

The Church and the World
6HT506
Reformed Theological Seminary – Washington/Baltimore

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McLean Presbyterian Church
Sept 2-3, 16-17, Oct 7-8
Fri 7:30-10pm; Sat 8:30-4pm

Course Description

This course explores what H. Richard Niebuhr calls “the enduring problem” of how to relate Christ to culture. Particular attention is given to social forces such as secularization, pluralism, individualism, and consumerism.

A significant aspect of the course will be a focus on what “being church” means. Most of us have heard the expression that the church is not the building but the people. It is important that we remember that church is not a place, a duty, or an hour on Sunday, but rather a body of those who are called out by Christ into a way of “being.” Marva Dawn writes: “In our highly technicized, scandalously superficial, inordinately busy, and extremely mobile culture, our congregations are fighting tremendous odds against being able to build the kind of community the Bible describes--in which we truly live 'in common' with each other, growing through being formed by the Scriptures, wasting time to bear each other's burdens, and struggling together to overcome all barriers between human beings. ‘Being Church’ is living as the Scriptures form us and being part of a community which nurtures that alternative way of life.”

The goal of this course can be traced in terms of knowing, being, and doing. We will investigate 1) what Scripture and tradition teaches about the Church and the world, 2) what this requires of us (individually and corporately) as the redeemed and “called-out” people of God, 3) and how this applies to ministry in our contemporary cultural setting.

Required Books

- H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*
- Marva Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World*
- Kimon Sargeant, *Seeker Churches*
- Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity*
- Craig Gay, *The Way of the Modern World*
- Course reading packet

Course Schedule

Sept 2-3

Lectures:

“Introduction: Culture and the Church”

“Institutionalism, Confessionalism and Pietism OR Liberal and Conservative?”

Reading associated with above lectures:

- Peter Liethart, “Against Christianity” in *Against Christianity*

Lectures:

“Ecclesiology: What is the church and why does it matter?”

“Church as Chaplain: Identity and Relevance”

Readings associated with above lectures:

- Kimon Sargeant, "Throwing out Tradition" in *Seeker Churches*
- Kimon Sargeant, "A New Reformation?" in *Seeker Churches*

Lectures:

- "Church Growth Movement"
- "Cultural Christology"
- "Christ and Culture: The Enduring Problem"

Readings associated with above lectures:

- Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Chapter 1 and 6)
- Miroslav Volf, "Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter" (this reading will be made available by email)
- Philip Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church"

Sept 16-17

Lectures:

- "Enlightenment Principles and Religion: Shattering the Classical Balance"
- "1960s"
- "Making Sense of our Time"

Readings associated with above lectures:

- James Davison Hunter, "Cultural Conflict in America" in *Culture Wars* (reading packet)
- James Davison Hunter, "The Anatomy of Cultural Conflict" in *Culture Wars* (reading packet)

Lecture:

- "Consumerism"

Readings associated with above lectures:

- Kimon Sargeant, "Traditional Religion in a Spiritual Age," in *Seeker Churches*
- Michael Budde and Robert Brimlow, "Towards and Economics of Discipleship: The Church as *Oikos*" in *Christianity Inc.* (reading packet)
- Rodney Clapp, "The Theology of Consumption and the Consumption of Theology" in *Border Crossings* (reading packet)

Oct 7-8

Lectures:

- "Pluralism and American Evangelicalism"
- "Popular Culture and Religion, Popular Culture as Religion"
- "Mercy Ministries: Church's Engagement with the World"
- "Worship"
- "Globalization: Coming Christendom"

Readings associated with above lectures:

- Robert Wilken, "Church as Culture" (this reading will be made available by email)
- Thomas Day, "Ego Renewal" in *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (reading packet)

- Peter Liethart, “Against Sacraments” in *Against Christianity* (reading packet)
- Kimon Sargeant, “Ritual: Modern Liturgies for Skeptical Seekers” in *Seeker Churches*

Course Requirements

Attendance and participation	10%
Reading Reports (1,000 words each)—3 reports at 10% each	30%
Exam	20%
Paper (3,000-4,000 words)	40%

Grading Scale

The standard RTS grading scale (found in the RTS Catalogue) will be used.

A	(97-100)	4.00 quality points
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00

The **reading reports** for the *Against Christianity*, *The Way of the Modern Worlds*, and *A Royal “Waste” of Time* can be done before, during, or after the course. For the reading report you are first asked to read closely, understanding the author on his/her terms and then depicting his/her argument fairly and responsibly in your report. Second, you are to engage the argument of each author critically, highlighting strengths and weaknesses and explaining where you agree or disagree and why.

You will be given a **take-home exam** on Oct 8th. It will be due Oct 15th.

The **final paper** is due May Nov 7th. I want this paper to be helpful to you. If you are a pastor or serve in ministry, please select a topic that is relevant and practical to your ministry. If you are planning on pursuing more graduate studies, please select a topic and approach that has an academic or theoretical dimension to it. More will be said regarding the topics and guidelines for the paper during the week of the course.

Reading Report

Title: _____

Author: _____

1. Did you read the entire book?
2. Summarize in one paragraph the thesis or argument of the text.
3. Summarize in one paragraph the author's method of proving her or his thesis. How does she or he "get there"?
4. What were some key points or passages that you think are relevant for a course on the church and the world in the 20th and 21st centuries?
5. Internal positive assessment: Assuming the author's point of view and being aware of what the author hoped and intended to do, write at least two paragraphs about some strengths of the text. To what extent did the author "pull it off" and accomplish a significant part of what she or he intended?
6. Internal negative assessment: Assuming the author's point of view and being aware of what the author hoped and intended to do, write at least two paragraphs about some weaknesses of the text. How many of your reservations about the text can be expressed from a point of view intrinsic to the text or assuming the author's point of view?
7. External positive evaluation: From your perspective and evaluating things in terms of your own commitments and purposes, what are some strengths of the text? Please write at least two paragraphs.
8. External negative evaluation: From your perspective and evaluating things in terms of your own commitments and purposes, what are some weaknesses of the text? Please write at least two paragraphs.