"Churches and synagogues, museums and galleries, and community art programs are playing an increasing role in bringing Americans’ interests in the arts to bear on their questions for the sacred. In the process, new attention is being given to the religious imagination, and many people are experimenting with the arts in their devotional lives, at their houses of worship, and in their efforts to serve others. The consequences are sometimes profound."

--Robert Wuthnow, All in Sync, 2003, p. xiv

“Common worship is the locus where the church’s distinctive vocabulary, narratives, and rituals are developed and enacted...as much as any other dimension of the church’s life, [worship] writes the ‘lived theology’ of the Christian community—that is, the theological vision that most believers live by, whether or not that vision matches that of official creeds, confessions, and classic texts.”

--John D. Witvliet, Worship Seeking Understanding, 2003, p. 17

“Looking at images, giving and receiving them, conducting prayer and Bible study before them, displaying them in the home, handing them on to the next generation—these are some of the iconic practices of belief, acts of visual piety....These are not mindless actions but embodied forms of cognition and collective memory that reside in the concrete conditions of social life.”

--David Morgan, Visual Piety, 1998, p. 4

In the past generation, there has been a groundswell of interest in the intersection of the arts, and spirituality and worship. From detailed academic studies like Robert Wuthnow’s examination of artists and religious belief, to church groups gathering to read through Julia Cameron’s The Artist’s Way, to touring exhibitions like “100 Artists See God,” scholars, churches and artists alike are devoting enormous amounts of energy and creativity to the visual and tactile manifestations of religion, piety, and spiritual experience.

In “Art and Christian Worship” we will address the historical and theological intersections of the arts in worship, with a special emphasis on the place of the visual arts. Beginning with some basic reflection on worship itself as well as a consideration of the place of art in different Christian traditions, we will then visit churches, speak with pastors, priests and lay leaders in order to see how the arts function within the context of worship. Over the course of the semester, students will be asked to think about the Christian doctrines, traditions and social contexts that have shaped their understanding of art, and reflect on how art and faith and worship intersect here at Westmont. During the last weeks of the semester, students will be asked to apply what they have learned in a very concrete way, researching and writing a grant proposal intended to address the intersection of Art and Christian Worship here at Westmont.

Course Information

Course Objectives
The Arts and Christian Worship is intended to achieve four goals.
- You should gain a more nuanced understanding of the historical and sociological roles that the arts have played in worshipping communities.
- You should become more sensitive to the theologies enacted by or embodied in the various arts and their role in worship.
You will practice the valuable skill of being genuinely participatory, and analytically engaged at the same time. Though we will practice this in the realm of worship, it is a skill that all thoughtful people need to develop.

You will be better equipped to understand, with generosity and gratitude, your own past experiences in worship and with arts in worship, and move into the coming years with a deeper awareness of the potentials and challenges present in all forms of Christian worship.

**Westmont’s Learning Standards**

Nearly every course at Westmont engages our six learning standards. But most courses also have a particular emphasis in a sub-set of those standards. Of the six standards, “The Arts and Christian Worship” is particularly engaged with two:

**Christian Orientation:** “The Arts in Christian Worship” will give you sustained opportunity to learn about other parts of the Christian Church, both those that belong to the past, and those that share our present world. You will become more conversant with the historical development of Christian worship practices, with the theological and confessional frameworks that shape (and are shaped by) worship practices, and the crucial ways in which the arts are a part of that history and practice. You will become more appreciative of your own history in the Church, be that a long one, or a short one, a relatively smooth one, or a difficult one; You will be come more aware of how images and objects help us enact our faith. Finally, in the words of our learning standards, as a class, we will practice "pursuing these goals in a spirit of hospitality and invitation, rather than in a spirit of coercion, manipulation, or intimidation."

**Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement:** “The Arts in Christian Worship” will also provide you with an important opportunity to apply what you are learning to the needs of a real community—that of Westmont College. Writing a successful grant proposal requires a sympathetic understanding of Westmont and its needs, a clear grasp of the interests of the granting agencies to which we may apply, and a creative approach to finding a good match between our needs, and an agency’s interests. A successful grant is the mark of learning put to good use, for the benefit of others. Art 129 has generated two proposals. Not only were both funded ($15,000 and $11,700 respectively) but the granting agency chose both of them as “exemplary projects.”

**Westmont’s General Education Curriculum:**

“The Arts in Christian Worship” also serves Westmont’s general education curriculum by fulfilling the requirements for the “Competent and Compassionate Action” rubric of “Performances and Presentations.” As described above, writing a successful grant requires working at an advanced level and presenting this work to others—namely the granting agency. Each student in the course will take responsibility for researching and writing two or three portions of the grant. The finished grant will be evaluated by the selection committee of the granting agency. Our hope is that every student-written grant will be as successful as our past two.

**Expectations and Evaluation**

Thoughtful and honest conversation is at the core of this class. Readings, writing assignments and site visits provide the material for our discussions. As such, 20% of your grade will be based on faithful attendance and thoughtful contributions to our class discussion. More than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. Another 20% of your grade will be based on the writing assignments you do in preparation for each of our class meetings. In addition to our weekly meetings and discussions, you will complete three different projects, each worth another 20% of your final grade. First, you will write a book review of a title chosen by you from the list in the selected bibliography at the end of this syllabus and present your book to our class. This will help us appreciate the various ways in which scholars have been interested in the role of the arts in Christian communities. Second, you will generate a “close reading” of the role of the arts in the congregation with which you are most familiar. This assignment helps us understand the ways in which our attitudes and expectations about art and worship have been deeply, but often quietly shaped by our worshipping communities. Don’t worry if you have not been a regular
church goer, or have only recently become a Christian. In conversation with me, we will adapt this assignment to your needs and interests; your insights have the potential to be extremely useful. Finally, as discussed above, as a class we will envision a project for Westmont, and write up this vision in the form of a grant proposal. Grant proposals are nearly a genre unto themselves. Getting some practice at writing them is a great skill to take with you into the future.

**Required Texts**


…and regularly, articles and essays as assigned, either distributed in class, available on the web, or on reserve in Voskuyl library. See weekly reading guides for assignments.

**Selected Bibliography**


Tentative Schedule of Meetings and Some Assignments

Unit One: Foundations

Wk 1: Introductions

Sept. 02 Getting Acquainted

Sept. 04 Dyrness, *Visual Faith* pp. 9-23, Preface and Introduction
Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul*, Introduction
Morgan, pp. 1-20, Introduction
Wuthnow, pp. 1-20, “A Puzzle: The Question of Religious Vitality”

Wk 2: Biblical and Historical Foundations for Thinking about Worship

Sept. 09 Excerpts from *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture* (CRC Pubs)

Sept. 11 Excerpts fromWebber’s *Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*

Wk 3: When we Gather: The Practices of Worship

Sept. 16 Webber: 135-194
Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul*, Chapter 5

Sept. 18 Webber: 195-264

Unit Two: Artful Worship

Wk 4: Orthodox Worship

Sept. 23 Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 87-102 “Reflecting Theologically on the Arts”
Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul*, Chapter 6

Sept. 25 St. John of Damascus, *On the Holy Images*
Dana Alexander, guest

September 28
St. Athanasius Orthodox Church, 10:00am
976 Embarcadero Del Mar ([www.stathanasious.org](http://www.stathanasious.org))

Wk 5: Orthodox Worship con't, and Catholic Worship

Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul*, Chapter 4

Oct. 02 The 1999 letter of Pope John Paul II to artists.
[http://www.adoremus.org/7-899ArtistLetter.html](http://www.adoremus.org/7-899ArtistLetter.html)
or available through the Vatican website.
*Diane Ziliotto, Guest*

October 05
Santa Barbara Mission, 10:30am
2201 Laguna St., ([www.sbmission.org](http://www.sbmission.org))

Interlude: Pictures, People, and Psychology

Wk. 6: Visual Pedagogy

October 07 Morgan: 21-57, “The Practice of Visual Piety”

October 09 Morgan: 59-96, “Empathy and Sympathy”
Wk 7: The Image of Christ
October 14  NO CLASS, but read Morgan: 124-151, “Reading the Face of Jesus”
October 16  Morgan: 152-180, “Domestic Devotion and Ritual”
 John Carlander, Guest

October 19
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 9:30am
3869 State Street, (www.gracelutheran.net)

Wk. 8: Lutheran and Reformed Worship
October 21  Dyrness, Visual Faith, 51-67, “Development of the Visual Arts from the
Reformation to the Twenty-First Century”
Excerpts from Luther, Calvin, Zwingli on the Arts and

October 23  Dyrness, Senses of the Soul, Chapter 2
“Calvinism and Art,” by Abraham Kuyper (1898), from
Lectures on Calvinism, (on reserve), or available via the internet at
http://www.kuyper.org/stone/preface.html

October 26
St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, 9:30am
4575 Auhay (www.standrewspcusa.org)

Wk 9: New World Developments: The Black Church in America
read “Luther on Music” by Walter Buszin (1958)
and Excerpts from Frederick Douglass, Narrative of my Life as a Slave

October 30  Excerpts from The Black Church in the African American Experience
by Lincoln and Mamiya
and Nairobi Statement (handout)
Toya Cooper, guest

Nov. 02
Bethel AME Church, 8:00am
855 South F Street Oxnard

Wk 10: New World Developments: Pentecostal and Charismatic Worship
Nov. 04  Wuthnow, 183-212, “ Redeeming the Imagination”
and sections from Steve Pfeifer’s Loose him and let him Go! Releasing
the Spirit of the Christian Artist.

Nov. 06  Student Church Analyses

November 09
New Life Church, 9:45am
50 East Alamar (www.newlifechurchsb.orb)

Unit 3: Opportunities and Challenges

Wk 11: Seeing The Sacred
Nov. 11  Morgan: 181-202, Chapter 6: “Memory and the Sacred”
Nov. 13  Wuthnow: 56-78, Chapter 3: “A Blending of Cultures”
**Wk 12: Art and the Sacred**
- Nov. 18: Student Book Reviews; Begin Grant Brainstorming

**Wk 13: Art and Worship at Westmont I**
- Nov. 25: Grant Brainstorming
- Nov. 27: THANKSGIVING BREAK (Drafts of grant sections)

**Wk 14: Attitudes and Opportunities**
- Dec. 02: Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 103-119 "Contemporary Challenges"
  - Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul*, Chapter 8
- Grant drafting continued

**Wk 15: Art and Worship at Westmont II**
- Dec. 09: Final editing
- Dec. 11: Final editing…. And semester wrap-up
Art 129—The Arts and Christian Worship
Fall, 2008

Essay Helps

Church Analysis Assignment (November 06)
Framing Questions:
Is there a denominational tradition? Which one? Is it an urban, suburban congregation? What is the exterior of the worship space like? Is there more than one service at this church? If so, do they differ?

Observations about the Congregation:
How large is the congregation? Who comes here? Age? Income? Ethnicity? How are people dressed for church?
How is leadership represented? How is hospitality demonstrated? What is typical “church behavior” for this congregation?

Observations about the worship space:
What is the layout of the worship space? Is there liturgical furniture? What? Where? What colors dominate the worship space? Pews or chairs? How are they arranged? Where are the musicians? Where is the podium or pulpit?

Observations about the worship service:
Is there a lot of participation in worship? How do people participate? Does everyone participate? Is the content of worship clear? How is the service structured? How is the structure communicated? What is the style of worship? How is the word emphasized and used? What was the place of the sermon? What kind of sermon was it? expository, topical, dramatic, historical) Were the sacraments present in any way? How? How was the structure of the service represented and communicated?

Observations about the arts in this worship space/service
What arts are represented (architecture, drama, music, images, furniture)? Where are they found (physically or temporally)? What is represented via the images arts? What role do these images play?

Other questions/Issues....

Note: this is a very important assignment! This is where you will show me what you are learning by drawing connections to our readings, synthesizing your insights, and demonstrating your own emerging sense of what is central and proper, when it comes to the use of the arts in corporate, Christian worship!

Book Review Guidelines (November 18)

Your book review should be typed, and 8-10 pages in length and include the following points:

1. Summarize the main argument of the book
2. Discuss and evaluate how the author makes the argument. What does he/she use for sources? How do those sources function?
3. Do a search for other books and articles by this author, and position this study within the author’s intellectual project. Are there points where you disagree with the argument? Where, on what grounds?
4. Make solid, appropriate connections to the readings we’ve done in class.
5. State what aspects of the book you find the most helpful.
6. Select a well-chosen passage of approximately 15 pages to distribute to the class at least one week before your presentation. Make use of this excerpt in your leadership of the classes’ discussion.