

Reformed Theological Seminary – Washington, DC

06PT5300: Theology of Worship | Spring Semester 2026

J. Ligon Duncan III

March 9-13, 2026 (9AM-3:15PM ET)

Revised November 19, 2025

Course Description

In 1544, Emperor Charles V called for the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire to meet at Speyer. Martin Bucer, Strasburg reformer, urged Calvin to write a statement of the doctrines and necessity for the Reformation. What emerged was *Calvin's The Necessity for Reforming the Church*, a book which Calvin's friend and successor, Theodore Beza, thought the most powerful and important book of his time. What was Calvin's chief concern? Worship!

This course will investigate as many of the issues of worship as time will permit. The canvas is vast: what does the Bible teach about worship? How are we to integrate both Old and New Testament materials for the church today? What does church history teach us? What are the issues facing the church today?

Course Purpose

"Theology of Worship" examines historic Christian ministry and worship according to the Reformed tradition.

What will we aim to do in this course specifically?

Give you the biblical foundations of worship. Convince you that that gathered worship is legitimate, necessary, and important and should be conducted biblically in both form and content. Address the crucial matters of music, congregational singing, contextualization, "worship styles" and more. The goal is to prepare you to be biblical worshippers, and to prepare you to help others be biblical worshippers, and to prepare you to be effective leaders in worship.

Course Objectives

1. To acquaint the student with the relevant materials of biblical and historical debate on worship
2. To facilitate the student to become a leader of worship that is both dignified and sensitive to current cultural norms
3. To engage the student in debate over issues currently of major controversy within the Reformed churches

Contact Information

Professor: Rev. J. Ligon Duncan III, PhD

Campus Office: 601.923.1656 and Ext 1656

Executive Assistant: Jan Hyde

If you would like discuss matters related to this course or future ministry, please contact my assistant to set up an appointment.

Teaching Assistant: **George Herndon** georgeh@fpcjackson.org

Tim Tumutod timt@fpcjackson.org

If you have any questions related to the details of this course, its assignments, or with Canvas, please contact my teaching assistant.

Academic Integrity

All work submitted must be the student's own. Group-produced work is not permitted in this course. Plagiarism and copying of old assignments are considered cheating. Students who do not fulfill assignments with requisite academic integrity will be referred to the Academic Dean with a recommendation for discipline (the student should also consult pp. 44 in the 2025-2027 RTS Catalog for further details).

Class Methodology

A. Lectures and Attendance

Many of these sessions will be in the form of seminars, to facilitate classroom discussion. Attendance, therefore, is an absolute requirement. Given the huge amount of material we have to cover and the relative scarcity of classroom hours, attendance will be at a premium and, of course, to the benefit of the student. If you need to miss a class or to leave early or to arrive late, you should seek permission (via my TA, my EA or myself). Failure to attend class, or to engage while in the class, will be noted. No unexplained absences.

B. Reading Assignments

1. Required Texts:

- John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, with A Reply to Cardinal Sadoletto, foreword by W. Robert Godfrey, Ligonier/Reformation Trust, 2020. (Calvin)
 - Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship?* P&R Publishing, 2020. (DGC)
 - Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* (Revised and Expanded). Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002. (Old)
 - The Westminster Directory for Public Worship*, available online and in various printed forms (WDPW)
- A suggested reading schedule has been posted in Canvas to assist you.**

2. Recommended Texts:

- Carson, Ashton, Hughes, Keller, *Worship By The Book*. Zondervan, 2002 (AHK)
- Jonathan Gibson, *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, New Growth Press, 2018. (RW)
- Matthew J. Pinson, *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*. B & H Academic, 2009. (PoCW)
- Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W.H. Thomas, and (Eds.) *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*. NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2011. (GPTG)
- Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*. Fortress Press, 1980 (LofWC)
- Robert Vasholz, *Benedictions*, Christian Focus Publications, 2007
- Calls to Worship*, Christian Focus Publications, 2008
- Terry Johnson, *Leading in Worship, Revised and Expanded*, Tolle Lege Press, 2013. (LiW)

C. Practical Requirement (60%)

1. Written Prayers. (20%)

The practice of extemporary praying is a good one and one for which our Puritan and Presbyterian forefathers fought hard to maintain. But even these traditions called for what they termed “studied prayers”: prayers that had been planned and thought through and then delivered without notes. Please follow this format exactly: Font size 10, Times New Roman, single spaced, 1/2” margins. One page exactly (no more, no less). Prayers must be submitted via Canvas on the dates listed below and in Canvas. **In addition to** a written prayer, provide a paragraph **on another page** explaining what it is you hope to accomplish in this prayer. Is it thematic? Is it based on some texts of Scripture?

How should I go about writing these prayers? (from Derek Thomas)

I suggest you take a Psalm and meditate on it. Then begin to formulate the ideas and word structures of the psalm, adapting them for suitability in 20th century parlance. Follow the order of thought in the psalm where appropriate. Grading someone’s prayers poses some problems. Still, a measure of objectivity will be attempted. Grading will depend on such things as style, wording, biblical content, structure.

Although I have not required these texts, I do recommend that you purchase the following books to assist you in public prayer. They will prove to be invaluable to most of you.

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995.

Arthur Bennett, *A Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1975.

C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Prayers*. Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1993.

Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*. Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1993.

2. Order of Service/Bulletin (20%)

The student will create six complete Worship Bulletins/orders of service. One bulletin for each of the following service types is to be submitted:

- 1.) Funeral
- 2.) Lord’s Supper
- 3.) Baptism
- 4.) Profession of Faith
- 5.) Wedding
- 6.) Regular Lord’s Day morning/evening services.

A “Worship Guide” is also expected for each worship order of service. In the guide you will explain the reasons you structured the service the way you did, include reference to historical Presbyterian worship, scriptural basis, elements, forms, circumstances, and rubric etc. Be sure to integrate your worship order, structure, hymn selection, and texts. If you choose to disagree with the philosophy of worship articulated in this course, you must provide a full justification for that in your “worship guide.”

3. **Short Essays** (20%)

In order to assist you in your own preparation for ordination, ministry, and life, as well as to provide a meaningful outlet for interaction with the materials, philosophies, and issues in this course each student will submit the following **three essays**:

1. Compare and contrast the historic “Regulative Principle of Worship” with other philosophies of worship. The student will include the history, key proponents, biblical basis, and difficulties of each view.
2. Discuss the use and views of church liturgy, the “church calendar,” and “contextualization” from a biblical as well as historical-theological standpoint. The student will be sure to include benefits and difficulties with various understandings and practices.
3. Describe in sufficient detail your own theology of public worship.

The best essays will include copious use of Scripture, theologians, and creedal statements. Be sure to make reference to and interact with both the lectures and assigned readings for this course.

Format: Please submit your essays using standard formatting (Size 12 font, Times New Roman, single-spaced, one-inch margins, page numbers). All papers must conform to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Eighth Edition. Essays shall **not** to exceed **three single- spaced pages**.

Collection of Assignments

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments shall be submitted via the appropriate Canvas upload link.

Late Work

Students should make every effort to turn in work on time or early. In the rare case of medical or other providential emergency, extensions and/or alternative arrangements may be granted. In most cases, late assignments will be accepted but penalized one letter grade per day. Please make these arrangements with the TA as soon as possible.

D. Comprehensive Final Exam (40%)

The final exam will cover the lecture and reading material in a comprehensive way. Students can expect to be asked both factual and integrative questions. Students can expect to be asked examination questions on all of the reading material.

Course Outline and Assignment Schedule

Listed below are the dates and topics and weekly assignment timetable/due dates for our course. *Please factor these into your term calendar now.*

Due Dates Summary

All assignments are **due on the dates posted below by 11:59 pm Eastern Time**. Assignments received after this time will be considered late and penalized accordingly (up to 1 letter grade per day). Assignments shall *not* be emailed to the TA, but rather uploaded to Canvas in pdf format.

1. March 10, 2026 – **Written Prayer 1** – Justification
2. March 11, 2026 – **Written Prayer 2** – Adoption
3. March 12, 2026 – **Written Prayer 3** – Sanctification
4. March 16, 2026 – **Written Prayer 4** – Confession of Sin
5. March 17, 2026 – **Essay 1 Due**: Compare and contrast the historic “**Regulative Principle of Worship**” with other philosophies of worship. The student will include the history, key proponents, biblical basis, and difficulties of each view.
6. March 18, 2026 – **Written Prayer 5** – Imprecatory
7. March 19, 2026 – **Essay 2 Due**: Discuss the use and views of **church liturgy**, the “**church calendar**” and “**contextualization**” from a biblical as well as historical-theological standpoint. The student should include benefits and difficulties with various understandings and practices.
8. March 20, 2026 – **Written Prayer 6** – Pastoral Prayer
9. March 23, 2026 – **Bulletins** (Order of Service) due:
 - 1.) Regular Lord’s Day morning/evening services
 - 2.) Funeral
 - 3.) Wedding
10. March 24, 2026 – **Bulletins** (Order of Service) due:
 - 1.) Profession of Faith
 - 2.) Lord’s Supper
 - 3.) Baptism
11. March 25, 2026 – **Written Prayer 7** – Invocation
12. March 26, 2026 – **Written Prayer 8** – Prayer at a funeral of a Christian
13. March 27, 2026 – **Essay 3 Due**: Describe in sufficient detail your own theology of public worship
14. March 31, 2026 – **Final Exam**. All reading must be finished by the final exam

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Course Objectives Related to MDiv Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Theology of Worship

Professor: Rev. Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

Campus: Washington, DC

Date: Spring 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><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></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students will study the major components of Reformed worship to be able to articulate and explain them faithfully and persuasively by preparing answers to a comprehensive exam as well as in required assignments such as written prayers, essays, and bulletins or orders of service in a manner that glorifies God and edifies the hearers.
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	Worship is to be governed by the Word of God; the question of how to apply the principles God decrees for His worship in His Word for modern and post-modern people will be discussed.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	The course will teach a consistent Reformed, Westminsterian Theology of Worship, and include significant discussion of the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW).
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Students will study Reformed worship to attain a wholesome and comprehensive grasp of biblical truth in order to glorify God and pursue godliness.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	Church authority is ministerial and declarative; students will be exposed to the components of Reformed worship in order to effectively minister to God's church as well as declare His glory to a watching world.
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.)	Moderate	The student will be taught a love for the gospel rightly displays a winsome desire to worship the Lord and bring others to do so.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Strong	Particular shepherding issues of weddings, funerals, baptisms, and hymn selection will be covered in this course as well as the theology behind them; the student will demonstrate his understanding of these issues in written assignments and essays.