

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PTHI/THEI 640 Issues in Contemporary Culture: The Works of J.R.R. Tolkien

An AGTS Video Course

Featuring:

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and

Jessica Dorn, MDiv.

Independent Studies Program

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introductory discussion of the life, the work, and the philosophical/theological perspective of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. Special emphasis will be given to writings pertaining to Middle-earth in an effort to shed interpretive light upon his best-known work, *The Lord of the Rings*.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this course the student should:

1. Have a deeper appreciation of Tolkien and his world-view as expressed through his writings and the testimony of his contemporaries.
2. Grasp the concept of myth as wielded by Tolkien and his Christian colleagues.
3. Understand specific symbols, archetypes, and themes running through *The Lord of the Rings* narrative.
4. Gain perspective on the use and misuse of Tolkien's anti-modernistic literary vocabulary in a modern and post-modern world.
5. Develop a clear theology about one of Tolkien's themes evident in his writings, with special emphasis on its relevance to the local church setting.
6. Demonstrate critical thinking and scholarly discussion about Tolkien's writings and themes through online discussion forums.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Birzer, Bradley J. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth*. 1st ed. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. (any edition)

----- *The Lord of the Rings*. (any edition)

----- *The Silmarillion*. (any edition)

BASIC OUTLINE

DVD	Session #	Session Title	Lecturer
1	1	An Opening Perspective	Thomas
	2	The Inklings	Dorn
	3	Tolkien's Understanding of Myth	Thomas
2	1	The One True God of Middle Earth	Dorn
	2	The Location of Middle Earth	Thomas
3	1	The Nature of Evil	Thomas
	2	What is Magic	Thomas
4	1	Favorite Characters	Dorn
	2	Gandalf	Dorn
	3	The Issue of the Films	Thomas
	4	Aragorn	Thomas
5	1	Aragorn Part II	Thomas
	2	Frodo	Dorn
	3	Bombadil	Thomas
6	1	Quest	Dorn
	2	Stewardship	Thomas
	3	Stewardship Part II	Dorn
	4	Hope & Joy	Dorn
	5	Despair	Thomas

METHODOLOGY

Course objectives will be met through:

1. DVD Video Lectures
2. Asynchronous Online Discussion Forums
3. Completion of required assignments of reading and writing

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Completion of reading assignments.** Birzer should be read (including foreword, preface, and introduction) before watching the DVD sessions. *The Silmarillion* Chapter One (“Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur”) should be read shortly before watching the DVD

sessions. A recent reading of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* itself would also be advisable before watching the DVD sessions. **For each:** give a bibliographic citation of the book and affirm that you read it in its entirety. (**Approximately 2,000 pages**)

2. **Watching DVD Lectures.** Watch all video sessions and keeping these questions in mind: What are the strengths/weaknesses of the session? What are the main thoughts in the session? How can these main thoughts be integrated into a local church context? **Turn in** with your reading report a statement affirming that you watched all sessions in their entirety.
3. **Online Discussion Forums.** Participate in the online asynchronous forums. Respond to the posted Forum Questions. Your response should completely address the question posed, using good grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization. Each response should be at least 200 words in length. Also, respond to at least 1 (one) of your classmates' responses. Your responses should be an evaluation of the respondents' thoroughness, line of argument, reasoning, biblical support, and insights. These responses should be at least 100 words in length. It should not focus on spelling, grammar, or descend to an argument about opinions. These exercises will comprise 20% of your final grade. Instructions on how to register for the forum will be emailed to you from the AGTS Continuing Education Office.
4. **Completion of writing assignment.** Trace a theological theme throughout the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien. Then write a research paper of **no less than 15-20 pages of written text** dealing with one of the major themes addressed in either Birzer or the class itself. Some sample topics are: Ethics, The Nature of Evil, Spiritual Warfare, Stewardship, The One True God, Hope, etc. The student should develop said theme as completely as possible using concrete examples from the LOTR text.

All assignments are to be typewritten, double-spaced, represent quality graduate level work, and follow the *Turabian* style manual, 6th edition.

All assignments must include a title page that includes your name, address, phone and email, course number, title, and assignment title.

Due date: All assignments are to be postmarked no later than 15 weeks after course registration (check your course release form for the exact due date).

(All projects must be received by the continuing education office by your due date)

NOTE: A \$30.00 fee will be charged to the student's account for every grade change even if the instructor has approved an extension for completing the work. Any exception to the policy will be made by the registrar.

Submit all assignment to: AGTS Continuing Education
1435 N. Glenstone Avenue
Springfield, MO 65802
e-mail: agts-ext@agts.edu

GRADING PROCEDURE

Completion of required reading	20%
Watching DVD Lectures	10%
Online Discussion Forums	20%
Research Paper	50%
Total	100%

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Becker, Alida. *The Tolkien Scrapbook*. New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.
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- Carpenter, Humphrey. *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1977.
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- Dickerson, Matthew T. *Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in the Lord of the Rings*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003.
- Duriez, Colin. *The J.R.R. Tolkien Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to His Life, Writings, and World of Middle-Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992.

- _____. *Tolkien and the Lord of the Rings: A Guide to Middle-Earth*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001.
- _____. *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003.
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- Fonstad, Karen Wynn. "The Atlas of Middle-Earth." Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991.
- Foster, Robert. *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth: Tolkien's World from a to Z*. Rev. and enlarged ed. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2001.
- Fuller, Edmund. *Myth, Allegory, and Gospel; an Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and Charles Williams*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1974.
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- Hammond, Wayne G., and Douglas A. Anderson. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography* Winchester Bibliographies of 20th Century Writers. Winchester, UK; New Castle, DE: St. Paul's Bibliographies; Oak Knoll Books, 1993.
- Hammond, Wayne G., and Christina Scull. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1995.
- Helms, Randel. *Tolkien's World*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Isaacs, Neil David, and Rose A. Zimbardo. *Tolkien and the Critics; Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's the Lord of the Rings*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.
- _____. *Tolkien, New Critical Perspectives*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1981.
- Knight, Gareth. *The Magical World of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkein, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield*. Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1990.
- Kocher, Paul Harold. *A Reader's Guide to the Silmarillion*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
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Wood, Ralph C. *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

WEBSITE RESOURCES

In addition to the selected bibliography, additional resources can be found at the following websites:

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/features/lordoftheringstrilogy/lessons/bibliography.shtml>

Accessed October 13, 2005

<http://www.tolkiensociety.com/ed/edbiblio.html> Accessed October 13, 2005

<http://www.tolkiensociety.com/ed/theses.html> Accessed October 13, 2005

SPECIFIC DATA

This syllabus was prepared by David Thomas and Jessica Dorn in August 2003. Revised for video course delivery by Monty Galloway, MDiv. October 2005.