

CS4362 – The Church in the Contemporary World

Tuesdays 1–3:40 PM

Instructor: Stephen D. Lawson

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Office Hours:

Mondays: 11–Noon, 1–2 and by appt.

I view it as my responsibility to be available and responsive to you. I aim to respond to all emails within 24 hours (weekends excluded) and am willing to set up meeting times with you to talk in person.

Note bene: Anything on this syllabus can change at the professor's discretion in order to accommodate the needs of the professor and/or the students. Any changes will be communicated via email, Canvas announcement, or in-class notice. In some cases, a revised syllabus may be posted on Canvas.



Photograph depicting worshippers departing the candlelit Easter service at Agio Thomas in Athens
Photographer: Nicholas Econopouly

Course Description

It is scarcely possible to overstate the differences between our world and the world to which Jesus of Nazareth preached. From the way we see physical creation to how we think about spiritual realities, from how we interact with one another through personal, public, and economic relationships to the ways that we relate to our own bodies, our world is far from first century Palestine. The abyss that separates us from that world is a particular challenge for ministers committed to preaching Jesus' gospel in the world today. This course equips students to lead the church faithfully in light of the evolving challenges and possibilities that confront the church in the contemporary world. This course cultivates reflection that bridges biblical and theological truth to the challenges facing the church today while attending to the pastoral needs of concrete people. We will give particular attention to the issues surrounding economics, embodiment (especially sexuality and death), and technology.

Learning Objectives

- Students will learn how to interpret and theologically assess some of the secular liturgies that shape our Western world.
- Students will be able to narrate how modern, secular reasoning developed, how it contrasts from historic Christianity, and will reflect critically on how to respond to it in the context of ministry in the Western world.
- Students will develop skills for reading, summarizing, and analyzing theological and philosophical texts.
- Students will develop theological and pastoral responses to some of the challenges the church faces in the world today, especially those relating to economics, sexuality, death, and technology.
- Students will increase their literacy through curating a bibliography of sources for theological reflection in their own pastoral contexts.

Course Readings:

- Required Texts:
 - William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008)
 - Craig M. Gay, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018)
 - Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018).
 - James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014)
 - James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016)
- Additional readings will be posted on the course Canvas site.

Course Assignments

- **Class participation (55% of final grade):** Students are expected to complete all required readings and to come to class ready to discuss the texts. Students' engagement with the course readings will be assessed through participation in class discussion as well as through regular writings of précis and protocols.
 - Précis & Discussion Questions
 - For every chapter that we read, one student will be assigned to write a brief précis followed by 2–4 discussion questions. Each précis should be between half a page and one page (single-spaced) followed by the discussion questions. Students should bring enough physical copies of their précis for everyone in the class to have a copy. Students should also post their précis on the course Canvas site so that they are easily accessible for students as they work on the course papers.
 - A précis is a concise and accurate summary of a given text. Quotations from the text should be employed sparingly. Please consult the document "Guide for Writing Good Summaries" on the Canvas site before writing your first précis.
 - Discussion questions generally fall into three types of questions:
 - Questions that ask for explanation, due to the reader not understanding certain passages in the text
 - Questions that arise from the text making a point that would seem to contradict an earlier text, or a discussion in class
 - Questions that ask "so what," and want to know the implications of certain claims, and what difference it would make if they were true
 - Protocols
 - Every week a student will be assigned to write a protocol. A protocol is a one-page (single-spaced) summary of the class period. Protocols should articulate the key points of discussion and highlight further questions and additional avenues for reflection and integration. No additional research is necessary, just reflection upon the class discussion. Our class sessions will begin with a discussion of the protocol that summarized the previous week's class period.
- **Unplugged assignment (5% of final grade)**
 - First, read the short article posted on Canvas entitled "Silence in the Face of Mystery" by Rowan Williams. After you finish reading it, spend at least thirty minutes alone and in silence. Do not watch television, listen to music, play with your phone, read, or communicate with anyone. You may complete this indoors or outdoors, but try to find a space with minimal distractions and no possibility of interruption. Sit or stand, but

remain physically still. Set a timer so that you know when the time is up, but do not look at the timer until it goes off.

- After the thirty minutes is over write two pages (double-spaced) of reflection about this experience
 - What is like to be with your own thoughts?
 - How does it feel to be “disconnected” for a few minutes?
 - Why do you think you feel this way?
 - What enters your mind when you aren’t distracted?
- Upload as a Word (.doc or .docx format) file on Canvas before class on **Tuesday, September 3.**
- **Theological Integration Papers (40% of final grade):** Students will write a ministry context profile, three theological integration papers, and one annotated bibliography.
 - *Ministry Context Profile (5% of final grade).* Students will write a profile of the congregation or ministry context (e.g. campus ministry, mission field, etc.) with which they serve or plan to serve. This profile should include bullet points of demographic information (number of members, age ranges, economic backgrounds, racial and ethnic information, educational background, etc.). It should also include a narrative of the history, present situation, and future plans for the congregation or ministry. The Ministry Context Profile should be at least three pages (double-spaced apart from the bullet points) and no more than five pages. **It should be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 PM on September 30.**
 - *Theological Integration papers (30% of final grade).* Students will write three Theological Integration Papers in which they reflect theologically upon three of the central topics of the course in light of their ministry context. These papers should address the challenges and resources of their ministry contexts. Each paper should demonstrate that the student integrated the course material with their knowledge of the biblical witness and with the unique pastoral situation of their ministry context. Each paper should be between four and six pages (double-spaced) and should seek to answer the question: what would it mean for this community to practice Christian discipleship in this context with regard to this specific issue?
 - Integration paper #1 (Consumerism and Economics) **[Due Oct 14]**
 - Integration paper #2 (Bodies, Sexuality, and Death) **[Due Nov 11]**
 - Integration paper #3 (Technology) **[Due Dec 2]**
 - *Annotated bibliography (5% of final grade).* In consultation with the professor, students will create an annotated bibliography of at least 10 books and 5 articles which embody the integrative theological reflection fostered in this course. Students are not expected to have read all of these sources in their entirety; just enough in order to write an annotation of 2–3 sentences commending this source to others. Think of this assignment as an opportunity to sketch out your continuing theological education post-graduation. **Due via Canvas upload at 11:59 PM on December 9.**

Course Schedule

(*) denotes that the reading is posted on the Canvas site

Date	Theme	Readings and Assignments
Aug 27	Course Introduction Syllabus Orientating questions	
Sep 3	Learning to see the world liturgically	Williams, “Silence in the Face of Mystery” Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> xi–82 Unplugged Assignment Due

Sep 10	Worship and Discipleship: On being the Church	Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> , 83–110 Philip Kenneson, “Gathering: Worship, Imagination, Formation” Stanley Hauerwas, “Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the ‘And’”
Sep 17	Worship and Discipleship: On being the Church	Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> , 111–190 Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church as God’s New Language”
Sep 24	Living in a Secular Age	Smith, <i>How (Not) to be Secular</i> , vii–139
Oct 1	The sacramental tapestry	Schmemmann, <i>For the Life of the World</i> , 7–138 Ministry Context profile due Sep 30
Oct 8	The sacramental tapestry, cont. Consumerism and Christian Desire	Schmemmann, <i>For the Life of the World</i> , 139–179 Cavanaugh, <i>Being Consumed</i> , vii–88
Oct 15	Consumerism and Christian Desire, cont. Discussion of integration paper #1	Cavanaugh, <i>Being Consumed</i> , 89–100 Eugene McCarragher, “We Have Never Been Disenchanted” R. H. Tawney, “Conclusion” from <i>Religion and the Rise of Capitalism</i> Integration paper #1 due Oct 14
Oct 22	Bodies: Sex and Marriage	Hauerwas, “Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians are Doing It” Hauerwas, “Resisting Capitalism: On Marriage and Homosexuality” Berry, “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community”
Oct 29	Bodies: Sex and Marriage	John Paul II, “Letter to Families” Thompson, “Marriage in the Fellowship of the Faithful” Jones, “Radical Faithfulness” Hart, “The Pornography Culture” McCabe, “Sex and the Sacred”
Nov 5	Bodies: Death and Medicine	Brock, “Parenting as Political Resistance” Griffiths, “Defending Life by Embracing Death” Warren, “What Happens When We Bury Our Unborn?” Gorer, “The Pornography of Death” Bishop, “Arts of Dying and the Statecraft of Killing” Lynch, “Tract”
Nov 12	Discussion of Integration Paper #2 Technology	Berry, “What Are People For?” Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating” Berry, “Why I am Not Going to Buy a Computer” Berry, “Feminism, the Body, and the Machine” Integration Paper #2 Due Nov 11
Nov 19	Technology	Gay, <i>Modern Technology and the Human Future</i> , ix–92
Nov 26	Technology	Gay, <i>Modern Technology and the Human Future</i> , 93–227
Dec 3	Technology Discussion of Integration Paper #3	Brock, “On Becoming Creatures” Integration Paper #3 Due Dec 2
Dec 10	Wrap up and discussion of bibliographies	Annotated Bibliographies due Dec 9

Course Policies

Attendance: Students must attend classes regularly. In the event of illness, family emergency, or an extenuating circumstance, it is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor as soon as possible of the reason for the absence. A doctor's note is required for excusing personal illness. If you have 2 unexcused absences, your final course grade will be dropped by one letter grade. After 3 unexcused absences, a student may be dropped from the course.

You will be considered tardy if you are not present when the roll is checked or if you leave during class. **3 tardies = 1 unexcused absence.** If you are tardy, it is your responsibility to make sure you were not counted absent. If you come in more than 10 minutes late, or leave before the end of class without telling me why, you will be counted absent. Take care of all business before and after class, or during the break.

Academic Integrity: Austin Grad places a high priority on honesty and a biblical commitment to truth. Incidents of **cheating, plagiarism**, or any other activities deemed dishonest will result in severe penalties, including possible dismissal from the course.

Late Work: I will generally not accept late work without penalty. If you find that you will need some extra time, you can request an extension via e-mail at least one full business day in advance. I will review all requests and you will be notified as soon as possible whether or not they will be granted. Work turned in late without an approved extension will lose one letter grade for each day that it is late.

Technology: This is a discussion-based course. For it to work well the students must be attentive to the instructor and to the other students. The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, or any similar devices are prohibited from the classroom because they inhibit discussion and promote distraction.