

# Contemporary Issues: Toward a Postmodern Approach to Faith

## Dr. Greg Smith

### Course Description (from the COW Fall 2009 Brochure)

The world is always changing, yet many claim our faith remains unchanged. . .

### Class Format

We will explore the changing nature of the American culture, American religious belief, and the implications of these changes for the future church and for our interactions with postmodern (pomo) people.

### Session 1: October 7

Course Overview & Exploration of Participants' Expectations  
From Perceived Practice and Belief to Actual American Practice and Belief  
From Religious to Spiritual  
From Dwelling to Seeking to Practicing

### Session 2: October 14

From Pursuit of Happiness to Happiness as an Entitlement  
From Hi-Touch to Hi-Tech  
From Modern to Postmodern  
From Your Faith Story to Pomo Faith Experience

### Session 3: October 21

From the Current Church to the Future Church  
From Modern Faith Talk to Pomo Faith Talk  
Course Evaluation

### Recommended Books:

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, 2009. 9780805087499.  
Estes, Douglas. *SimChurch*, 2009. 9780310287841.  
Fuller, Robert C., 2001. *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. 9780195146806.  
Hippis, Shane. *Flickering Pixels*, 2009. 9780310293217.  
Penner, Myron B, ed. *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, 2005. 9781587431081.  
Raschke, Carl. *GloboChrist*, 2008. 9780801032615.  
Stark, Rodney. *What Americans Really Believe*, 2008. 9781602581784.  
Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence*, 2008. 9780801013133.  
Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in American Since the 1950s*, 1998. 9780520222281.

### Contact Information:

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**Contemporary Issues: Toward a Postmodern Approach to Faith**  
**Session 1**  
**Dr. Greg Smith**

**Course Overview & Exploration of Participants' Expectations**

**From Perceived Practice and Belief to Actual American Practice and Belief**

Meet Rodney Stark

*What Americans Really Believe* (2008)

Indicate whether you believe each statement to be true or false

1. The percentage of Americans who belong to a local congregation has been in decline since the early years of our nation.
2. Weekly church attendance has been in a decline over the last 50 years.
3. Denominations and denominationalism are dying.
4. Megachurches are inferior to small churches and not as involved in the community.
5. Women believe more and pray more than men.
6. Atheism as defined by people not believing in God has declined in the last 60 years.
7. More people view God as a severe God of judgment than as benevolent and engaged.
8. The percentage of income people give to a church is highest among those who attend most often.
9. Most people believe that they will go to heaven when they die.
10. Most people are not comfortable talking about religion with most people.

## **From Religious to Spiritual**

Meet Robert C. Fuller

*Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (2001)

Spiritual vs. Religious

Spiritual – private

Religious – public

Those who are spiritual but not religious

20% of overall population (about half the unchurched)

Differ from Churched Counterparts

Dissatisfied with institutional religion

Greater interest in personal religious experience

Seeker spirituality is nothing new

## **From Dwelling to Seeking to Practicing**

Meet Robert Wuthnow

*After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (1998)

Dwelling

Seeking

Practicing

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**From Pursuit of Happiness to Happiness as an Entitlement**

Meet Barbara Ehrenreich

*Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America (2009)*

Positive Thinking Defined

Positive Thinking and Culture

Positive Thinking and Christianity

**From Hi-Touch to Hi-Tech**

Hi-Touch and Hi-Tech Defined

Technology Timeline

Really Real or Virtually Real

## From Modern to Postmodern

Premodern

Modern

Postmodern

An overly generalized comparison

<b>Modern</b>	<b>Postmodern</b>
Metanarrative	Local Narrative
Rational Knowledge	Personal Experience
Objective Truth	Truth is Socially Constructed
Values Permanence	Values Transience
Construction	Deconstruction
Belief in Progress	Progress as Modern's Understand is Illogical or Impossible
Western	Post-Western or Multicultural

## From Your Faith Story to Pomo Faith Experience

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**From the Current Church to the Future Church**

The Top 10 Changes for the American Church

10. Less Real Estate
9. Less Formal
8. More Relevant and Leading Edge
7. More Functional (Ministry Teams & Task Forces)
6. Inclusive
5. Greater Variety of Worship Experiences
4. Congregational/Local is Primary
3. Relational
2. Experiential (Doing/Practicing the Faith)
1. Discipleship (Not Membership)

## From Modern Faith Talk to Pomo Faith Talk

Shane Hipps

*Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (2009)

The medium is the message – Marshall McLuhan

Jesus is the medium / We are the message / The church is God's medium and message

Carl Raschke

*GloboChrist: The Great Commission Takes a Postmodern Turn* (2008)

Relational Christianity is postmodern Christianity

Global Pomo Christianity

Decentralized

Deinstitutionalized

Indigenized

Robert Webber

*Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (1999)

Table A: Paradigms of Church History

<i>Ancient</i>	<i>Medieval</i>	<i>Reformation</i>	<i>Modern</i>	<i>Postmodern</i>
Mystery	Institutional	Word	Reason	Mystery
Community			Systematic &	Community
Symbol			Analytical	Symbol
			Verbal	
			Individualistic	

Don Everts and Doug Schuapp

*I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (2008)

A Postmodern Path to Faith – the Wisdom of 2000 Stories

Trusting a Christian

Becoming Curious

Opening up to Change

Seeking after God

Entering the Kingdom

## Course Evaluation