

**MB Biblical Seminary**  
***Church & God's Mission in the World***  
**(syllabus)**

**IS – 525 (Fall, 2007)**  
**3 Units of Credit**

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Time: 1:30 – 4:30 PM Wednesdays, August 29 – Dec. 5 (no class Oct. 10, module week, nor Dec. 12)

Location: TBA, MBBS campus.

Instructor: Tim Geddert

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Office Hours: By appointment (or drop by!)

**Nature and Timeline of the Course:**

- This course consists of 42 lecture hours and 84 hours (estimate!) of reading, discussing and responding to 7 required textbooks (some of them quite short!)
- Total reading for the course is about 1100 pages.

**Course Description**

This course examines selected Scriptures from Genesis through Revelation, gathering insights into a “biblical view of the church and its mission.” It explores how the creation mandate, Israel as God’s covenant people, Jesus’ teaching about God’s reign, the disciple community around Jesus, and the nature and development of the early church all contribute to our understanding of what the church is and should be. The course also explores implications of our view of church for questions of leadership, mission and ethical living.

**Course Objectives**

IS 525 seeks to understand the church’s vocation in light of God’s mission in the world, especially God’s mission in the person of Jesus Christ. As students, you will experience the following outcomes:

1. You will gain an appreciation for the central themes in Scripture that foster an understanding of the nature & purpose of the church;
2. You will discover how the work of God in the Old Testament sets the stage for understanding the New Testament church;
3. You will learn how the church’s self-understanding in the 1st century contributes to our understanding of its nature and purpose in the 21st century;
4. You will explore ways of cultivating missional communities that bring the Gospel into engagement with a broken world; and
5. You will learn to recognize churches that are vital faith communities, exhibiting God’s strength in weakness rather than living and acting as fallen powers, captive to the principalities and powers of this world.

## Degree Related Objectives

Within the larger goals of the seminary degree programs, IS 525 seeks to address the following outcomes:

- To prepare students to be able to articulate commitment to a biblical theological Christian perspective, especially as it relates to the church and its mission.
- This includes an ability to:
  - narrate the biblical story, integrating the major biblical theological themes of the Old and New Testaments and the relationship between the testaments;
  - explain the central themes/doctrines of the Christian faith, especially as they relate to a biblical ecclesiology, the missionary witness of the church in terms of the creation mandate, the Great Commandments and the Great Commission, an alternative cultural lifestyle that rejects godless values, discipleship as following Jesus with other faithful followers, a biblical call to justice and peacemaking as modeled by Jesus and the prophets, a biblical community as the home of countercultural discipleship and missional church;
  - articulate and defend a biblical view of leadership and Christian ministry in the world.
- It also includes the ability to:
  - analyze, synthesize, and engage contemporary church and world issues from a biblical theological perspective;
  - describe the *missio Dei* view of church as a people called and sent to represent God's reign as community, servant, and messenger in dialogue with personal and denominational theology/history/sociology of church;
  - describe how to minister among God's people so as to evoke the trust, credibility, and confidence that a congregational leader requires during times of change.

## Required Texts

The texts are listed in the order that they are to be read during the semester. For specific reading due dates see the course assignments section of this syllabus.

1. Witherington, Ben, *The Realm of the Reign*. Discipleship Resources, 1999. (available in electronic form to those registered for the course.)
2. Ott, Bernhard, *God's Shalom Project*. Good Books, 2004.
3. Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community*. Herald Press, 1984
4. Banks, Robert. *Paul's Idea of Community*. Revised Edition. Hendrikson, 1994.
5. Snyder, Howard. *Models of the Kingdom*. Wipf and Stock, 2001.
6. Barrett, Lois Y., et. al. *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. Eerdmans, 2004.
7. Dawn, Marva J. *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*. Eerdmans, 2001.

Students will read these books, discuss each one in class in small group settings, following discussion guides prepared for that purpose and then complete a written assignment (response, critical review or essay) in response to each book (see Course Assignments for details).

**Special Note:** The above texts, except for Witherington, are available for purchase at FPU Bookstore and on two-hour reserve in the Hiebert Library. The Witherington text will be

available in electronic form to those registered for the course. Students may make substitutions for texts they have already read. However, prior approval from the instructor is required.

## **Course Outline**

### **Unit One God's Project and God's People**

The first unit of the course focuses on the following:

- "Bottom Lines" – i.e. key terms and issues in understanding "The Church and God's Mission in the World;"
- Creation and God's plan for humanity as stewards of God's creation;
- The formation and the nature of the Old Testament People of God;
- Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament (discontinuity, continuity, fulfillment) – our key "test case" for this will be concepts of "leadership" through the Scriptures;
- Jesus' proclamation of the nearness and arrival of God's already/not yet kingdom.
- Textbooks that directly relate to this section are the books by Witherington and Ott.

### **Unit Two The Community around Jesus and the New Testament Church**

The second unit of the course focuses on the following:

- Jesus and the disciple community (e.g. the call to discipleship; the treasure and the pearl; the new family);
- Jesus and the church (e.g. the foundation of the church – Matthew 16; the discipling community – Matthew 18; – the missionary community (e.g. Matthew 28);
- The church in the Book of Acts (e.g. the concept of witness – Acts 1:8; priorities of the church – Acts 2:42-28; the church in unity and diversity – Acts 15);
- Models of the Kingdom, especially the relationship between God's reign and the church;
- The fulfillment of the Kingdom (eschatology);
- Textbooks that directly relate to this section are the books by Lohfink, Banks and Snyder.

### **Unit Three Understanding the Church & Culture**

The third unit of the course focuses on the following:

- The crisis of the NA churches, how the church shaped by Christendom engaged in mission, and the basic characteristics of a missional ecclesiology;
- Understanding North American culture, the key characteristics of the modern/post-modern NA culture;
- The church's vocation as a body of people sent to represent the reign of God as its community, servant, and messenger;
- The church's captivity to the powers and the church as an alternative community in terms of power, vocabulary, and economics;
- Answering the following question: "What would a theology of the church look like that took seriously the fact that North America is now itself a mission field?"

- Textbooks that directly relate to this section are the books by Barrett and Dawn.

## Course Assignments

The assignments listed below are designed to promote the course and degree objectives listed above. The assignments are arranged in the order in which they are to be completed. Most of the assignments revolve around the required readings.

Class Discussion and Participation: There is a great deal of reading and discussion required for this course. So it is imperative that you read all the material assigned for a particular day before class – highlight key ideas and take notes – and come to class well prepared to discuss what you have read. You need to do the required reading before class! Consult the course outline for the texts and topics that will be discussed and for assignment due dates. Be prepared to contribute to class discussion with your discoveries, reflections and evaluations. Dialogue is an important part of the learning experience. After all the written assignments have been graded, your final score may be adjusted down by as much as 10% for absenteeism, non-participation, or negligence. If you miss more than 20% of the class sessions and study group sessions, you may not qualify to pass the course. The class sessions and discussion group meetings represent about 42 hours of your total work load.

### **Specific Written Assignments: (these may be submitted electronically, see below)**

1. Response to Witherington's Book: Read *The Realm of the Reign* by Ben Witherington before the in-class discussion on Sept. 5. After that write a short response (2-3 double spaced pages) to both the book and your discussion of it. As you write your short response paper, reflect both positively and negatively on the Witherington book and the issues it raised for you, AND reflect both positively and negatively on the discussion experience and the issues it raised for you. What surprised you in the group interaction? Did you mostly disagree or agree? If you disagreed, were you happy with the group dynamic in the discussion? Did you find a balance between “being convinced” and “letting other views stand”? Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the diversity of convictions you experienced in the group?

- Written response is due Wednesday, Sept. 12 (midnight) Please submit a hard copy or email your responses to the prof.
- Estimated time for this assignment is about 7 hours, including reading (4 hrs.) and writing (3 hrs.). (Discussion time does not count because this is part of class time). 5% of final grade.

2. Response to Ott's Book: Read *God's Shalom Project* by Bernhard Ott before the in-class discussion on Sept. 19. In the context of your group, discuss your reactions to Ott (a discussion guide is attached). After your discussion group has met, write up a 2-3 page double-spaced response that reflects on the text by Ott and on the interactions within your study group as you discussed his book. For example, what new insights were shared? On what issues did some or all of you disagree with Ott? Assuming there was a diversity of opinions expressed by your group, how do you respond personally to the diversity of beliefs within your discussion group? What topics addressed by Ott would you personally like to explore more thoroughly?

- Book response is due Wednesday, Sept. 26 (midnight)
- The estimated time for this assignment is about 8 hours, including reading (5 hrs.) and writing (3 hrs.) 10% of final grade.

3. Critical Review of Lohfink's Book: Read *Jesus and Community* by Gerhard Lohfink before the in-class discussion on Oct. 3. In the context of your group, discuss your reactions to Lohfink (a discussion guide is attached). What did you find persuasive? At what points were you not convinced? How were Lohfink's views helpful in your own growing understanding of the nature & purpose of the church? Where you agreed with Lohfink's viewpoint(s), how would you suggest they should be applied in today's church context? After your discussion group has met, write a 3 page double-spaced critical review of the book by Lohfink. This is not quite the same as a response, since it engages critically with the issues raised in the book. (Critical means "with careful evaluation" and does not necessarily mean you have to disagree.) You should also focus on evaluating the book; this time you are not asked to reflect on the discussion group processing of the book.

- Critical Book review is due Wednesday, Oct. 10 (midnight) (even though we do not meet for class that day.)
- The estimated time for this assignment is about 10 hours, including reading (6 hrs.) and writing (4 hrs.) 10% of final grade.

4. Critical Review of Banks' Book: Prior to the group discussion on Oct. 17, read Robert Banks' book, *Paul's Idea of Community*. After your discussion group meets, you are expected to write a 3-page double-spaced critical review of Robert Banks' book. You will be using some of your discussion time on Oct. 17 to process your own personal reactions to his book with the larger group (a guide for your discussion is attached). What did you find persuasive? At what points were you not convinced? How were Banks' views helpful in your own growing understanding of the nature & purpose of the church? Where you agreed with Banks' viewpoint(s), how would you suggest they should be applied in today's church context? Your response is to be a critical book view, not simply a reflection on your group processing as in the first two assignments. So briefly summarize Banks' main points, then engage critically with the arguments, findings, and implications of his book. What are the main benefits of the book and where would you call into question some of its claims?

- Critical Book Review is due Wednesday, Oct. 24 (midnight).
- The estimated time for this assignment is about 11 hours, including reading (7 hrs.) and writing critical review (4 hrs.). 15% of final grade.

5. Essay on Snyder's Book: Prior to your discussion group meeting on Oct. 31, read Howard Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom*. After reading Snyder, you will meet with your group to discuss it on Oct. 31 (a group discussion guide is attached). After your discussion group meeting, write a short, tightly worded essay (approximately 5 pages double-spaced) in which you select one of the models of the kingdom presented in Snyder's book. Select the model that you find most faithful to the teaching of Scripture. For this essay you are not required to do additional research beyond the three texts you have read in the course thus far. Of course, if you choose to do additional research, that's fine! In your essay you are to define the model, indicating how Snyder presents it. Then refine it, if necessary, indicating how you would modify the way Snyder has presented it in order for it to capture your own convictions about God's reign and the church. Next, defend your choice of models over against the alternatives presented in Snyder. In your defense, comment on how your model fits within the six polarities outlined by Snyder in his opening chapter. Finally, devote a single page at the conclusion of your essay to discussing why the contemporary church should adopt your model and how it should be embodied in today's church. In your discussion groups on Oct. 31, you will be encouraged to share with the rest of the group the model you have selected, or the model you are inclined to embrace.

- Essay on models of the Kingdom due date: Nov. 7.

- Note: All “Synder Papers” must be submitted electronically, even if you submit a hard copy. The electronic copies will be submitted as part of the student’s portfolio.
- Estimated time for this assignment is 18 hours, including reading (8 hrs.) and writing essay (10 hrs.). 25% of your final grade.

6. Response to Barrett: Read Lois Barrett, et. al., Treasure in Clay Jars prior to your in-class discussion of her book on Nov. 14. In the context of your group, discuss your reactions to Barrett (a discussion guide is attached). After your discussion group has met, write up a 2-3 page double-spaced response that reflects on the text by Barrett and on the interactions within your study group as you discussed her book. For example, what new lessons were learned? On what issues did some or all of you disagree with Barrett? Assuming there were diverse opinions expressed by the members of your group, how do you respond personally to the diverse perspectives of your discussion group? What topics addressed by Barrett would you personally like to explore more thoroughly?

- Book response due date: Nov. 21 (midnight)
- Estimated time for this assignment is about 9 hours, including reading (6 hours), writing (3 hours). 10% of final grade.

7. Essay on Dawn’s Book: You are expected to read Marva Dawn, *The Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* prior to the in-class discussion of Dawn on Nov. 28 (a discussion guide is attached). After the in-class discussion of Dawn, write a short, tightly worded essay (5 pages double-spaced) in which you indicate how churches in NA are being and acting as fallen powers. In your essay begin by describing Dawn’s particular interpretation of the principalities and powers (pp. 1-34). What did you find persuasive? Where were you not convinced? How are her views helpful in understanding the biblical treatment of the principalities and powers? Next, respond to her discussion of the various ways the churches are being and acting as fallen powers (pp. 73-122). In particular, weave into your essay your responses to Dawn’s questions on chapter three listed on pages 166-167 of her book. Finally, in your essay, indicate what you think it would mean for your local church to live by its weakness rather than its own power. Weave into your essay your responses to Dawn’s questions on chapter four listed on page 167.

- Essay on Dawn’s book due Dec. 6, midnight.
- Estimated time for this assignment is 21 hours, including reading (11 hrs.) and writing (10 hours). 25% of final grade.

Total hours of assignments estimated at: 84 hours.

### Summary of Grading & Academic Policies

Response to Witherington	5%
Response to Ott	10%
Critical Book Review of Lohfink	10%
Critical Book Review of Banks	15%
Essay on Snyder’s Models of the Kingdom	25%
Response to Barrett	10%
Essay on Marva Dawn	25%
Total	100%
Class Participation Deductions (10% possible deduction)	

**MBBS academic policies** (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodations for disability, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, grading templates, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to your professor or consult the Registrar.

**Class Participation** is one of the most significant parts of the shared learning experience at MBBS. Any student who misses more than 25% of the class time in a course may have their grade reduced by a full letter grade and may be at risk for failing the course. Exceptions to this policy may be considered because of medical or family emergencies; but all exceptions must be approved by the faculty member and the Academic Dean.

**Course evaluations** are to be completed online and are due one week after the completion of the course. Official grades will not be posted until the student's evaluation of the course is completed.

**Evaluation.** All written assignments will be assessed according the following categories: appropriateness, clarity, comprehensiveness, creativity, argumentation, form and care. "Student work will be evaluated by two standards: a) by what is considered the appropriate level of graduate performance, and b) by comparison with work submitted in a given class" (see MBBS academic guidelines). The letter grades conversions follow the MBBS Grading Template: A (100-94%), A- (93-90%), B+ (89-87%), B (86-83%), B (82-80%), C+ (79-77%), C (76-73%), C- (72-70%), and F (69-0%). The performance expectations are as follows: "B" is the baseline which means the student is doing satisfactory work. "B+" or higher grades indicate the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. "C" grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level.

**Due Dates:** Students are expected to submit written assignments on time. Late reading reports and essays may graded down up to 2% for each day after the due date. This penalty may not apply to students who have a documented emergency that prevents them from submitting the assignment on the due date. Check with the instructor to see if alternate arrangements can be made. Students may submit their work by fax or email.

**Formatting Specifications.** On questions of style and citation form, consult Carole Slade, *Form and Style: Research papers, Reports, Theses*, 11th Edition. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. Any of the styles explained in that resource are acceptable, but please be consistent.

**Electronic Submission** of papers is acceptable. Please email them to [tgeddert@mbseminary.edu](mailto:tgeddert@mbseminary.edu). Your assignments should be attached documents using Word, RTF, or PDF format.

### **Bibliography for Church and God's Mission**

#### **Church**

Clowney, Edmund P. The Church. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Dunn, James D. Jesus' Call to Discipleship. Cambridge, England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Ellul, Jacques. The Presence of the Kingdom. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989.

Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler. Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church. New York: Crossroad, 1984.

Mead, Loren B. The Once and Future Church: reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1991.

Russell, Keith A. In Search of the Church New Testament Images for Romorrow's Congregations. Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1994.

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Shenk, Wilbert R., ed. A Challenge to Church Growth: a symposium. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973.

Smith, David L. All God's People: a theology of the church. Wheaton, Ill.: BridgePoint Book, 1996.

Snyder, Howard A. The Community of the King. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977.

Webber, George W. Today's Church: a community of exiles and pilgrims. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979.

Wright, N. T. For All God's Worth: true worship and the calling of the church. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

Yoder, John Howard. The Royal Priesthood: essays ecclesiological and ecumenical. Ed. Michael G. Cartwright. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1994.

Yoder, John Howard. Body Politics: five practices of the Christian community before the watching world. Nashville, Tenn.: Discipleship Resources, 1992.

### **The Mission of the Church**

Bosch, David Jacobus. Believing in the Future: toward a missiology of Western culture. Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International; Leominster Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1995.

Brueggemann, Walter. Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: living in a three-storied universe. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Byler, Ron. Pathways to a Missional Future: becoming a Christ-like church. Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Church USA, 2004.

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Fahrer, Walfred J. Building on the Rock: a biblical vision of being church together from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995.

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Padillea, René. Into the Vacuum: being the church in the age of barbarism. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998.

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## **Kingdom of God**

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## **Community**

Ascough, Richard S. Paul's Macedonian Associations: the social context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

Esler, Philip Francis. New Testament Theology: communion and community. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Hills, Julian V, ed. Common Life in the Early Church: essays honoring Graydon F. Snyder. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

Myers, Joseph R. The Search to Belong: rethinking intimacy, community, and small groups. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2003.

## **Missional Church** (additional bibliography borrowed from Ray Bystrom)

An excellent bibliography for research on the “missional church” concept is located in Darrel Guder’s book, *Missional Church*, pp. 269-280. Resources are grouped according to the following

areas: missional theologies of the church, signaling the current crisis, biblical and theological perspectives, historical and sociological perspectives, and vision for pastoral and congregational practice. Also, here is brief list of publications on this North American movement since 1998.

1. Lois Y. Barrett, ed. *Mission-Focused Congregations: A Bible Study*. Scotsdale, PA: Faith & Life Resources, Mennonite Publishing House, 2002.
2. \_\_\_\_\_. *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns of Missional Faithfulness*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004 (Forthcoming).
3. Stephen B. Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
4. Brownson, James, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West. *Stormfront: The Good News of God*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
5. Marva Dawn. *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
6. Darrell L. Guder. *The Continuing Incarnation of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.
7. \_\_\_\_\_. *Unlikely Ambassadors: Clay Jar Christians in God's Service*. Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA), 2002.
8. George R. Hunsberger. *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigins' Theology of Cultural Plurality*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
9. Philip Kenneson. *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community*. Downers Grove, IL: IVCF Press, 1999.
10. Mary Jo Leddy. *Radical Gratitude*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
11. Wayne A. Schwab. *When the Members are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People*. Essex, NY: Member Mission Press, 2002.
12. Craig Van Gelder. *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000.

**Christian Mission & Modern Culture Series** (additional bibliography borrowed from Ray Bystrom)

Listed below are some of the books in the Christian Mission and Modern Culture series edited by Alan Neely, H. Wayne Pipkin, and Wilbert R. Shenk, a series designed to help the church understand its missional responsibility to a culture in crisis.

1. H. D. Beeby. *Canon and Mission*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
2. David J. Bosch. *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. Trinity Press International, 1995.
3. James V. Brownson. *Speaking the Truth in Love: NT Resources for A Missional Hermeneutic*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
4. Jerome E. Burce. *The Magnet and the Vial: How the Church Achieves its Purpose in a Culture of Doubt*. 2000.
5. Kenneth Cragg. *The Secular Experience of God*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
6. Darrell L. Guder. *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 1999.
7. Douglas John Hall. *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Trinity Press International, 1997.
8. Barry A. Harvey. *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World*, 1999.
9. Paul G. Hiebert. *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*. Trinity Press International, 1998.

10. Bert Hoedemaker, *Secularization and Mission: A Theological Essay*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
11. Philip Kenneson. *Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World*, 1999.
12. J. Andrew Kirk. *The Mission of Theology and the Theology of Mission*. Trinity Press International, 1997.
13. Michael Warren. *At This Time in This Place: The Spirit Embodied in the Local Assembly*, 1999.
14. Lesslie Newbiggin. *Truth and Authority in Modernity*. Trinity Press International, 1996.
15. Alan J. Roxburgh. *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*. Trinity Press International, 1997.
16. Lamin Sanneh. *Religion and the Variety of Culture: A Study in Origin and Practice*. Trinity Press International, 1996.
17. Gordon Scoville. *Into the Vacuum: Being The Church in an Age of Barbarism*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
18. Jonathan R. Wilson. *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue*. Trinity Press International, 1998.
19. Charles C. West. *Power, Truth, and Community in Modern Culture*, 1999.
20. Wilbert R. Shenk. *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Trinity Press International, 1995.

## Guide for Discussion Groups Witherington's Book (Sept. 5)

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Witherington's book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your subsequent response. You are to have read the book prior to the discussion group session.

### **Guidelines for the discussion group:**

The easiest way of structuring your discussion time is to go to the end of each chapter and share your personal answers to the "Questions for Reflection" there. However, you will need to guard against spending a lot of time with only a few questions and thus run the risk of discussing only a few chapters before the time is up. If you do go through all the chapters, try to limit your discussion of any one chapter to 8-10 minutes, *at the most* (using a time-keeper if necessary). You want to be through the book in 35 minutes so that you have at least 10 minutes to deal with general questions like the following:

1. What was most enlightening to you as you read this book? (That is, what did Witherington help to clarify that you were confused about before?) Share these briefly with others in the group.
2. On what points did Witherington confirm views that you already held? Again share these with the group.
3. On what points did you either disagree with Witherington, or at least have sufficient questions about his claims that you want to pursue the matter further?

As "areas of disagreement" are brought up, discuss them in the group. Did you all question the point that someone brings up? Were some of you convinced and others not? Why? Does it really matter?

4. If you haven't discussed the "Heaven's not my home, I'm just a passing through!" issue under # 3, address this question now. Is this view new to you? Could that be because the church has been far more strongly influenced by an "other-worldly Greek (Platonic) worldview" than by a Hebrew biblical worldview?

### **Guidelines for writing your response: (due Sept. 12)**

You are to respond to Witherington, *but you are also to respond to the discussion period*. What surprised you in the group interaction? Did you mostly disagree or agree? If you disagreed, were you happy with the group dynamic in the discussion? Did you find a balance between "being convinced" and "letting other views stand"? Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the diversity of convictions you experienced in the group?

As you write your short response paper, reflect both positively and negatively on the Witherington book and the issues it raised for you, AND reflect both positively and negatively on the discussion experience and the issues it raised for you.

## Guide for Discussion Groups **Bernhard Ott's Book (Sept. 19)**

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Ott's book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your subsequent response. You are to have read the book prior to the discussion group session. While reading, please reflect on the questions at the end of each chapter. Ideally you would jot down your answers to all these questions, but that is not being assigned.

### **Guidelines for the discussion group:**

The easiest way of structuring your discussion time is to go to the end of each chapter and share your personal answers to the "For Further Reflection" questions, especially those that provoked some creative responses. However, you will not be able to discuss all the questions for all the chapters. Guard against trying to do so (that would be a very shallow hasty discussion!). But also guard against getting stuck on just one or two chapters. You want to be able to discuss the main issues addressed in the book within the discussion period of about 45 minutes.

Make sure you spend some time on general questions like the following:

1. What was most enlightening to you as you read this book? (That is, what did Ott help to clarify that you were confused about before?) Share these briefly with others in the group.
2. On what points did Ott confirm views that you already held? Again share these with the group.
3. On what points did you either disagree with Ott, or at least have sufficient questions about his claims that you want to pursue the matter further? As "areas of disagreement" are brought up, discuss them in the group. Did you all question the point that someone brings up? Were some of you convinced and others not? Why? Does it really matter?
4. If there is still time, make sure you address some of the following issues (if you have not already done so).
  - the issue of "human choice" (Can humans really choose for God?);
  - the meaning and centrality of "Shalom" as the focus of God's project;
  - the development of Christology from "Jesus of Nazareth" to the Christ confessed by the church after the resurrection;
  - the relationship between the church and the "empire";
  - eschatological expectations (rapture, tribulation, etc.)

### **Guidelines for writing your response: (due Sept. 26)**

You are to respond to Ott, *but you are also to respond to the discussion period*. What surprised you in the group interaction? Did you mostly disagree or agree? If you disagreed, were you happy with the group dynamic in the discussion? Did you find a balance between "being convinced" and "letting other views stand"? Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the diversity of convictions you experienced in the group?

As you write your short response paper, reflect both positively and negatively on the book and the issues it raised for you, AND reflect both positively and negatively on the discussion experience and the issues it raised for you.

## Guide for Discussion Groups Lohfink's Book (Oct. 3)

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Lohfink's book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your critical review. You are to have read the book prior to the discussion group session. While reading, please keep the issues highlighted below in mind, so that you can productively discuss these issues in your group and then work them into your critical review.

*For your interest:* Gerhard Lohfink was a catholic priest and professor, until his experience of his own church and his perception of what the New Testament teaches about the church were so far apart that he left his post and ministry in disillusionment. After writing this book (Jesus and Community" (the original German title is more like "How did Jesus want the church to be?") he was drawn back into an "Integrated church" that truly practiced community and included other formerly disillusioned church-participants. He gained a whole new appreciation for church "as community" and ended up writing a much more substantial book entitled "Braucht Gott die Kirche?" (Does God Need the Church? . . . translated with this title into English). In it he sees a whole new side of the Church . . . not its nature (as God intended it) but its function as a corporate witness to what God is doing in the world.

Reflect in your group on how Lohfink's own biography has shaped his thinking and writing and also how your own biography shapes your own processing and applying of what you learn from this book and are learning in this course.

Other issues to process:

- Is the legacy of "Individualism" (e.g. Harnack) as clearly negative as Lohfink portrays it in the introduction?
- How do you respond to the strong focus on "the regathering of Israel" as the primary function of the earthly Jesus' ministry? (section 1)
- How do you respond to Jesus' intentional re-fashioning of values in the disciple community, including breaking down "patriarchy" and other societal barriers, creating a new family, renouncing violence, etc.?
- Do you see the early church in any new ways, as you consider Lohfink's presentation of it as a clear continuation of the values Jesus instilled in the disciple community? How?
- As a (former) Catholic, Lohfink pays much more careful attention to the developments of the "ancient church" (2-4 centuries) than Protestants typically do. What did you learn from section 4 of the book in terms of the good and bad developments of the church in its first few centuries after the apostolic era. Which developments did Lohfink consider "pros" and "cons"? Which do you?
- Comment briefly on Lohfink's assessment of Augustine's contribution and your response.

When you write your critical review, make sure you are clear about what you found persuasive, where you were not convinced, how Lohfink's views were helpful (or not) in your own growing understanding of the nature & purpose of the church? A critical book review is not quite the same as a response, since it engages critically with the issues raised in the book. (Critical means "with careful evaluation" and does not necessarily mean you have to disagree.)

Critical Book review (about 3 pages) is due Wednesday, Oct. 10 (midnight) (even though we do not meet for class that day.)

## Guide for Discussion Groups Banks' Book (Oct. 17)

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Banks' book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your subsequent critical review. You are to have read the book prior to the discussion group session.

### **Guidelines for the discussion group:**

Since you will be writing a critical book review, the discussion period is a good chance to test your positive and negative reactions to the book with others. Have you correctly understood Banks' positions? Are you clear about why you affirm or do not affirm various views? What does that tell you about the influence of your own church background and commitments?

The following are suggested discussion questions for each chapter of Banks (please *select* from these):

1. What was helpful in Banks' assessment of voluntary gatherings in the 1. century (ch. 1)?
2. Banks views "freedom" as a central feature of Paul's understanding of the Christian life (ch. 2). How is this like or unlike what we usually understand "freedom" to mean?
3. What is gained and lost when churches have their own buildings and when church memberships are often many times as large as early Christian gatherings were (ch. 3)?
4. What did Paul mean by "ecclesia"? (ch. 4)? What did you learn in this chapter about the priorities of the church according to Paul?
5. How did the metaphor "family" and the concept of "koinōnia" function in Paul's concept of the church (ch. 5)? How well is the N.A. church doing at embodying these concepts?
6. What features of the church did Paul capture with the metaphor of the "body" (ch. 6)?
7. How important was "understanding" for Paul (ch. 7)? How important is it today?
8. Which of the "physical expressions of fellowship" should be retained, and which should find new and more culturally relevant counterparts in the contemporary church (ch. 8)?
9. How did you respond to Banks' claims about the role of spiritual gifts within the various kinds of Christian gatherings (ch. 9)?
10. Were relationships more important than "rites" and "Scripture" (ch. 10)? Should they be?
11. What did the Pauline churches do about social and economic distinctions and disparities? (ch. 11). What do (or should) we do about them today?
12. Do you agree with the way Banks assesses Paul's attitude to gender issues (ch. 12)? To what extent should Paul's view also be our view in the 21<sup>st</sup> century western world?
13. Is it really true that everyone participated in leadership in the Pauline churches (ch. 13)? What does that say to today's church? (see also the next point!)
14. In the church "authority is dispersed throughout the whole membership." (p. 148, ch. 14) Does that fairly describe the NT church? Should that be our practice? Why or why not?
15. What did you learn in ch. 15 concerning the nature of Paul's missionary teams?
16. What is the relationship between the "ecclesia" and "the mission" (ch. 16)?
17. What kind of authority did Paul have? How did he exercise it? (chs. 17 and 18). In what way was he modeling himself after Jesus? And how should contemporary Christian leaders do so?
18. Respond to the middle paragraph on p. 190 (conclusion). Does it fairly represent Paul's idea of community? What does it have to say to the contemporary church?

**Critical Review of Banks due Oct. 24.** (Note: this is a critical review, not a report on your discussion groups!)

## **Guide for Discussion Groups** **“Snyder’s Models” (Oct. 31)**

This guide is to help you understand the essay you are to write, and to suggest ways of using your discussion time to help prepare for the assignment. You are to have read the book prior to the discussion group session. If you have finished your reading well in advance, it would be good to refer again to chapter 1 (pages 15-24) in preparation for your discussion.

For your essay you will be selecting one of the models Snyder lists in this essay, based on which model you believe most adequately describes God’s Reign as presented in Scripture. You would thus choose from the following list:

1. The kingdom as future hope: *the future* kingdom.
2. The kingdom as inner spiritual experience: the *interior* kingdom.
3. The kingdom as mystical communion: the *heavenly* kingdom.
4. The kingdom as institutional church: the *ecclesiastical* kingdom.
5. The kingdom as counter-system: the *subversive* kingdom.
6. The kingdom as political state: the *theocratic* kingdom.
7. The kingdom as Christianized culture: the *transforming* kingdom.
8. The kingdom as earthly utopia: the *utopian* kingdom.

(An alternative is to select more than one which you believe can or should be combined to form a “biblical view”.)

### **In the discussion group:**

1. Each person should indicate which model (or combination of models) he or she thinks is most adequate.
2. Take each model that is chosen in turn and have those who have selected that model describe how they understand it and why they believe it is most adequate. What is the biblical support for each model? Are there also major themes in Scripture that argue against some of the models? Because it is unlikely that all members of the group will choose the same model, the group can debate the positive and negative aspects of each of the chosen models.
3. Discuss what Snyder means by the “polarities” he discusses in chapter 1. In your opinion, how do the models chosen in your group fare when evaluated in the light of these polarities? And how do they fare in the light of other “tests” advocated by Snyder – i.e. tested against the teaching of Jesus, against their potential for instructing the contemporary church, etc.?
4. Discuss how the various models can contribute positively to the renewal of the church in its mission. Perhaps the diversity of models chosen will reveal that class members are not at all united on exactly what the mission of the church is! Discuss your differences.

**After the session**, you should be better prepared to write your paper (**Due Nov. 7**). Here are some tips to help you stay on track with this assignment. These are based on past experience!

- 1) Sometimes students present what they call a “model of the kingdom”, but really what they are presenting is their “personal passion.” Personal passion is good and some students both describe and biblically defend theirs very well. But be careful that you don’t confuse your passion with “the biblical concept of God’s Reign.”

- 2) Just because you find arguments in Snyder's book, does not mean they are necessarily adequate ones! Snyder does not endorse all eight models as equally valid. So if you include in your paper what Snyder says other people do when they defend that view, that does not mean you have adequately defended the view!
- 3) Choosing more than one model is O.K. But be careful about choosing two models which are about as opposite as possible on Snyder's polarities. It is unlikely that "the Reign of God" means two virtually opposite things!
- 4) Finally, some comments on two models that students sometimes misunderstand. Some students understand "Christianized culture" to mean that Christians get involved with culture, and "Counter-culture" to mean they don't. Is that really what Snyder means by these?

Students have sometimes found this assignment tough, but usually have said afterward that it was also very rewarding. I hope these comments (and your discussion time) help some, and I hope it is worth the effort!

**Due Date: Nov. 7**

## **Guide for Discussion Groups** **Barrett's Book (Nov. 14)**

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Barrett's book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your subsequent response. You are to read the book prior to the discussion group session.

### **Discussion Group Guidelines**

1. The authors want this book to be a source of encouragement (xi) "so that we do not lose heart" (153). They want you to be inspired "to let the gospel of Jesus Christ ... shape your congregation" (153). Were you encouraged? Were you inspired? If so, how? Share briefly.
2. Having read the book, what is a "missional church"? Or, what does it mean for a church to be moving toward "becoming missional"?
3. The various congregations mentioned in the book are "clay jars" (155) that hold a great treasure (the Gospel). What do you remember about any one of these congregations that reveals that it is simply a "clay jar" and not a perfect model to be emulated?
4. Eight patterns of faithfulness are sketched in the book. Are all the patterns of faithfulness evident in your congregation? If not, what's missing? Which pattern is least developed in your congregation? Which pattern is most evident in your congregation?
5. Of the eight patterns of faithfulness is there ONE pattern that you would like to create or cultivate in your congregation? Why?
6. Of the eight which pattern would be most difficult to cultivate in your church? Why?
7. Can you name patterns of faithfulness in your congregation that were not mentioned in this book?
8. At what points do you disagree with Barrett, or at least have sufficient questions about her claims that you want to pursue the issue some more?

### **Writing Guidelines**

The syllabus assignment asks you to respond to Barrett's book. But keep in mind that you are also asked to respond to the discussion session. What surprised you in the group interaction? Did you mostly disagree or agree with one another? If you disagreed, were you happy with the group dynamics during the discussion? Were you comfortable or uncomfortable with the diverse convictions expressed in your group?

As you write your response to Barrett, reflect positively and negatively on Barrett's book and the issues it raises. Also, reflect on the discussion group experience, noting both positive and negative features of it.

**Response due: Nov. 21**

## **Guide for Discussion Groups**

### **Dawn's book (Nov. 28)**

This page is designed to facilitate a good discussion of Dawn's book in your study group, and to give you guidelines for your subsequent response. You are to read the book prior to the discussion group session.

#### **Discussion Group Guidelines**

1. What is Dawn's primary aim or goal in writing this book? Try to find a quote to substantiate your understanding of the purpose of her book.
2. Chapter One addresses the question, "What are the powers?" How does Dawn answer this question? At what points does she differ with Walter Wink whom she critiques. What is the status of the powers in light of the cross? How does the church reveal the shackling and subjugating of the powers? How do we as Christians (churches) relate to the powers?
3. Chapter Two focuses on the tabernacling of God and a theology of weakness. According to Dawn, what is the church's true vocation as a created power? How does Dawn translate and interpret 2 Corinthians 12:9? Why are large proportions of today's churches in NA not living out of weakness? Why have they turned pastors into CEO's? Why do we search for pastors who are handsome, sophisticated, charismatic – instead of pastors who are models of suffering? Why do so many of today's churches adopt the practices of the business world and its achievement models? Why do so many churches resort to gimmicks or Technique?
4. In chapter three Dawn writes about the church as being and acting as a fallen power. Do you agree with her assessment? If so, why don't churches resemble the weakness of Jesus? of Paul? of the early church? How is the church's vocation of weakness violated when it is influenced by the powers? Is leadership in the church important in Dawn's view? If so, what dangers do they need to avoid?
5. In chapter four Dawn speaks of the church as living by its weakness and imbued by the tabernacling of God. What does corporate weakness look like? How can a congregation fulfill its call to weakness as a power true to its vocation? How does personal weakness affect the corporate life of the church, and vice versa? Is it possible for a church or denomination to operate out of weakness? How do we avoid passivity or apathy? How does the church engage in the battle with the powers from a posture of weakness? Is weakness an effective or ineffective way to be the church?
6. At what points do you disagree with Dawn, or at least have sufficient questions about her claims that you want to pursue the issue some more?

#### **Writing Guidelines**

Write a short, tightly worded essay (5 pages double-spaced) in which you indicate how churches in NA are being and acting as fallen powers. In your essay begin by describing Dawn's particular interpretation of the principalities and powers (pp. 1-34). What did you find persuasive? Where were you not convinced? How are her views helpful in understanding the biblical treatment of the principalities and powers? Next, respond to her discussion of the various ways the churches are being and acting as fallen powers (pp. 73-122). In particular, weave into your essay your responses to Dawn's questions on chapter three listed on pages 166-167 of her book. Finally, in your essay, indicate what you think it would mean for your local church to live by its weakness rather than its own power. Weave into your essay your responses to Dawn's questions on chapter four listed on page 167.

**Essay Due: Dec. 6, midnight.**