

Christ, Culture & Contextualization

Reformed Theological Seminary

Course: ST5600-N1 – NYC Distance

Instructor: Dr. Paul Jeon

Course Dates: September 8, 2026 – October 27, 2026

Credit Hours: 2.00

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.

This course has both online and in-person components. In-person meetings will be held on September 25–26 and October 9–10, 2026 only.

Meeting Schedule

- Online (Zoom): Tuesdays, September 8 – October 6, 2026 | 5:00–7:00 PM
- In-Person: Friday, September 25, 2026 | 6:00–9:00 PM
- In-Person: Saturday, September 26, 2026 | 9:00 AM–12:00 PM
- In-Person: Friday, October 9, 2026 | 6:00–9:00 PM
- In-Person: Saturday, October 10, 2026 | 9:00 AM–12:00 PM
- Online (Zoom): Tuesdays, October 20 – October 27, 2026 | 5:00–7:00 PM

Student Learning Objectives

1. Articulate a biblical theology of culture rooted in Scripture.
2. Evaluate major historical models of Christ and culture.
3. Identify worldview assumptions shaping contemporary culture.
4. Apply principles of contextualization to preaching, evangelism, and pastoral ministry.
5. Engage contemporary cultural issues with theological clarity and pastoral wisdom.

Required Textbooks

1. Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. HarperOne.
2. Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Eerdmans.
3. Keller, Timothy. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Zondervan.
4. Watkin, Christopher. *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*. Zondervan Academic.

These texts represent complementary perspectives on the relationship between Christ and culture and provide the theological, historical, missiological, and practical framework for the course. Together they introduce students to classical models of cultural engagement, missionary approaches to the modern West, principles of contextualization, and contemporary cultural analysis from a biblical perspective.

Overall Course Map

Part 1 — The Crisis and Calling

Session 1 — Why Culture Matters Now

Topics:

- Cultural fragmentation and loss of shared meaning
- Why contextualization is unavoidable
- The missionary nature of the church

Key texts:

- Acts 17:16–34
- 1 Corinthians 9:19–23

Part 2 — A Biblical Theology of Culture

Session 2 — Creation and Culture

- Cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26–28)
- Culture as calling

Session 3 — Fall, Redemption, and New Creation

- Babel and fragmentation
- Christ's redemptive work
- The church as counterculture
- New creation (Revelation 7)

Session 4 — Christ and Culture: Five Models

Engage H. Richard Niebuhr

- Against
- Of
- Above
- Paradox
- Transforming

Session 5 — Beyond Niebuhr: A Better Framework

- Critique of the five models
- Biblical tensions (exile, witness, holiness)
- Toward a gospel-centered framework

Part 4 — Understanding Culture

Session 6 — What Is Contextualization?

- Faithfulness vs relevance
- Syncretism and cultural captivity
- Biblical case studies (Acts 15, Acts 17)

Session 7 — Reading Culture: Worldviews and Idols

- Honor/shame, guilt/innocence, fear/power
- Secularism and expressive individualism
- Cultural narratives shaping identity

Part 5 — Practicing Faithful Engagement

Session 8 — Contextualization in Mission and Preaching

- Cross-cultural mission
- Preaching as translation
- Connecting gospel to cultural longings

Session 9 — Leading in a Fractured Culture

- Pastoral leadership in polarized contexts
- Cultural humility + theological conviction
- Student presentations

Course Requirements

1. Reading Reflections (20%)

Students will submit four reading reflections (2–3 pages each) over the course of the semester. Each reflection should:

- Summarize the central argument of the assigned reading.
- Identify one insight that challenged or clarified the student's thinking.
- Explain how the material applies to preaching, discipleship, evangelism, or church ministry.
- Raise one question for further discussion.

Length: 2–3 pages each (8–12 pages total).

2. Cultural Analysis Paper (30%)

Students will analyze a particular ministry context (city, church, demographic group, institution, or subculture) through the lens of biblical theology and cultural analysis.

The paper should address:

1. Description of the context.
2. Dominant worldview assumptions.
3. Functional idols and competing narratives.
4. Barriers to receiving the gospel.
5. Areas of resonance with biblical Christianity.
6. Opportunities for faithful witness and discipleship.

Students are encouraged to focus on a ministry setting in which they presently serve or hope to serve.

Length: 8–10 pages.

3. Contextualized Sermon Project (20%)

Students will prepare a sermon manuscript or detailed outline that demonstrates thoughtful contextualization.

The project should include:

- A biblical text and central proposition.
- A brief description of the intended audience.
- Identification of the audience's assumptions, fears, longings, or idols.
- Exegetical outline.
- Illustrations and applications designed to connect the gospel to the hearers' context.
- A one-page rationale explaining the contextualization decisions employed.

Students may submit either:

- a full sermon manuscript (2,500–3,500 words), or
- a detailed sermon outline with expanded applications.

4. Final Ministry Project (30%)

Students will submit a Contextualization Ministry Project demonstrating mastery of the course objectives.

The project consists of three sections:

Part I: Cultural Analysis

Describe the cultural forces shaping a particular ministry context.

Part II: Theological Reflection

Integrate biblical theology, major Christ-and-culture models, and principles of contextualization.

Part III: Ministry Strategy

Develop a practical ministry plan addressing preaching, evangelism, discipleship, leadership, or church planting within that context.

Students should demonstrate:

- biblical and theological depth,
- awareness of competing worldviews,
- pastoral wisdom,
- missional sensitivity, and
- practical application.

Students will present a 10-minute summary of their project during the final class session.

Length: 12–15 pages.

Course Policies

Attendance is required. Because the course meets only nine times, students are expected to attend all sessions unless circumstances prevent attendance.

Late assignments may be penalized unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor.

Students are expected to complete assigned readings prior to class sessions in order to participate meaningfully in discussions.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

Students are expected to use artificial intelligence tools responsibly and in accordance with the academic integrity standards of Reformed Theological Seminary. AI may serve as a helpful aid for research, brainstorming, and editing, but it must never replace the student's own understanding, analysis, or original work. Students are responsible for the accuracy and integrity of all submitted assignments. For the most current policies and guidance regarding the appropriate use of artificial intelligence, students should consult the latest edition of the **RTS Student Handbook**. Any use of AI that violates RTS policies regarding plagiarism, misrepresentation, or academic honesty is prohibited.