

## **ST5600 CHRIST, CULTURE AND CONTEXTUALIZATION**

**RTS/Orlando**

**Spring Term: March 18-22, 2024**

**Dr. Richard Lints, Course Instructor**

### **I. Details**

1. Times: Monday to Thursday: 9:00AM–12:00PM & 1:30PM–4:30PM; Friday 9:00AM – 12:00PM
2. Instructor: Dr. Richard Lints
3. Contact: [rlints@gmail.com](mailto:rlints@gmail.com)
4. Due Dates: All written work is due May 31

### **II. Goals**

1. To develop an integrated theology of how church and culture relate from a Reformed biblical perspective.
2. To understand the character of our late modern secular culture
3. To appreciate the criticisms of various thinkers of late modernity.
4. To develop biblical discernment in cultural analysis and cultural appropriation.
5. To understand and critically evaluate different models for cultural engagement.
6. To develop ways to navigate the challenge of over-adapting to culture or under-adapting to culture.

### **III. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore a biblical theology of culture from a Reformed perspective, evaluate different models for Christian cultural engagement, and develop a biblical perspective on the principles and practice of contextualization. Attention will be given to the application of cultural analysis and contextualization in church ministry.

#### **IV. COURSE OUTLINE**

##### **Session One - Introductory Matters**

Interpreting the Word and the World  
Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation  
Redemptive History and Our History

##### **Session Two - Naming Our Age: Late Modernity**

The Rise of Modernism and Modernization  
Liberalism and Democratization  
Technology and Technopoly  
Capitalism and Consumerism  
The End of Modernity?  
The Postmodern Phase

##### **Session Three – Late Modern Secularism**

The Immanent Frame  
The Iron Cage of Efficiency  
Triumph of the Therapeutic

##### **Session Four - Student Groups – Discussion/Presentations**

Post-Christian Troubles with Christianity  
Responding to the Criticisms

##### **Session Five - The Critics of Secular Modernity**

Peter Berger, *From Fate to Choice*  
Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*  
Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*  
Charles Taylor, *The Loss of Significance*  
Alvin Plantinga, *Reformed Epistemology*

##### **Session Six – Lesslie Newbigin's Discovery**

The End of Christendom  
The End of the Secularization Thesis  
The Missionary Encounter with Our Culture

##### **Session Seven – Ministry in a Secular Age**

Models of Engaging Our Secular Age  
Evangelism in the Secular City  
Over Adapting and Under Adapting

##### **Session Eight - Christ and the Idols**

Reading Culture through its Idols  
Understanding Ourselves through our Idols  
Identity and Idolatry

#### **V. Required Reading:**

1. James Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford, 2010)
2. Tim Keller, *How the West Won Again* (Redeemer City-to-City, 2020)
3. Dan Strange, *Plugged In: Connecting Your Faith With What You Watch, Read and Play* (Good Book Co., 2019)
4. Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry* (IVP, 2015)

#### **VI. Assignments:**

##### **A. Student Discussion/Presentations – Day Three (March 20)**

In groups of 3, take one of the following issues and brainstorm 2-3 things to say in response. The rest

of the class will serve as your post-Christian audience.

1. Why do you have such a negative view of people, calling everyone sinners?
2. Why do I need to get meaning, satisfaction, and identity from religion
3. Isn't it religion vs. science? Isn't God disproved?
4. Why do I need religion in order to be a moral, just, decent person?
5. Isn't religion for the immature and people who just can't face reality as it is?
6. Aren't religious people sexually repressed?
7. Doesn't religion lead to exclusion and violence?

**B. Short Reflection Paper – 3-5 pages** Which model of mission comes closest to describing your own convictions about the way in which the church relates to it's surrounding culture. Offer reasons why you have adopted this model. Give some concrete description of the priorities that this model would give to you as the pastor or lay leader in the church.

**C. Two Interviews:**

1. Talk to one non-Christian - asking them what are the greatest obstacles to religious belief. You should also inquire whether they ever thought religious belief was a viable option for them. Write up the interviews in 2-3 pages, double spaced, 1000 word limit.
2. Talk to a Christian from a different cultural context than your own. Ask them what they find distinctive about their culture, and the issues the church faces in that context. Write up the interview in 2-3 pages, double spaced, 1000 word limit.

**D. Film or Book Review 3-5 pages (1500 word limit)**

Write a short review of a popular film, television show or book – explaining why it has cultural significance, how it explains the significance of life, and how moral decisions are made. What is the major “problem” to overcome and how does the “solution” work?

**E. Group Book Review**

In groups of three or four, read one of the following books, and together draw up a one page summary – in bullet points – of the main points of the book.

Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Anchor, 1969)

Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 2007, orig 1981)

Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (Norton, 2018, orig 1979)

Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity* (Oxford, 1999) with responses by Jean

Bethke Elshtain and George Marsden

Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (Oxford, 2011)

**VI. Grading**

1. Class attendance and participation — 10%
2. Required Reading – 10%
3. Class presentation — 10%

4. Short Reflection Paper – 20%
5. Two Interviews – 20%
6. Film or Book Review – 20%
7. Group Book Review – 10%

## VII. Recommended Supplementary Reading

You are not *required* to read any of the items below, but you may find them useful to consolidate the course material and for further study as your interests dictate. For many of these, the table of contents can be viewed on Amazon.com or Google Books.

Bruce Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Lexham Press, 2015).

D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Eerdmans, 2008).

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011)

Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel, 2017).

Michael Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation* (Baker 2018)

Bob Goudzwaard and Craig Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: An Archaeology of Contemporary Culture* (IVP, 2017)

Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Zondervan, 2012).

Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomena of Evangelical Theology* (Eerdmans 1993)

Richard Lints, *Uncommon Unity: Wisdom for the Church in an Age of Division* (Lexham 2022)

Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Eerdmans, 1986).

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989).

James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009).

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard, 2007).

Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Zondervan, 2022)

## Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST5600 Christ Culture and Contextualization

Professor: Richard Lints

Campus: Orlando

Date: 3/18/2024

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b> <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>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b>
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Moderate	1. Reflection Paper 2. Narrative of Interviews 3. Oral presentations in class followed by open discussion
<b>Scripture</b>	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	1. Develops a biblical theology of culture based on texts across the canon 2. Discusses importance of culture in understanding and applying Scripture
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	1. Emphasizes Reformed RH framework for biblical theology of culture 2. Application of Reformed doctrine (sin, redemption, common grace, etc.)
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	1. Personal reflection paper on cultural influences on faith and life
<b>Desire for Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	1. Emphasis on relationship between worldview and cultural context 2. Application of biblical worldview to cultural analysis and contextualization
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	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.)	Moderate	Addresses contextualization in evangelism and missions as application of "love your neighbor"  Interview of neighbor
<b>Preach</b>	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Moderate	1. Addresses contextualization in preaching (idioms, illustrations, etc.)
<b>Worship</b>	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Moderate	1. Addresses contextualization in worship (liturgy, music styles, etc.)
<b>Shepherd</b>	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.	Moderate	1. Addresses contextualization in evangelism and church planting
<b>Church/World</b>	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	1. Course as a whole focuses on cultural analysis and engagement at both global and local levels