

Course: TR235 -- The Church, Spirituality and the Arts

Faculty: Wilson Yates

**Term: Summer, 6-24 June, 2011, Thirteen sessions
United Theological Seminary**

Course Description

This course will examine the relationship the church has had with the arts and how art has shaped the church's spirituality in selected moments of its history. We will engage in the religious interpretation of art at the both the level of theological analysis and spiritual exploration.

In this process, we will develop a methodological approach for interpretation that takes into account style, formal elements, iconography, and levels of meaning including foremost the spiritual and theological dimensions of a work. There will be one session on the early church, one on the Byzantine period, one on late medieval and early renaissance, two on the reformation period, and three sessions on the 20th century where we will treat both artists who were informed by traditional religious symbols and those who turned to new spiritual explorations removed from traditional iconography and meaning. The 20th century considerations will include an overview of 20th century art and then a consideration of specific artists' work. We will go to the Minneapolis Institute of Art for a study tour.

Reflections on and Protocols and Assignments for our
class noted here with serious intent and an occasional
light touch

1. When we attend and participate in class sessions we should be

respectful and open to those around us. I offer, in this spirit of respectfulness, a few expectations and observations about our work together.

- Leave at the door theological, ideological, moral, social, or emotional dogmas that deny you the freedom to question or see in new ways.

- *Recognize that the beginning of moral wisdom is the recognition of moral ambiguity.

- *Raise questions.

- *Debate ideas.

- *Construct new ways of seeing.

- *Recognize that you have no choice but to seek the truth, if you wish to become a wise person. But recognize that the truth you seek will only be partial, for you see through a glass darkly. Recognize that to claim to have the truth must, paradoxically, lead you to realize that you have the truth only partially.

- *Approach a work of art as one source of religious truth, but realize that it may turn out to be nothing more than an expression of pietistic sentimentality or ideological arrogance parading under the cloak of theology or spirituality.

- *Approach a work of art with the hope that it might reveal that which is beautiful, but recognize that it may only be a pretty picture.

- *Recognize that a work of art has finally a presence of its own that cannot be reduced to cultural or religious forces that it might reflect. Recognize that it is a power *sui generis*. Ideological reductionism is a fundamentalism that is degrading of the mind and spirit and theological manipulation and censure of art is blasphemy.

- *Realize that whatever this class becomes, will be the choice of

of what we decide to make it become in the unfolding of these weeks.

* Remember that the class has in the room a third party attendant to our deliberations, for in addition to the professor and the students. there is the class, itself, with a life that is more than the teacher or the students. Treat it with respect and it shall reward us many fold over.

2. Read and study the primary works noted in the syllabus.
3. Become familiar with the Minneapolis Institute of Art.
4. Study and write about one major artwork. Write a ten to twelve page paper about the work with attention to contextual factors such as the artist, period, style, and historical factors related to the work; compositional or formal elements such as image, form, shape, colour, tonality, perspective, line, texture, space, movement and their significance for the work; iconography or subject matter and its symbolic presentations; and the iconology or meaning of the artwork and its theological meaning and spiritual implications. And acknowledge what you bring to the work. . While we will make reference to other art forms, the paper should treat visual works that might be, for this course, paintings, drawings, stained glass, constructions, sculpture, carvings, and fabric. The artwork should be a piece that is recognized publicly as “good art” and is accessible in a museum or in reproductions that can be easily researched.
5. Undertake research work using books, journals, the internet, and museums as well as, personal experience. I should note that material taken off of the internet should be documented as thoroughly as a reference taken from a book. In writing your paper, you should check the student handbook regarding footnote procedures and other protocol regarding graduate papers.
6. Engage your own spirituality by responding to works not only in terms of intellectual analysis, but in terms of how you encounter a

work spiritually and what impact it has on you.

7. This course invites hard work, wit, a liveliness of thought, a theological openness, spiritual discipline, a deep engagement with art and an appropriate distance from it, and always a love, unrequited and consuming, for the beauty of art and the Beauty of God. You do not need to have studied art or created art to be fully at home in this course. You do not need to be excited about what the class has to offer and open to its becoming an exciting and transformative experience for you.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. *THE RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF ART* 6.6.11

We will introduce ourselves, discuss the syllabus and examine certain assumptions brought to this course regarding the arts, the church, spirituality, and theology.

In this session, we will examine theological and methodological aspects of interpreting works of art including a model that draws on Erwin Panofsky, Jane Dillenberger and Joshua Taylor in its consideration of pre-iconographic elements (formal motifs), iconography (subject matter) and iconology (content and meaning). The model envisions three actors on stage: the artist, the work, and the viewer and the contexts that inform them. It takes into account each of these actors and their roles in the process of interpretation. We will also discuss the way in which we can speak of time, object, image, word, space, place, sound, movement, and narrative as sacred in our own experience and in that of the church and society.

Primary Readings:

- Wilson Yates, *Methodological Worksheet on Interpreting a Work of Art*. (Handout).
- Joshua Taylor, *Learning to Look, A Handbook for the Visual Arts*.

In this session we will first look at six roles that the arts play in religion with a focus on how we approach these roles theologically as theologians, and how we approach them spiritually as religious persons.

These roles or points of intersection include the following:

- +art and its role in worship.
- +art and its role in understanding the history of religious faith.
- +art and its role in raising religious questions
- +art and its prophetic role
- +art and its sacramental role
- +art and its envisioning role

The second part of this session will consider what is meant by “theological reflection” on art and begin our consideration of certain 20th century theologians who were central to the development of this discussion. The major theologian who initiated much of the modern discussion was Paul Tillich. We will focus first on his approach.

Primary Readings:

- John Dillenberger, Introduction, *Tillich on Art and Architecture*.
- Paul Tillich, *Art and Society* in Dillenberger, *ibid.*

III. APPROACHES TO THE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF ART 6.9.11

This session will continue our conversation on Paul Tillich and examine a number of other approaches including those provided by James Luther Adams, Roger Hazelton, theologians working with theological aesthetics, and Margaret Miles. The approaches of these figures will be treated in a limited fashion, but it will provide an overview of the thought that has undergirded the theology and arts conversation. It will also move us to an approach that is being developed in this course which I call a *Dialogical Approach*.

Primary Readings:

- Wilson Yates, *Homage to JLA*, ARTS
- Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu et. al. *Theological Aesthetics and the Art of John August Swanson*, ARTS, 21.2, 2010.
- Wilson Yates, *Notes on a Dialogical Approach*

IV. INTERPRETATION: SELECTED WORKS IN THE MIA 6.10.11

We will spend the afternoon in the MIA looking at specific works of art with a focus on works that we will be treating in class. Specifically, we will consider the late medieval/early renaissance works, of Daddi, Fra Angelico and the ivory *Diptych* of scenes from the life of Christ and works by Rembrandt, Goya, van Gogh, Brancusi, Moore, Chagall, Beckman and Kandinsky. The study tour will function as a discussion of these works with reference to the method of interpretation we are developing in the course.

Primary Readings:

- MIA website on these works or
- Sandra Lipchutz, *Selected Works, the MIA* or

- other catalogue of MIA works.

V. EARLY CHURCH AND BYZANTINE ART

6.13.11

This session will treat early church and Byzantine art. We will consider with broad strokes works from the early church including the wall paintings at Dura Europus, and selected works from the Catacombs, mosaics from Ravenna, and liturgical objects. Our focus, however, will be on the Byzantine Icon.

In the Eastern Church the icon is central to Orthodox spirituality and theology. We shall examine how the painting of the icon is a spiritual discipline, how Orthodox theology is built around the image, and the role the icon plays in the life of the believer and the church. There will be a particular focus on Russian icons.

Using the book by Linnette Martin for icon representations and discussing in the lecture Andrei Rublev's icons, we will explore our own personal response to them relative to what they might say to our own spirituality.

Primary Readings:

- Linette Martin, *Sacred Doorways*, 2002.
- Wilson Yates, *Andrei Rublev* in *ARTS*, 15.1, 2003.

VI. THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS ON THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY RENAISSANCE WORKS OF DUCCIO AND GIOTTO

6.14.11

This discussion will focus on the late medieval theology and spirituality reflected in the Sienese painter, Duccio, and the early Renaissance Florentine artist, Giotto. They were painting in the late 13th and early 14th centuries and deeply influenced the art world and the church. Duccio painted the final chapter of medieval brilliance in

art and Giotto helped give birth to the Renaissance that would flourish in the workshops of Florence and influence the breadth of Renaissance painters. We will pay special attention to how the changing styles and treatment of subject matter express a changing theology.

It is important to note that we move in our next session to the Reformation. The high and late Renaissance will not be treated, which is our loss, due to time constraints and the decision to spend more time on the 20th century.

Primary Readings:

- Studies on Duccio and Giotto that you can find on reserve and in the library collection.
- Internet references
- See below: background readings

Background Readings:

- For study of works by these two figures, use the website to examine, particularly, Duccio's Maesta and Giotto's Assisi and Padua cycles of St. Francis life, nativity, holy week, and Easter. (The large and extraordinary book, Giotto by Francesca Flores D'Arcais provides excellent reproductions of his work). Also on reserve is the excellent study, Italian Frescoes, the Age of Giotto, by Joachim Poeschke. Again, much of the material in these works can be found on the internet by going to Duccio and Giotto on Google, Arts Media, Web Art Gallery, Arts Resource and other arts internet collections.

VII. THE REFORMATION AND REMBRANDT

6.16.11

To gain insight into the relationship of the reformation and art, I will acknowledge the different positions on the arts held by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Karlstadt, and the Anabaptists with considerations of major Protestant painters. such as Durer, Cranach and, most significantly, Rembrandt. Our focus will be on Rembrandt including his biblical works seen in his etchings, drawings, and paintings. The book we are reading, Arthur Wheelock's Rembrandt's late Religious Portraits, is a study in Rembrandt's late religious subjects and his theology. My judgment of Rembrandt is that he is "the Protestant painter" who provides a profound expression of reformation spirituality much as Michelangelo, "the Roman Catholic painter," provides the deepest of insights into Roman Catholic renaissance spirituality. In this discussion we will treat Michelangelo's three pietas as expressive of his own spirituality.

Primary Readings:

- Arthur Wheelock, Rembrandt's late Religious Portraits, 2005.
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Secondary Resources:

- Please use the internet to explore other works of Rembrandt and library resources

VIII. THE REFORMATION, COUNTER REFORMATION AND BIBLICAL ART

6.17.11

This session will examine the Reformation's treatment of biblical themes where we can see a "visual theology" at work. Our case study will be the treatment of the Prodigal Son. Our primary text for this session will be And Grace Will Lead Me Home, edited by Robert Brusica. This work is a collection of essays and artworks from the Jerry Evenrud collection of The Prodigal Son.

Primary Readings:

- Robert Brusic, ed., *And Grace Will Lead Me Home, Images of The Prodigal Son* from the Jerry Evenrud Collection. See particularly essays by Sarah Henrich and Wilson Yates and Brusic's interpretations of the works.

IX. 20th CENTURY PAINTINGS AND RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION 6.20.11

We are making a major shift to the 20th century where we will focus for the remainder of the course. By the 20th century secularization had led to a major split between the two estates of art and the church. This period is far removed from the Byzantine era when all art was religious and all artists were monks – a relationship that continued through much of the medieval period. Change, as the differentiating of art and the church in the face of secularizing forces becomes more dominant in the Renaissance and the Reformation and continues down through our own time. In this session, there will be an overview presentation of selected works from such artists such as van Gogh, Rouault, Nolde, Beckman, Bearden, Mondrian, Chagall, Newman, Rothko, Hepworth, and Kollwitz. We will explore how works by modern artists, that may or may not use religious iconography, have spiritual significance.

Primary Reading:

- Wilson Yates, "Kaethe Kollwitz and the Question of Death", in *Visual Theology* ed. by Robin Jensen and Kim Vrudny
- Robin Jensen and Kim Vrudny, *Visual Theology*, Part I, essays by Charles Pickstone, Sarah Henrich, and Deborah Sokolove

X. VISUAL THEOLOGY: POLITICS AND NATURE 6.21.11

This session will treat examples of 20th century art and the treatment of the political or prophetic and art and the environment and their spiritual dimensions.

Primary Readings:

- Jensen and Vrudny, *Visual Theology*, Parts 2 and 3, "Visual Theology: the political and the natural."

XI. VISUAL THEOLOGY: THE LITURGICAL AND THE COMMUNAL 6.23.11

The discussion will focus on the works from the collection of essays that are in parts 4 and 5 of Visual Theology.

XII. PARTY AT THE YATES HOME WITH PRESENTATIONS BY STUDENTS OF THEIR PAPER IDEA 6.24.11

Each student is asked to interpret a work of art using the approach we have developed in class which takes into account form, subject matter, and religious meaning. You will be asked to theologically reflect on the work and indicate its spiritual significance for you. You should have an image of the work to show the class. Your presentation will be approximately 15 minutes including questions. You should have an outline of the paper to pass out to all participants.

This will be your paper for the semester. It should be 10 to 12 pages in length. You may use notes for your presentation or, if you have finished writing the paper, read from it.

After the paper presentations we will have tea and dessert and

good conversation. *wy*