

DM8351 THE CHURCH IN AN AGE OF POLARIZATION
RTS/Charlotte
Spring Term: JULY 27-31 , 2026
Dr. Richard Lints, Course Instructor

I. Details

1. Times: Monday 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM; Tuesday thru Thursday 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM; Friday 9:00AM – 1:00 PM
2. Instructor: Dr. Richard Lints
3. Contact: rlints@gmail.com
4. Due Dates: All written work is due by 31 October, 2026 unless otherwise stated

II. Goals

1. To develop a Biblical theology of the church's unity-and-difference.
2. To understand the character of our late modern secular culture
3. To appreciate the challenges of pastoral leadership in a polarized culture.
4. To better understand the nature of wisdom and its application in the life of ministry.
5. To better understand the missionary character of the church.
6. To develop ways to navigate the challenge of over-adapting to culture or under-adapting to culture.

III. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Christians are embedded in a late modern democracy which influences how we understand difference and unity. An important task of the church is to recognize those influences and to better understand how the story of the Gospel interprets those cultural influences. The pastoral task of making bi-cultural disciples is imperative – teaching them to speak the language of the Gospel as well as the ordinary language of the present cultural moment. Pastors must wrestle with what it means to minister at the end of Christendom and the attendant secular pressures. Navigating the politics of power inside the church must take into account both the organizational structure of authority and also the relational intelligence required by your unique community of ministry. In this cultural moment, pastors need to learn how to lead from the middle.

IV. COURSE OUTLINE

Session One - Introductory Matters (Monday Afternoon)

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

Session Two - Naming Our Age: Late Secular Modernity (Monday Afternoon)

The Rise & Fall of Modernity
 The Roots of Classic Liberalism
 Freedom and Democratization
 The End of Modernity
The Secular Age
 The Immanent Frame
 Late Modern Democratic Secularism

Session Three – Inclusion and Exclusion Narratives (Tuesday Morning)

The History of Democracy
 Exclusion and Inclusion in that narrative
The Story of the Gospel
 Exclusion and Inclusion in that narrative

Session Four – Diversity in the Church (Tuesday Afternoon)

Models of Unity: Trinity, Marriage, Redemptive History
In what does the unity of the church consist?
Diversity and Contextualization
Denominations and Difference

Session Five - Student Presentations –D.Min Project Topics (Wednesday Morning)

Session Six - Student Panel Discussions (Wednesday Afternoon)

Case Studies followed by Reflections
Case Studies to be handed out the first day of class

Ministry in Polarized Times

Session Seven - Student Presentations –D.Min Project Topics (Thursday Morning)

Session Eight – Student Panel Discussions (Thursday Afternoon)

Responding to Hard Questions
Hard Questions to be handed out the first day of class

Responding to the Popular Narratives of Our Time

Session Nine– Ministry in a Secular Age (Friday Morning)

The Missionary Encounter with Our Culture
 Models of Engaging Our Secular Age
 Evangelism in the Secular City
 Reading Culture through its Idols
 Over Adapting and Under Adapting

Lunch Together – Q&A

V. Required Reading – A Reading Report is due on August 31, 2026 simply saying whether you have read the books or not.

1. Richard Lints, *Uncommon Unity* (Lexham 2022)
 2. James Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford, 2010)
 3. Collin Woodward, *America Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (Penguin, 2012)
 4. Irwin Ince, *The Beautiful Community* (IVP 2020)
 5. Keller and Inazu, *Uncommon Ground* (Thomas Nelson, 2021)
 6. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *The Politics of Ministry* (IVP 2019)
 7. Ben Sasse, *Them* (St. Martin's Press, 2018)
 8. Lessie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans 1989)
- Total: 1925 pages

VI. Assignments:

A. Student Presentations –D.Min Project Topics

Each student will take 15 minutes to present their proposed topic for the D.Min project. This does not commit the student to writing specifically on this topic, especially if they are still in the investigation mode with regard to potentially interesting topics. Rather, these are potential topics which the student is interested in exploring in their D.Min program. Each presentation will be followed by 5 minutes of feedback from the class. Students are to come prepared prior to the start of class with their topics/presentations already prepared.

B. Student Panel Discussions – See Separate Document

In groups of 2-3, one case study (on Day 3) or one difficult question (on Day 4) will be chosen at the beginning of the class week. The Panel will then devise a ministry strategy for tackling the case study or the difficult question, and divide the presentation of the strategy among the group members. If members of the group differ in how they would like to respond, each member may rehearse their own take on the issue(s). The presentations will be followed by reactions from the rest of the class.

C. Short Reflection Paper – In 3-5 pages describe the model or framework of ministry which 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/framework. Give some concrete description of the priorities that this model would give to you as the pastor or lay leader in the church.

D. Two Interviews:

1. **Talk to one non-Christian** - asking 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.

- E. Film or T.V. Review 3-5 pages (1500 word limit)** Write a short review of a popular film, television show or secular book – explaining why it has cultural significance, how it might illustrate underlying values in your ministry context and how you might use it in a sermon.
- F. Book Review – (4-6 pages)** Pick one of the following books from the required reading list and write a review of it. You may choose from Irwin Ince, *The Beautiful Community* (IVP 2020), Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *The Politics of Ministry* (IVP 2019) or Ben Sasse, *Them* (St. Martin's Press, 2018) You should state where you strongly agree and also where (if at all) you disagree with the book.

VI. Grading

1. Class attendance and participation — 10%
2. Required Reading – 10%
3. Class presentation — 10%
4. Short Reflection Paper – 20%
5. Two Interviews – 10%
6. Film or T.V Review – 20%
7. Book Review – 20%

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).

Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (IVP Academic, 2005).

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)

John Inazu, *Confident Pluralism* (U. of Chicago, 2018)

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)

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).

Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity* (Harper One, 2011).

Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, 2020).



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Professor: Dr. Richard Lints

Campus: Charlotte
 Date: July 27-31, 2026

<u>DMin* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the DMin 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 DMin outcomes.</i></p> <p><i><u>NOTE:</u> DMin Emphases are:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Reformed Expository Preaching (REP), and</i> 2. <i>Reformed Theology and Ministry (RTM)</i> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None 	
Biblical/ Theological Foundations:	<p>Significant knowledge of biblical and theological foundations for pastoral ministry. (This includes interaction with Biblical texts, as well as awareness of Reformed Theology.)</p> <p><i>For meets: REP= Significant</i> <i>For meets: RTM= Significant</i></p>	Strong -	This course is designed to help students interpret their cultural contexts Biblically.
Historical/ Contemporary Practices:	<p>Significant knowledge of historical and contemporary practices of pastoral ministry.</p> <p><i>For meets: REP= Minimal</i> <i>For meets: RTM= Significant</i></p>	Moderate	Historical discussions will be significant and the primary focus will be the history of cultural forces which influence ministry today
Integration:	<p>Ability to reflect upon and integrate theology and practice, as well as implementation in a contemporary pastoral setting.</p>	Strong	This is a thoroughly integrative course seeking to understand the practice of ministry in the contemporary cultural moment
Sanctification:	<p>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids in the student's sanctification.</p>	Moderate	The life of the church is the central focus of the course and secondarily about the life of the individual Christian in the church.
Hermeneutical/ Homiletical Analysis	<p>Demonstrates ability to interpret a text and apply homiletical principles to the text.</p> <p><i>For meets: REP= Significant</i> <i>For meets: RTM= Minimal</i></p>	Moderate	The course considers the primary obstacles to the practice of ministry and preaching in the context of a late modern secular culture.