) Paper:

- The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .

a) Content:

- A detailed description (e.g., broad and thick descriptions) of the cultural values and worldview(s) assumed, advocated, and/or critiqued by the artifact.
- A careful and thoughtful *Christian* interaction with the artifact (see the essays in Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology* for samples).

b) Argument:

- 1) Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports)
Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.
- 2) Describe your topic under consideration.
- 3) Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.
- 4) Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms of the position and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.

c) Presentation:

- 1) Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid first person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).
- 2) Use and document a *minimum* of ten scholarly resources.
 - For advanced degree students a minimum of 15 sources
- 3) Accurately document sources according to the MacDiv Style Sheet.
- 4) Paper length: 10-12 pages.
 - For MA students 18-20 pages
- 5) Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).

4. Reading (**DUE December 14**):

- Please read the texts books assigned or in cases such as Vanhoozer the chapters specified.
- The professor may at times assign supplementary readings.
- Submit a reading report that states the percentage of reading completed for each assigned book.

VI. Lecture Outline (*tentative*):

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Assignment & Presentation Schedule	Due
1	9/14	Introduction to the Course I. Faith & Culture in the Bible A. Old Testament Case Studies (e.g., the creation accounts)		
2	9/21	B. New Testament Case Studies (e.g., implications of the Incarnation for a theology of culture) ●Guest presentation: M. Boda on OT & culture (50 minutes)	Vanhoozer, <i>Everyday</i> , 15-60	
3	9/28	II. Faith & Culture in the History of the Church (e.g., Christendom, monasticism, Protestant responses to Christendom) ●Group discussions of Interpreting Culture		
4	10/5	III. Faith & Culture in the Evangelical Tradition A. Modernism & Evangelicalism ●Guest: G. Heath case study on Christians and culture: The Canadian Church and Empire (50 minutes)		■ Interpreting the Culture
5	10/12	B. Postmodernism & Evangelicalism ●Group discussions of Church Case Study	During this segment of the course be prepared to discuss Smith, <i>Desiring</i> , and Ramachandra, <i>Subverting</i>	
6	10/19	1. Postmodernism & Post-Christendom		

7	10/26	2. Contemporary Church and Culture (e.g., emergent church) ●Group discussions of Cultural Engagement Project		
8	11/2	IV. Grace and Culture: A Proposal for a Theology of Culture		■ Case Study: Church
9	11/9	V. Theology and Popular Culture ● This section includes lectures, viewing segments from <i>Eyes Wide Open</i> (video), and discussions of contemporary culture	1. Student Presentation _____ 2. Student Presentation _____	
10	11/16	V. Continued	3. Student Presentation _____ 4. Student Presentation _____	
11	11/23	V. Continued	5. Student Presentation _____ 6. Student Presentation _____	
12	11/30		7. Student Presentation _____ 8. Student Presentation _____	
13	12/7	Film Discussion (Film TBD)	9. Student Presentation _____ 10. Student Presentation _____	
	12/12-16	Exam Week		■ Reading report due 12/14

VII. Policies:

A. Textbook Purchase:

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 218, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstores, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416-620-2934; fax 416-622-2308; e-mail books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

B. Academic Honesty:

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.

Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ www.madciv.ca/regs/honesty.php.

C. Gender Inclusive Language:

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

VIII. Late-Assignment and Exam Policy:

- A. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified in the syllabus.
- B. Students take exams on the date and at the time scheduled in the syllabus.
- C. Late assignments are reduced five percentage points for each day late (e.g., if the grade is 90 and it is one day late, the grade will be reduced to 85).
- D. Assignments and exams will be accepted without penalty after the specified date in the syllabus **only** in the case of an excused absence. If a student misses an exam or assignment submission due to a reason that he/she believes is excusable, then he/she must notify the instructor and schedule an exam date and/or late-assignment submission date within twenty-four hours of the beginning of the missed class session.
- E. Assignments and exams will not be accepted late on the basis of the student's involvement with school-approved activities. If you are not able to be in class for an exam or assignment submission, then you must pre-arrange with the instructor to take the exam and/or submit the assignment before the scheduled date in the syllabus.

Please Note: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

Appendix 1: Web Resources for Christianity and Culture

Restoring Eden: Christians for Environmental Stewardship (<http://www.restoringeden.org/index.html>)

Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and Arts (<http://www.brehmcenter.com>)

The Journal of Religion and Film (<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf>)

Sojourners: Faith, Politics, Culture (<http://www.sojo.net>)

The Gospel and Our Culture Network (<http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm>)

The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture (<http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/index.html>)

The Ooze: Conversation for the Journey (<http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm>)

Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity (<http://www.touchstonemag.com/>)

The Wittenburg Door (<http://www.wittenburgdoor.com>)

Yale Center *for* Faith & Culture (<http://www.yale.edu/faith>)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk>)

Evangelical Environmental Network and Creation Care Magazine (<http://www.creationcare.org>)

Allelon: A Movement of Missional Leaders (www.allelon.org)

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
(http://www.virginia.edu/iasc/publications_hedgehog_review.php)

The Center for law and Culture (http://www.lawandculture.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

The John Ray Initiative: Connecting Environment, Science, and Christianity (<http://www.jri.org.uk/>)

Emergent Village (<http://www.emergentvillage.com/>)

Reginald Bibby: <http://www.reginaldbibby.com/>

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- Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.
- Braaten, Carl E. *Christ and Counter-Christ: Apocalyptic Themes in Theology and Culture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972.
- Carter, Craig A. *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.
- Clapp, Rodney. *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000.
- Cobb, Kelton. *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2008.
- Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.
- Dark, David. *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and Other Pop Culture Icons*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002.
- Detweiler, Craig. *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008).
- Detwiler, Craig and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Gallagher, Susan & Lundin, Roger. *Literature Through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1989.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic, 1973.
- Gelder, Craig Van, ed. *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990.
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. *Cultural Literacy*. Westminster, MD: Random House Vintage, 1988.
- Hsu, Albert. *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Johnston, Robert K. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.
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Appendix 2: Interpreting Culture Assignment Sample

Interpreting Culture Assignment:
A Vanhoozerian Examination of Sweatshopwatch.org

by

Nikola T. Caric

Introduction

Every Christian individual, church, and denomination exists within the milieu of human culture. These Christian agents cannot help but interact with the worldviews, presuppositions, metaphors, ideologies, theologies, images and archetypes of the surrounding culture. The interaction may be rejection, accommodation, integration, critique, or embrace, but there is no question that an interaction occurs. Kevin Vanhoozer argues

that understanding the “texts” of the surrounding culture is crucial for the Christian church.¹ Christians must be adept at interpreting their surrounding culture because they need to determine if the cultural worldview/s are negatively shaping Christian thought and practice, if their own embodiment of the Gospel can be effectively communicated within the culture, and if the presence of God can be seen within culture.

The first step in interpreting culture theologically is to understand a particular cultural text or artefact on its own terms. This short paper is an exercise in this first step, as it will examine the NGO (non-governmental organization) Sweatshop Watch as expressed through the website sweatshopwatch.org.² NGOs have become an important part of Western culture in the last few decades, the exploits and ideals of organizations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International now form part of the cultural fabric. Additionally, the reality that much of our clothing products are made in factories with substandard working conditions (i.e. in sweatshops) permeates the culture — from academic conferences to jokes on late-night talk shows.

Vanhoozer’s method of analysing cultural texts through the tripartite framework of the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world in front of the text will be used to interpret sweatshopwatch.org. This paper will let the cultural text speak for itself in presenting its own worldview, as opposed to listing what other sources argue concerning sweatshops and our proper response to them and the economic policies and forces involved. First, a broad description of the cultural artefact is necessary to orient the reader.

Sweatshopwatch.org: A Broad Description

[Sweatshopwatch.org](http://sweatshopwatch.org) is the website of Sweatshop Watch, an NGO that is a coalition of organizations working in such areas as labour, civil rights, immigrant rights, women’s issues, etc. These organizations share a commitment to ending the “exploitation” and “inhuman conditions” of sweatshops.³ Sweatshop Watch works with factory workers around the globe, but focuses on sweatshops in California. The website functions as a source for information, a call to action, an income generator, and a gateway to myriad sites concerning sweatshops, labour issues, and globalization.

¹ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 32-35.

² Sweatshop Watch, “Welcome to Sweatshop Watch.” In order to reduce clutter in the bibliography, only reference to this homepage on sweatshopwatch.org will be made. All the “articles” referred to in the footnotes are listed on the homepage in the navigation bar.

³ Sweatshop Watch, “Mission.”

The majority of pages within the website disseminate information about sweatshop working conditions, the work of Sweatshop Watch, and stories of successful worker action against corporations (e.g. unionization). Some of the pages encourage readers to get involved in the mission of the organization through purchasing non-sweatshop made clothing or petitioning political leaders to take action. The website also generates income for Sweatshop Watch through a donation page and a section where browsers may purchase merchandise. Many of the pages contain links to other websites, including the member organizations and websites reporting the labour practices of multi-national corporations (MNCs). The information on the website is primarily in English language text, although there are also videos, pictures, a slideshow, and Spanish text.

The World “of” Sweatshopwatch.org

Vanhoozer defines the world “of” the cultural text as the specific way of “doing life” proposed by the text, and “into which it invites us to enter and participate”.⁴ What is Sweatshop Watch trying to accomplish with the text of its website? What kind of worldview is it presenting and proposing?

The overarching theme of sweatshopwatch.org is one of struggle against oppression, but also the possibility of succeeding in that struggle. Sweatshop Watch was formed in response to a particular case of oppression in El Monte, California in 1995. A sweatshop was discovered where dozens of “Thai immigrant workers were forced to sew clothes behind razor wire and armed guards” for less than two dollars and hour.⁵ Sweatshop Watch organized campaigns against the retailers and manufacturers and as a result the workers received compensation.

The story of Sweatshop Watch’s first successful campaign can be viewed as a template for what the text as a whole (the website) is communicating. Foremost, there is the reality of injustice. The text clearly communicates that sweatshops are places of exploitation, abuse, health and safety hazards, unfair wages, intimidation, and (sometimes) child labour. Furthermore, there are powerful human organizations and forces at

⁴ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 50.

⁵ Sweatshop Watch, “History.” Sweatshop Watch, “Modern Day Sweatshops.”

work in creating and/or exacerbating sweatshops and the concomitant oppression. The website singles out transnational clothing corporations that are only interested in how cheaply factory owners can make the products, economic structures such as free trade and the IMF that place the bulk of power in the hands of corporations over against workers, and governments that are unwilling or unable to enforce or create labour laws to prevent the injustice.⁶

The way of “doing life” proposed by sweatshopwatch.org is at odds with the existence of sweatshops and the structures that create them. The harsh conditions of sweatshops should not be a part of human life, and institutions that perpetuate sweatshops need to be held accountable. The website provides stories that narrate how battles have been won against corporations, manufactures and governments.⁷ Through lawsuits, legislation, unionization, and solidarity among workers, the world envisioned by Sweatshop Watch is possible. This is a world where workers receive a living wage for their services, are treated with respect, and hold power through their association with other workers. Furthermore, the reader is invited to enter into the struggle to make this world possible through purchasing only union made clothing or writing government representatives (for example).

The worldview of sweatshopwatch.org contains a strong sense of right and wrong or just and unjust, a desire to see power distributed fairly, and a sense of hope that oppression can be fought. This worldview makes strong ethical demands on the reader and his or her practices.

⁶ Sweatshop Watch, “Why Do Sweatshops Exist?”

⁷ Sweatshop Watch, “Recent Accomplishments.”

The World “Behind” Sweatshopwatch.org

The world “behind” the text “refers to the background context from which a cultural text emerges”.⁸

Vanhoozer states that this includes the attributes and biases of the author as well as certain ideological presuppositions. Since analysing all the persons involved in creating sweatshopwatch.org is beyond the scope of this paper the focus will be on a major ideological presupposition.

The website lies on one side of the debate over the process of economic globalization. It is an oversimplification to say there are only two sides to the issue, but for the purposes of this paper it will suffice. On the one side is the camp that believes economic globalization should continue along the course dictated by free market capitalism — i.e. enacting the features of free market capitalism (deregulation, privatization, intellectual property rights, free trade, etc.) across the globe. On the other side are those who argue that global capitalism (as presently constructed) results in injustice and oppression to many of the most vulnerable people in the world (the poor, the indigenous, etc.). They propose that instituting laws and structures that protect the vulnerable, distribute power, and are not focused on maximizing profit will result in a more humane process of globalization. There is an ongoing fight throughout the world between these competing claims and the way to create a better global society.

Sweatshopwatch.org is clearly in the second group and this is reflected in its stance on issues such as free trade, WTO policy, and the reasons for the existence of sweatshops.⁹ The world it wants to create is akin to the world advocated by those opposed to the dominant economic globalization in place today. Within this overarching struggle for globalization one sees Marxist themes of the workers uniting to combat the power of the capitalists. It is unclear how much the creators of sweatshopwatch.org are influenced by Marxist analysis, but language of worker solidarity and a portrayal of the multi-national corporations as, implicitly, villains is employed. However, there is no place in the text where violence against the oppressors is advocated.

⁸ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 49-50. While Vanhoozer, in his methodology, describes the world “behind” the text prior to the world “of” the text, it was necessary in this analysis to start with the world “of” the text since it leads to the uncovering of the world “behind” the text.

⁹ Sweatshop Watch, “Globalization and Economic Justice Project.”

The World “in Front of” Sweatshopwatch.org

Vanhoozer’s description of the world “in front of” the text is harder to pinpoint than the first two categories.¹⁰ The analysis seems to be about the affects on the reader of embracing the world of the text. What does the reader become if he or she accepts the culture of the text? What does the reader’s world look like if he or she embodies the world of the text?

An acceptance of the worldview of sweatshopwatch.org could have radical changes on the habits and practices of the reader. A person’s clothing becomes a window into their ethical standards or knowledge of global oppression. The clothing stores at the mall are no longer rooms of postmodern identity construction, but displays of the fruit of exploitation and injustice. These new realities eliminate any notion of neutrality, one is contributing to the oppression of workers or one is working against it. The story of the production of a garment is more important than the label sewn upon it — a person’s relationship to clothing (no minor area of life) is fundamentally altered.

Additionally, one is drawn into the debates over globalization, the struggle between corporations and workers/activists for power in the globalized world. There is real injustice and wrongful action in the world, injustice that must be opposed. However, amidst the darkness there is hope, justice can be achieved for the oppressed. And being a part of that achievement is more rewarding than a new pair of cheap jeans. Therefore the ethical demands of this world are worth the perceived cost — join the fight, donate and buy union-made merchandise! This is the world “in front of” sweatshopwatch.org, the world that begins when the reader embraces the world “of” the text.

Conclusion

The cultural text sweatshopwatch.org proposes a certain way of explaining the world and a vision of what the world should be. It is influenced by the presuppositions of the anti/alternative globalization movement and, perhaps, Marxist thought. This leads to a concept of the world where power is held by corporations and the

¹⁰ Vanhoozer, "Everyday Theology," 52-53.

governmental institutions that support them to the detriment of the working poor — specifically, those in sweatshops. These workers face injustice and oppression, realities that prevent them from being fully human. Therefore, there is a struggle by the workers to unite and take power from the corporations in order to improve their conditions, a struggle that the reader should join in through supporting anti-sweatshop organizations, petitioning governments, and purchasing union-made clothing. A reader embracing this view enters a world of high ethical standards pertaining to how one consumes, and will have his or her previous relationship to clothing and consumption altered.

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Appendix Three: Advanced Degree Requirements

I. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement (a.k.a. presentation and paper; **DUE** one week after presentation):

- Advanced degree students will prepare a cultural engagement project or write an academic thesis paper.
- If you have an idea for a paper or creative project that does not neatly fit into the parameters of the assignment, please come and discuss your idea with me. I am open to papers/projects that cohere with the essence of the course and are suited to your research field and interests.
- The paper should include (description categories below correspond to those of the grading rubric) . . .

A. Content:

1. A detailed description (e.g., broad and thick descriptions) of the cultural values and worldview(s) assumed, advocated, and/or critiqued by the artifact.
2. A careful and thoughtful *Christian* interaction with the artifact (see the essays in Vanhoozer, *Everyday Theology* for samples).

B. Argument:

1. Detail a clear thesis (the view that your paper supports)
Example of a thesis statement: the Emergent church movement is an authentic Christian way of being the church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture.
2. Describe your topic under consideration.
3. Write an essay that coherently demonstrates your view.
4. Detail major alternatives and/or criticisms of the position and interact with them vis-à-vis your view.

C. Presentation:

1. Write a stylistically clean and academic paper—e.g., you should avoid first person discourse, colloquialisms (academic is different than conversational voice), passive voice (use active).
2. Use and document a *minimum* of fifteen scholarly resources.
3. Accurately document sources according to the MacDiv Style Sheet.
4. Paper length: 20-25 pages.
5. Provide a bibliography (list only the books cited in the footnotes of the paper).

II. Lecture & Discussion: (due day of scheduled presentation):

A. Purpose:

- The purpose of this assignment is to give students experience with developing and presenting lectures.

B. Description:

- Each advanced student presents a lecture on one of the topics listed in the course outline (or an approved alternative topic).
- Lecture topic and major paper topics can be coordinated

C. Lecture expectations:

1. Research component

- a. Research for the lecture will account for the supplemental reading for advanced degree students (approximately 5,000-6,000 pages)
- b. Documentation of reading:
 - Please provide an annotated bibliography of the reading consulted in the preparation of the lecture (the annotations for the texts should be about one paragraph—identify the key thesis and contributions of the text).

2. Lecture content:

- a. The lecture should present and discuss the primary content points of the topic (or sub-topic)
- b. Lecture handouts/outlines are helpful, but not required
- c. Time:

The lecture and discussion will take the first fifty minute period of the course.

3. Lecture evaluation:

Grading of the lecture and discussion session will be based on the following . . .

- a. Please submit to the professor a copy (electronic or hard copy) of your lecture notes and annotated bibliography used to develop the lecture.
- b. Does the lecture accurately present and discuss the topic?
- c. Does the lecture engage in critical evaluation/discussion of the content?
- d. Does the lecture highlight the transcendent value of the material—e.g., does it have

value for contemporary Christian thought, life, and ministry?

e. Does the lecture facilitate student discussion?

III. Class Leadership:

A. Purpose:

- A significant part of your future or current work will likely include teaching in an academic and/or church context.
- Taking a leadership role in the course will provide an opportunity to develop teaching skills for your current/future vocational work.

B. Description:

1. Group discussions:

- The course will have regular in-class group discussions of the assignments and readings.
- Advanced students will have the opportunity to facilitate these group discussions. You do not need to play the role of expert, but facilitate the discussion by asking questions, offering short insightful thoughts on the subject, and drawing on course readings that will relate to the discussion and spark group discussion.

2. De-brief meetings:

- Advanced students will meet three times (probably weeks four, nine, and twelve) during the semester with the professor to discuss teaching style, content, purpose of chosen content, rationale of approach, experience leading the group discussions, evaluation of lectures, etc.
- I envision these meetings as times when we can prompt each other to consider and hone our teaching styles, approach to teaching the content for this course, and theological viewpoints
- Length: approximately thirty minutes.

IV. Hollywood and the Gospel?

- See assignment description under the professional degree syllabus

V. Course Performance Criteria:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Due</u>
A. Performing Christian Cultural Engagement: (a.k.a. presentation and paper)	50%	One week after presentation
1) Presentation	20%	
2) Paper	30%	
B. Lecture and Discussion:	25%	Day of lecture
C. Hollywood and the Gospel? (reflective essay on a film)	15%	12/7
D. Annotated Bibliography:	5%	12/7
E. Class Leadership:	5%	Throughout semester
	<u>Total: 100%</u>	