

Christ, Culture, and Contextualization RTS-Atlanta – Fall 2023

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. Hebrews 1:1–2

From a strictly theological point of view there is no point within pagan thought which offers an unripe truth that can be simply taken over and utilized as a basis for our Christian witness. If this is what is meant by point of contact, then there just is none. But, practically speaking, in actual missionary experience, we cannot avoid making frequent ‘contact’; no other way is open. But, we must never lose sight of the dangers involved, and we must ever endeavor to purify the terms we have borrowed of their pagan connotations . . . What we preach is of an entirely different nature than what people ever could have thought themselves. J. H. Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 140

I. Course Description

- A. Faithful pastoral ministry not only flows from a Spirit-wrought faith in the Christ-centered and redemptive-historically forged revelation of holy Scripture, it also flows into specific personal, immediate, and wider cultural contexts. Ministers who seek to preach and teach with persuasion and insight into those contexts must recognize, and wisely exploit, the divinely ordained touchpoints between God’s Word and God’s world. This class aims to explore these connections between Christ and his revealed Word, redemptive history, human history, and the array of cultural contexts in which people live. Students are encouraged to follow Scripture’s example and command to deploy a Christ-centered vision of cultural engagement with the gospel as part of their ministry as pastors and teachers in the world.

II. Course Details

- A. Dates: August 22–December 4, 2023
- B. Times: Tuesdays, 1:30–4:30 PM
 - 1. Class Days: 8/22, 8/29, 9/5, 9/12, 9/19, 9/26, 10/3, 10/24, 10/31
 - 2. (No class period on 9/5, 10/10, or 10/17)
- C. Location: RTS-Atlanta Campus
- D. Instructor: Dr. R. Carlton Wynne, Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology
- E. Contact: c.wynne@wmpca.org

III. Course Goals

- A. To exhibit a deeper love for the absolute and personal triune God, His Word, and His church.
- B. To grow in biblical discernment in cultural analysis and cultural appropriation, largely by developing the implications of a Reformed approach to apologetics.
- C. To more deeply appreciate how the structure of redemptive history ought to inform pastoral ministry and the calling of the pastor.
- D. To understand and critically evaluate a number of different models for cultural engagement.

IV. Course Overview (for a more detailed outline, see the “Analytical Outline” below)

- A. Introduction: Basic Orientation and Basic Questions
- B. A Biblical Theology of Culture¹

¹ THESIS 1 = *Culture, as a common grace endeavor, generated by God’s image, in response to general revelation (and properly guided by special revelation), provides the context for the offer and effects of special grace, to destroy and subvert, and to heal and restore. Therefore, Christians should engage in cultural criticism, give thanks in Christ for the gifts of one’s culture, and support (but not stand on) the cultural fruits of God’s renewing grace.*

- C. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Redemptive-History²
- D. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Apologetics³
- E. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Contemporary Challenges

V. Course Requirements

A. Attendance and Class Participation

1. All registered students are expected to attend all class sessions.
 - i. NB: Computers used in class should be for note taking only. The temptation to surf the internet, check email, etc., during class time should be denied (see Rom 8:13).
 - ii. There will be opportunity for class participation and questions during lectures.
2. Though the course will generally feature lecture format, class discussion and questions are welcomed and expected. Because of time constraints, though, tangential comments should be reserved for outside of class time. If the need arises, we may set aside certain times for questions and discussions only.

B. Reading Assignments

1. Required:
 - i. Bolt, James, James D. Bratt, and Paul J. Visser, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), **pp. 145–232 (Ch. 3–4)**
 - a. Bavinck—not to be confused with his more famous uncle (!)—brings insights of the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition to missiology by focusing on the “religious consciousness” of all men.
 - ii. Keller, Timothy. *Loving the City: Doing Balance Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), **Parts 1 & 3.**
 - a. Keller treats contextualization with a discussion-worthy emphasis on cultural analysis.
 - iii. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, Lausanne Occasional Papers, No. 2 (1978). **ALL** [Available on Canvas]
 - a. A report generated by a January 1978 consultation of 33 theologians, anthropologists, linguists, missionaries, and pastors from all six continents, convened by the Lausanne Committee’s Theology and Education Group to study “Gospel and Culture.”
 - iv. Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. Expanded ed. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001. **ALL**
 - a. Essential reading given the influence of Niebuhr’s five-fold taxonomy on Christ and culture discussions.
 - v. Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), **Part 1 (all), Part 2 (ch. 3 only), Part 3 (all), Part 4 (ch. 9–10 only).**
 - a. Trueman sheds enormous light on twenty-first century notions of the human self by surveying major shifts over the last 300 years.

C. Personal Reflection Paper

1. You are required to write a short paper reflecting critically on your own cultural conditioning and cultural context. (You may narrow the focus of your reflection paper to one or more *subcultures* if you wish). Your paper will consist of two parts.
2. In the FIRST PART (~1500–2500 words), please address at least some of the following questions:

² THESIS 2 = God’s redemptive project of eschatological projection and progress contextualizes and defines every epoch of redemptive history, including our own. Therefore, every context may inform—even will inform—but must never determine, the manner in which ministers preach and teach the Word of God.

³ THESIS 3 = The interplay of antithesis and common grace, defined by the Word of God, is the deepest guide for distinguishing biblical contextualization from misguided capitulation. Therefore, every culture, as a mix of rebellion and restraint, of sin and saltiness, provides an opportunity to discern, deconstruct, subvert, and celebrate culture in the name of Christ.

- i. What are the distinguishing elements or features of your culture(s), i.e., the culture(s) with which you most closely identify?
 - ii. What have been the major cultural influences in your life?
 - iii. In what ways has your culture defined and shaped your Christian faith and life?
 - iv. How might an uncritical embrace of your culture create “blind spots”? Has it? As best you can tell, what might those “blind spots” be?
 - v. How would you evaluate the various elements of your culture? Which are biblical/unbiblical? Which are good/bad/neutral? Which are helpful/unhelpful?⁴
3. In the SECOND PART (~750 words), please identify concrete examples *within your own cultural context* that manifest some or all of J. H. Bavinck’s “five magnetic points” of a “religious consciousness” (e.g., totality, norms, power, deliverance, destiny). How might you challenge, subvert, and celebrate those examples in the name of Christ?
 4. Please check the schedule below and upload all reflection papers on our “Canvas” page by the **DUE DATE: October 5, 2023.**
 - i. Your assignment grade will be docked ½ letter grade for each day it is late (Sunday excepted). Early submission is fine.

D. Class Presentation

1. You are required to give a 5–10 minute presentation in class, in which you will discuss a familiar biblical text (of your choosing) addressing the following questions:
 - i. What is the specific redemptive-historical context of the chosen text?
 - ii. What redemptive truth, ultimately fulfilled in Christ, does the text convey to your contemporary context?
 - iii. How might your own contemporary context lead you to *misinterpret* the text? How might your contemporary context lead you to *misapply* the text?
 - iv. How might the text both challenge and/or subvert the “religious consciousness” of your hearers?
2. The presentations will take place during class periods in the latter half of our time together.
3. There will be an opportunity for open discussion following each discussion.

E. Research Paper

1. You are required to write a critical research paper (3500–4500 words, excluding footnotes) on any topic addressed in the lectures or readings. If you’re in any doubt about whether your topic is a suitable one, please check with me first.
2. Length: 3500–4500 words (~12–15 pp.), excluding footnotes. You are required to stay within this page range.
3. Structure: Your paper should include all of the following:
 - i. A clearly defined thesis statement (“The thesis of this paper is...” “This paper seeks to demonstrate that...”). A thesis statement does far more than merely introduces the general topic under consideration (i.e., please do not write, “This paper will discuss the issue of...”)
 - ii. A clear explanation of the issue that demonstrates your understanding of its various dimensions.
 - iii. Citations of *at least 8 scholarly sources*.
 - a. For the purposes of this paper, a scholarly source is a book or article by a recognized expert in the field (and not aimed at a popular level for a general audience)—ideally one that has been peer-reviewed.
 - b. Wikipedia is clearly *not* a scholarly source. That said, with sufficient discernment, Wikipedia can be a *useful pointer* to scholarly sources and is generally reliable for fact-checking on uncontroversial issues.

⁴ For an extended example of such self-reflection, see Esau McCauley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020).

- c. You should not rely heavily on internet sources. Use the library!
 - d. Use a recognized scholarly style for citations (e.g., Chicago/Turabian, SBL), noting the author, title, publisher, date of publication, and page number for each source you use.
 - e. A standard bibliography.
 - iv. Your paper should be word-processed, not hand-written.
 - a. Use a 12-point font and double line-spacing for the main text.
 - b. Use section headings where applicable to improve readability.
 - c. Use footnotes (10-point font) rather than endnotes.
 - v. Page numbers in the top, right-hand corner of each page (no page number for a title page), with the pages printed single-sided and stapled together in the upper left-hand corner.
 - vi. Evidence of diligent attention to proper grammar, spelling, and formatting (i.e., “Scripture” not “scripture”; “biblical” not “Biblical”; block quotations that are single-spaced and indented on both sides; periods and commas inside closing quotations marks; no space between final periods and footnote numbers; etc.).
 - vii. A title page containing all of the following: your name, the name and year of the course; your mailbox number; the lecturer's name; the title of the paper; **and the exact word count for the full text of the paper** (obtained from your word processor’s word-count feature).
 - viii. The following statement at the end of your paper and signed by you: *I understand and have not violated the Seminary’s position on plagiarism.*
 - ix. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.
 - x. For good examples of scholarly papers using scholarly sources, take a look at the online papers from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* ([here](#)) and the *Westminster Theological Journal* ([here](#)). For good examples of research papers from RTS students, visit the *Pen and Parchment* webpage ([here](#)).
 - 4. Please check the schedule below and upload all reflection papers on our “Canvas” page by the **DUE DATE: December 4, 2023.**
 - i. Your assignment grade will be docked ½ letter grade for each day it is late (Sunday excepted). Early submission is fine.
- F. *Final Exam*
- 1. A 2-hour final exam will cover course lectures, as supplemented by assigned readings.
 - 2. The exam will likely consist of short and long answer essay questions.
 - 3. An unmarked English (or native tongue) translation of the Bible (without study notes, etc.) and/or Hebrew/Greek Scripture texts may be used. You may not use any class notes or other study resources.
 - 4. Please check the schedule below and take/submit the final exam on our “Canvas” page by the **DUE DATE: December 4, 2023.**

VI. About Grades

- A. In this course, grades are a fallible way for the instructor to assess your comprehension of the course material as you prepare for gospel ministry.
- B. The grading rubric (see below) will serve as a guide for grading the written assignments. Please use it as a guide for completing the written exams.
- C. If you think it would be useful to your growth in Christ (see Phil 2:14), I will be happy to discuss your exam/paper grades with you.
- D. The final course grade is calculated as follows:
 - 1. *Course Reading: 15%*
 - 2. *Reflection Paper: 15%*
 - 3. *Class Presentation: 15%*

4. *Research Paper: 30%*
5. *Final Exam: 25%*

VII. RTS Zoom Policy

- A. Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment.
- B. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

VIII. RTS Extension Policy

- A. All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class. Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.
- B. Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p.46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18)
- C. Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

DATE	LECTURES	ASSIGNMENT DUE
Week 1 (Aug 22)	<i>Introduction</i>	
Week 2 (Aug 29)	<i>A Biblical Theology of Culture</i>	Niebuhr, <i>C&C</i> , ch. 1–3
Sept 5	No Class	
Week 3 (Sept 12)		Niebuhr, <i>C&C</i> , ch. 4–7
Week 4 (Sept 19)	<i>Christ-Centered Contextualization and Redemptive-History</i>	<i>The Willowbank Report</i>
Week 5 (Sept 26)		<i>Bavinck Reader</i> , 145–198
Week 6 (Oct 3)	<i>Christ-Centered Contextualization and Apologetics</i>	<i>Bavinck Reader</i> , 199–232; Keller, <i>LTC</i> , Part 1
Oct 10 and Oct 17	No Class	Reflection Paper <u>DUE</u> <u>Oct 5</u>.
Week 7 (Oct 24)		Keller, <i>LTC</i> , Part 3; Trueman, <i>R&T</i> , Ch. 1–3;
Week 8 (Oct 31)	<i>Christ-Centered Contextualization and Contemporary Challenges</i>	Trueman, <i>R&T</i> , Ch. 6–7; CLASS PRESENTATIONS
Week 9 (Nov 7)		Trueman, <i>R&T</i> , Ch. 9–10; CLASS PRESENTATIONS (if necessary)
Dec 4		<u>FINAL EXAM</u> and <u>COURSE PAPER DUE Dec 4</u> by 11:59 PM

Grading Guide for Written Assignments

	Content	Organization and Coherence	Mechanics
A / 97–100% A- / 94–96%	Accurate representation of the source, penetrating and insightful exposition. Nothing significant overlooked.	Clear, coherent, and efficient. No oddities or unnecessary this or that; all the essential pieces included and well balanced.	Entirely free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. Maybe a slip up here or there, but clearly the paper was proofread with care.
B+ / 91–93% B / 88–90% B- / 86–87%	Excellent and accurate summary; no factual inaccuracies but less recognize of implicit issues.	Good organization; coherent and clear, though perhaps not optimally clean or comprehensive.	May contain a few errors, which may annoy the reader but not impede understanding.
C+ / 83–85% C / 80–82% C- / 78–79%	More or less accurate representation of the reading; significant oversights and even one or two misrepresentations of the reading.	Good. However, some oddities (unneeded material, missing links, counter-intuitive structure) may cause confusion.	Contains several mechanical errors which may confuse the reader but not impede the overall understanding. Inadequate proofreading.
D+ / 75–77% D / 72–74% D- / 70–71%	The number of inaccuracies is high. General failure to connect with the reading.	Quite confusing. More disorganized than organized. Significant gaps or unnecessary material that compromises readability.	So many errors that the paper is barely intelligible. The paper was written hastily and not proofread.
F / Below 70%	No detectable relationship between the student's work and the reading.	No appreciable organization; lacks transitions and coherence.	Unintelligible due to errors.

Analytical Outline
(Subject to change due to time constraints)

I. Introduction

- A. Basic Orientation
 - 1. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20)
- B. Basic Questions
 - 1. Christ: Who is he?
 - 2. Culture: Where is it?
 - 3. Contextualization: What is it?

II. A Biblical Theology of Culture

- A. Creational Foundations of Culture
 - 1. Creation of Heaven and Earth
 - 2. Man as Image of God
 - 3. The Covenant of Works
 - 4. Creation Ordinances
- B. The Fall and Its Effects on Culture
 - 1. Pre-Fall vs. Post-Fall Culture-Making
- C. Redemption and the Future Prospects for Culture
 - 1. Evaluating “Thesis 1”

III. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Redemptive History

- A. The Organic Progress of Special Revelation
 - 1. The Covenant of Works and Eschatology
 - 2. Vos on the “Philosophy of Revelation” in Hebrews
- B. Symbol vs. Type
- C. Christ as Possessor and Conveyor of the Holy Spirit

IV. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Apologetics

- A. The Problem of Sin and Depravity (Gen 6:5)
 - 1. Rom 1:18–32
- B. Natural Law: What Use is It? (Rom 2:14–15)
- C. Common Grace
- D. Subversive Fulfillment
 - 1. Points of Attack
 - 2. Points of Opportunity
 - 3. Points of Contact
- E. J. H. Bavinck’s “Five Magnetic Points”

V. Christ-Centered Contextualization and Contemporary Challenges

- A. Introduction
- B. Four Models
 - 1. Schleiermacher’s Liberalism
 - 2. Al Wolter’s Neo-Calvinist Transformationalism
 - 3. David Van Drunen’s Two Kingdoms
 - 4. Tim Keller’s “Redeeming the City”
- C. Three Test Cases
 - 1. Transgenderism
 - 2. Critical Race Theory
 - 3. Christian Nationalism

Course Objectives Related to MDiv Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Christ, Culture, and Contextualization

Professor: Rev. Dr. R. Carlton Wynne

Campus: Atlanta

Date: Fall Term 2023

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		Strong Moderate Minimal None	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Students will write a scholarly research paper and make an oral presentation related to the intersection of Scripture and cultural context, giving special attention to principles from the course lectures.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Students will explore how a redemptive-historical hermeneutic bears upon the interpretation of particular texts from the Old and New Testaments. They will also learn to apply Scripture as their epistemological norm when examining culture.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Students will draw from God's redemptive revelation in Scripture to understand how anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and eschatology relate to one another.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Students will analyze their own cultural contexts in an effort to grow in their love for neighbor when teaching and preaching the Word of God.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Students will seek to order their interpretation of the world in terms of inscripturated revelation, while also learning principles

			for diagnosing and engaging unbelieving worldviews.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Students will learn how a biblical and Reformed approach to Scriptural interpretation and cultural analysis serves the interests of gospel-proclamation with confidence and love.
Preaching	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Moderate	The course's training in cultural analysis will indirectly inform the student's approach to addressing challenges to the Christian faith from the pulpit.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Minimal	Students will learn how a Christ-centered worldview informs a worshipful attitude in all cultural endeavors, though this is not a feature aspect of the course.
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	Minimal	Students will explore how the principles of biblical interpretation and application relate to the work of pastoral ministry in whatever contexts God may call them.
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	Students will learn how God's common grace and the structures of unbelief inform public issues, and how Christians ought to approach such issues in the name of Christ.