

## Foundations of Theology and Public Life (2 credits)

Spring 2026 - Dr. Jennifer Patterson  
(Preliminary Syllabus, December 2025)

### Overview

This 2-credit foundational course for the Institute of Theology and Public Life includes lectures and reading discussions, focusing on our cultural situation and conceptual context, theological principles relevant to public life, and cultural engagement.

### Meeting Dates

Wednesday, 7:00-10:00 p.m., Feb. 25-May 6 (no class on March 11 or April 1)

### Readings

Readings include the books listed below and additional readings (chapters/articles from other sources) that will be supplied on Canvas.

1. *Books* – Please obtain a copy of the following books:

- Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).
- O. Carter Snead, *What It Means to Be Human* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2022).
- Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).
- Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014).
- Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023).
- Collin Hansen, Skyler R. Flowers, and Ivan Mesa, eds., *The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2025).
- Augustine, *City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (Penguin Classics, 2004).  
NOTE: Only *short* excerpts will be included in required reading; we will *not* be reading the whole book! Students are encouraged to obtain a copy of the Penguin Classics paperback edition so we can consult the same version of the text together in class.

2. *Additional Readings* – Excerpts and articles, to be supplied on Canvas, include:

- Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), ch. 1, pp. 222-33, 242-44.
- Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), excerpts from Prologue and ch. 1.
- Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, ch. XII, “The Origin, Essence and Purpose of Man.”
- Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (April 1989): 35-65; “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church.”

- Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation: Genesis 1 and 2 as Tools of Cultural Critique* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), ch. 1.
- William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (IVP Academic, 2016), pp. 55-56 (on H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*).
- Bryan McGraw, "Rawls and the Culture War," in *John Rawls and Christian Social Engagement: Justice as Unfairness*, ed. Anthony B. Bradley and Greg Forster, (New York: Lexington Books), 2014.
- Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), pp. 9-28.
- Thomas Aquinas, Treatise on Law (excerpts), *Summa Theologica* I-II, questions 90-91.
- John Calvin, "On Civil Government" (excerpts), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
- Eric Patterson, *A Basic Guide to the Just War Tradition: Christian Foundations and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), excerpt.
- Anabaptist Schleithem Confession
- John S. Redd, Jr. "The Earth Is the Lord's: A Biblical Theology of Religious Liberty," *Set Free*, edited by Art Lindsley and Anne R. Bradley (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2019).
- Jennifer Patterson, "Christian Formation in Practical Public Theology," *Unio Cum Christo*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Oct. 2020.

### **Assignments (three written submissions):**

- 1) *Due March 27*: Choose one of four pieces to read (selection posted on Canvas). Answer questions about the piece (also posted on Canvas) concerning theological principles, policy responses, and personal responses (maximum 1,000 words).
- 2) *Due May 8*: Write a 2,000-word essay synthesizing and applying themes from the course, based on the student's selection of one among several prompts. Details will be supplied on Canvas.
- 3) *Due May 13*: Submit a reading report (maximum 800 words) that—
  - a) Indicates what percentage of the assigned reading (books + articles) you completed;
  - b) Notes two insights on each of the following topics that you appreciated from the readings, citing one or more readings in association with the insight:
    - Our cultural situation and conceptual context
    - Theologically informed principles applied to a specific issue
    - Cultural engagement

### **Grading:**

- Reading Report: 25%
- Class Participation and Reading Preparation for Class: 25%
- Writing Assignments: 50%

**Contact:** Jennifer Patterson, [jpatterson@rts.edu](mailto:jpatterson@rts.edu); Office hours on request.