

# ST5600 – Christ, Culture, and Contextualization

Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

Spring 2026

## I. Details

- A. Schedule: Thursdays, 8:30am–11:00am (with half-hour break for prayer chapel)
- B. Professor: Dr. James N. Anderson
- C. Contact: [janderson@rts.edu](mailto:janderson@rts.edu)
- D. Availability: If you wish to discuss some aspect of the course, please speak to me after class or email me to arrange an office appointment. (I'm also available for lunches with students to chat about any topics of interest or concern, theological or otherwise.)

## II. Goals

- A. To develop an integrated theology of culture from a Reformed biblical perspective.
- B. To understand and critically evaluate different models for cultural engagement.
- C. To appreciate the insights of various Christian thinkers on the topic of culture.
- D. To develop biblical discernment in cultural analysis and cultural appropriation.
- E. To develop a biblical perspective on the principles and practices of contextualization.
- F. To appreciate the contemporary challenges faced by the church through its call to be “in the world, but not of the world.”

## III. Course Overview

- A. Introduction & Definitions
- B. A Biblical Theology of Culture
- C. Twenty Theses on Culture
- D. Models of Cultural Engagement
  - 1. Niebuhr's Typology
  - 2. Keller's Typology
- E. Contextualization in Christian Ministry
  - 1. Definitions
  - 2. Principles
  - 3. Pitfalls
  - 4. Precedents
  - 5. Practices

## IV. Course Requirements

- A. *Class attendance and thoughtful participation.*
  - 1. As per seminary policy, you are required to attend all the lectures. If you know that you will be unable to attend class on a particular date, please inform me in advance, otherwise you may be penalized for your absence.
  - 2. There will be opportunity for class participation and questions during the lectures.

3. You will be expected to use the internet in the classroom *only for appropriate class-related activities*. Please consult **Appendix A** regarding the RTS Charlotte policy on classroom technology usage.
  4. A proportion of your final grade (see below) will depend on your attendance record and your participation in the classes (thoughtful interaction with the professor and other students).
  5. **Important:** If you want to ensure that you receive the credit for participation that you deserve, please update your Canvas profile (<https://rts.instructure.com/profile>) to include a recent, recognizable headshot.
- B. *Reading assignments.*
1. The required reading is listed below (Section VII).
  2. A proportion of your final grade will depend on how much of the required reading you have completed.
  3. A reading report indicating the *percentage completed* of each required reading item is due on **May 14**. The report should be uploaded to Canvas (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
  4. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.
  5. A reading schedule will be provided at the start of class.
- C. *Personal reflection paper.*
1. You are required to write a short paper (1500–2500 words) reflecting critically on your own cultural conditioning and cultural context. (You may narrow the focus of your reflection to one or more *subcultures* if you wish.)
  2. Your paper should address at least some of the following questions:
    - 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. Do you have any cultural ‘blind spots’?
    - v. How would you evaluate the various elements of your culture? Which are biblical/unbiblical? Which are good/bad/neutral? Which are helpful/unhelpful?
  3. Your personal reflection paper is due on **March 20**. It should be uploaded to Canvas (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
  4. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.
- D. *Class presentation.*
1. You are required to give a 5–10 minute presentation to class, in which you will discuss a familiar biblical text (of your choosing) from the perspective of cultural analysis and contextualization.
  2. Your presentation should address each of the following three questions:
    - i. How does knowledge of the cultural context of the (human) author and the original readers/hearers help us to properly interpret and apply the text?
    - ii. How might we expound and apply the text in our own cultural context?
    - iii. In what ways might our own cultural context incline us to *misinterpret* or *misapply* the text?

3. The presentations will take place in the second half of the semester (after spring break) but you must submit your biblical text for approval by me **before March 16**.
4. There will be opportunity (if time permits) for open discussion following each presentation.

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. Whatever topic you choose, make sure that your paper has a clear, focused thesis.
3. Your paper will be graded according to the following criteria, in no particular order: responsible use of Scripture, responsible use of sources, extent of research, creativity, clarity, structure and coherence, cogency of argument, practical relevance, evidence of critical thinking, and good writing style (inc. grammar, spelling, and punctuation).
4. The paper should cite *at least 8 scholarly sources*.
  - i. 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.
  - ii. Wikipedia is clearly *not* a scholarly source.
  - iii. That said, with sufficient discernment, Wikipedia can be a *useful pointer* to scholarly sources and is generally reliable for fact-checking on uncontroversial issues.
  - iv. Please consult me if you have any doubts about whether a source is scholarly.
  - v. You should not rely heavily on internet sources. Use the library!
  - vi. The paper should include a properly formatted bibliography.
5. The paper should be word-processed, not hand-written.
  - i. Use a 12-point font and double line-spacing for the main text.
  - ii. Use section headings where applicable to improve readability.
  - iii. Use footnotes (10-point font) rather than endnotes.
  - iv. Use a recognized scholarly style for citations (e.g., Chicago, Turabian, SBL).
6. The paper should be submitted with a title page containing all of the following: the name and year of the course; your name; the professor's name; the title of the paper; and the *exact word count* for the main text of the paper (obtained from your word processor's word-count feature).
7. You will be penalized if you do not observe the requirements and guidelines above.
8. 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 Charlotte students, visit the *Pen and Parchment* webpage ([here](#)).
9. Your paper is due on **May 14**. It should be uploaded to Canvas (look for the link on the **Modules** page) on or prior to this date.
10. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.

F. *Final exam.*

1. The final exam should be taken with a proctor during the exam period: **May 14–19**.

2. The exam will consist of three short-essay questions based on all of the class material and all of the required reading. You will have three hours to complete it.
3. It is an **open-book exam**, but you will still need to arrange a proctor.
4. You will be asked to sign a declaration that you have not discussed the content of the exam with anyone who has previously taken the exam.

## V. Course Documents

- A. *Instructions for accessing course documents.*
  1. Log in to the RTS Canvas website (<https://rts.instructure.com>).
  2. Select “Christ, Culture, and Contextualization” from the **Courses** menu.
  3. All of the course documents will be accessible from the **Modules** page.
- B. *Course outline.*
  1. Other than the syllabus, the course outline is the most important document. You will need a copy (either electronic or printed) in front of you throughout the class.
  2. You are strongly encouraged to supplement the outline with your own notes.
  3. The outline will be uploaded to Canvas the week before class.
- C. *Supplementary documents.*
  1. The reading schedule and some of the required reading items (see below) will be available on Canvas.
  2. You should also consult the documents “Research Paper Checklist” and “Guide to Annotations on Graded Papers” *before* you write your papers.

## VI. Academic Policies

- A. *Policy on extensions for assignments.*
  1. In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor.
  2. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied.
  3. *All extension requests must be made prior to the assignment deadline.* No retrospective extensions will be granted.
- B. *Policies on plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence for coursework.*
  1. Please note RTS’s plagiarism policy in the [RTS Catalog](#).
  2. Please consult the document “Artificial Intelligence Policy Students Feb 2025” on [MyPortal](#) for details of RTS’s AI policy. Bottom line: “Illegitimate uses of AI are subject to penalties in line with the severity of the violation, ranging from letter-grade reductions, a grade of F for a course, or academic probation.”

## VII. Grading

- A. Class attendance and participation — 10%
- B. Reading assignments — 15%
- C. Personal reflection paper — 10%
- D. Class presentation — 15%
- E. Research paper — 30%
- F. Final exam — 20%

## VIII. Required Reading

You should obtain copies of all the items below. You should also bring an English translation of the Bible to class. ESV is preferred, since that is what I'll be using. NIV, NASB, and CSB are acceptable; KJV and *The Message* are not!

- A. D. A. Carson, "Athens Revisited," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Zondervan, 2000).  
[A copy of this will be made available on Canvas.]
- B. William Edgar, *Created and Creating* (IVP Academic, 2017).  
[Available as an [eBook via EBSCO](#).]
- C. John M. Frame, "Part Five: Christ and Culture," in *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (P&R, 2008).  
[A copy of this will be made available on Canvas.]
- D. John M. Frame, "How to Write a Theological Paper," Appendix F in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R, 1987).  
[A copy of this will be made available on Canvas.]
- E. Timothy Keller, *Loving the City* (Zondervan, 2016).
- F. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture*, Lausanne Occasional Papers, No. 2 (1978).  
[A copy of this will be made available on Canvas.]
- G. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (HarperCollins, 2006).  
[Be sure to get the 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary expanded edition.]

## IX. 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. Further recommendations for specific topics are included in the course outline.

- A. Bruce Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Lexham Press, 2015).  
[Solid introduction from a Kuyperian perspective, but not deep or detailed.]
- B. John Barber, *The Road from Eden: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Academica Press, 2008).  
[A detailed study of the influence of Christianity on Western culture, written from a Reformed perspective.]
- C. D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Eerdmans, 2008).  
[As the title indicates, this is Carson's revisiting and updating of Niebuhr's classic work. In my humble opinion, not one of Carson's best works—it raises more questions than it answers in the end—but still provides many useful and provocative insights.]
- D. Joshua D. Chatraw and Karen Swallow Prior, *Cultural Engagement: A Crash Course in Contemporary Issues* (Zondervan Academic, 2019).  
[A collection of short articles by a wide range of authors (from conservative to liberal) commenting on various contemporary issues. Raises more questions than it answers!]
- E. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (InterVarsity Press, 2008).

- [Insightful and provocative contribution to the evangelical debate over culture. Crouch's thesis is that the only effective way for Christians to *change* culture is to *create* culture.]
- F. Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Sentinel, 2017).  
[Important and controversial contribution to the debate over how Christians in the U.S. (and the West more generally) should respond to the collapse of Christendom. The book has provoked much discussion, only a fraction of which engages with Dreher's proposal in a responsible fashion.]
- G. Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (IVP Academic, 2005).  
[Very insightful and thorough treatment of how the fledgling Christian church (and especially the apostle Paul) contextualized its theology for the sake of missions.]
- H. John M. Frame, "Is Natural Revelation Sufficient to Govern Culture?" *Christian Culture* (August 2006). [Available online [here](#).]
- I. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2010).  
[Hunter offers explanations for why Christian efforts to change the world have so often failed or turned out to be counterproductive. Includes critiques of the Christian Right (e.g., Colson), Left (e.g., Wallis), and Neo-Anabaptists (e.g., Hauerwas). Hunter's thesis is sure to provoke discussion for many years to come.]
- J. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Zondervan, 2012).  
[Part-vision-casting, part-handbook for church planting in urban contexts. The required reading, *Loving the City*, is the second section (parts 3-5) of this larger book.]
- K. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Hendrickson, 2008).  
[A series of lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898 in which Kuyper, a Dutch Calvinist theologian and statesman, argues that Reformed theology is a worldview that has significant implications for all aspects of human culture. Various editions available.]
- L. Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (P&R, 2012).  
[Collection of critical essays on the Reformed Two Kingdoms perspective.]
- M. Ken Myers, *All God's Children & Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Crossway, 1989/2012).  
[An influential and insightful guide for analyzing and engaging with popular culture.]
- N. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Eerdmans, 1986).  
[Expanded version of the 1984 Warfield Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in which Newbigin calls for a "missionary encounter" with modern Western culture; a precursor to *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (see below).]
- O. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989).  
[Influential work by a British theologian and missiologist addressing the challenges of Christian witness in a pluralist society; deals with issues of cultural engagement and contextualization.]
- P. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009).

- [The first volume in Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* series. An important corrective—but also in some respects an overreaction—to intellectualized forms of Christian education.]
- Q. Dan Strange, *Plugged In* (The Good Book Company, 2019).  
[A practical, insightful, popular-level guide to Christian cultural engagement from a broadly Neo-Calvinist perspective.]
- R. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).  
[Highly influential account of the rise of modern Western secularism by a Roman Catholic philosopher. Regularly cited by Protestant cultural commentators such as Tim Keller, Al Mohler, and James K. A. Smith. See also Smith's introduction to Taylor's thought, *How (Not) to Be Secular*.]
- S. Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective* (P&R, 2012).  
[Turnau argues for a balanced approach to engaging popular culture, recognizing both the good and the bad, with a particular emphasis on worldview analysis.]
- T. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (P&R, 1959).  
[Very insightful analysis from a conservative Dutch Reformed perspective. The author was the nephew of Cornelius Van Til and clearly influenced by his thought.]
- U. Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Zondervan, 2022).  
[Not an easy book to summarize! Essentially a critical analysis of “modern life and culture” through the lens of the biblical storyline/worldview. Creative and insightful, it provides a useful ‘toolkit’ for understanding and critiquing modern secular culture.]
- V. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2005).  
[Concise exposition of a “reformational worldview” with a focus on how we should think about creation, culture, and our calling in the world. Wolters writes from a Dutch (Neo-)Calvinist perspective. Emphasizes the cosmic aspects of redemption to the neglect of the personal/individual aspects (in my estimation).]

# **Appendix A: RTS Charlotte Classroom Technology Usage**

## **Academic Dean's Office**

RTS Charlotte recognizes how essential it is for students to have reliable, campus-wide access to the internet. For that reason, we have made Wi-Fi available for our student body, not only in the library and student lounges, but also in the classrooms. We know that students need to use the internet to download class materials, access files on the Cloud, and locate other important information.

However, we also recognize that internet access in the classroom provides opportunity for abuse and misuse. Some students have unfortunately used their internet access to engage in many activities that distract them from the classroom lectures (e.g., surfing the web, checking sports scores, playing games). Not only does such activity hamper a student's own seminary education, but it distracts other students who can easily view the screens of nearby students. In addition, donors and classroom guests (who often sit in the back) can see this inappropriate internet usage, which reflects poorly on RTS.

In order to address this issue, we must appeal to the integrity of the students as ones who are preparing for a lifetime of ministry to Christ and his church. We expect each student to take personal responsibility for proper classroom technology usage and to encourage others around them to do the same. All RTS Charlotte students are accountable to the policies stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog and are therefore expected to use technology in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities.

From the Student Handbook: "Classroom etiquette also includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet and laptop computer games and communicating to your neighbor during lectures. Student conduct is under the supervision of the Dean of Students."

## Appendix B: Instructions for Exams with LockDown Browser

1. Install the LockDown Browser application on the computer you intend to use for exams, prior to sitting for the exam, using this link:  
<https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=998253613>
  - a. This link is ONLY for RTS students and covers Mac and Windows applications.
  - b. Be sure that you are able to log in to your Canvas account from the LockDown Browser before the day of the exam.
  - c. If you use internet filtering software (for example, Covenant Eyes) you may need to disable it before beginning an exam with LockDown Browser. Some types of filtering software can block your computer's connection to Canvas. Also, please be sure to add an exception for our Canvas URL: <https://rts.instructure.com>
2. The exam proctor should not be a current RTS student (current = taken a class within the past year but not yet graduated) or a member of the library staff.
3. The proctor must observe the student taking the exam and ensure that there are no devices or resources available other than the computer being used for the exam.
4. Access the exam during the date window specified for that exam.
  - a. Sign in with the proctor.
  - b. Start the LockDown Browser application using a wired or known reliable Wi-Fi connection. We do not recommend using restaurant or coffee shop Wi-Fi to take exams.
  - c. Have your student ID number and proctor details available to input into the exam.
  - d. Log in to your Canvas account.
  - e. Navigate to the exam. You will not be able to access the exam with a standard web browser. For additional details on using LockDown Browser, review this [Student Quick Start Guide \(PDF\)](#).
  - f. The time clock will begin once you open the exam.
  - g. The exam must be completed in one sitting. You may not exit and return to the exam later.
  - h. The exam will contain questions regarding an honor pledge, and certification that your proctor was present during the entire exam period.
  - i. Sign out with the proctor.
5. Proctors may be contacted to verify information regarding exam administration.
6. In the rare case of a technical issue (for example, if power goes out during exam) the proctor will document the date and time when the issue was reported. Once you open the exam using the LockDown Browser, you will not be able to access other programs on your computer.

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

Course: Christ, Culture, and Contextualization  
 Professor: James N. Anderson  
 Campus: Charlotte  
 Date: Spring 2026

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b>	<b><u>Mini-Justification</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> <small>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</small>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong</li> <li>• Moderate</li> <li>• Minimal</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>	
<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. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Moderate	1. Scholarly research paper 2. Final exam tests understanding and articulation of course topics 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 entire canon 2. Discusses important of culture for 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 doctrines (total depravity, antithesis, common grace, etc.)
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	1. Personal reflection paper on positive/negative cultural influences on faith and life
<b>Worldview</b>	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	1. Emphasis on relationship b/w worldview and cultural context 2. Application of biblical worldview to cultural analysis and contextualization 3. Course as a whole focuses on cultural analysis and engagement at both global and local levels
<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.)	Minimal	1. Addresses contextualization in evangelism and missions as application of "love your neighbor as yourself"
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	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.	Moderate	1. Addresses contextualization in preaching (idioms, illustrations, etc.), worship (liturgy, music styles, etc.), evangelism and church planting