

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Continuing Education Course
Springfield, Missouri
November 14-15, 2003

PTHE 640 Issues in Contemporary Culture: The Works of J.R.R. Tolkien
(1 Credit)

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Fall, 2003

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.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Birzer, Bradley J. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth*. (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

- I. Tolkien: His Worldview and His Works
- II. The Inklings
- III. What Is Myth?
- IV. What, Where, & When Is Middle-earth?
- V. The Epic of Middle-earth as Recorded Salvation History
- VI. The One True God of Middle-earth
- VII. The Nature of Evil
- VIII. Christological Imagery
- IX. Quest
- X. Stewardship
- XI. Hope, Joy, & Despair
- XII. Preservation, Restoration, & Loss

METHODOLOGY

Course objectives will be met through:

1. Classroom lecture
2. In-class questions, answers, and discussions
3. Completion of required assignments of reading and writing

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Pre-session

1. **Completion of reading assignments.** Birzer should be read (including foreword, preface, and introduction) before the first session. A recent reading of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* itself would also be advisable. *The Silmarillion* Chapter One (“Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur”) should be read shortly before the first session.

Session

1. **Attendance.** Given the abbreviated nature of the course, full attendance is crucial. If for any reason the student must miss part of the class, anticipated absences should be made known to the professor beforehand. Consult the AGTS catalog for seminary policy on the relation between excessive absenteeism and grade reduction.
2. **Classroom participation** (discussion, questions, answers) where appropriate.

Post-session

1. **Completion of writing assignment.** An 8-10 page paper should be submitted dealing with one of the major themes addressed in either Birzer or the class itself. The student should develop said theme as completely as possible using concrete examples from the LOTR text.
DUE DATE: January 15, 2004.

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

***Late work will be docked one-half letter grade per date unless previous permission has been granted by the professor.**

GRADING PROCEDURE

Class participation	10%
Paper	90%
Total	100%

SPECIFIC DATA

This syllabus was prepared by David Thomas and Jessica Dorn in August 2003.