

## CS4362 – The Church in the Contemporary World

Tuesdays 1-3:40 PM

**Instructor:** Stephen Lawson, Ph.D. (cand.)

**Email:** [lawson@austingrad.edu](mailto:lawson@austingrad.edu)

**Office phone:** (512) 476-2772 ext. 209

**Office Hours:** Apart from when I am teaching or eating lunch, I am in my office from 8:30-4:30 Mondays-Fridays.

You are always welcome to stop by to talk with me. I truly enjoy visiting with students, so do not hesitate to come by to talk about anything. If you want to discuss something for an extended amount of time, please email me to arrange a time. 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).



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

*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.

### 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 bringing Jesus' gospel to people 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, sacramentality, 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 creating a bibliography of sources for theological reflection on issues relevant to their own development and the needs of their pastoral context.

### 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
    - 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.
    - For each reading assignment each student will write a brief précis followed by 1–3 discussion questions. Each précis should be between 150 and 350 words (longer readings should have longer précis). Write them (single-spaced) on a single document. Follow each précis by the discussion questions prompted by that reading. Students should upload their précis and discussion questions as a .docx file to the Canvas site by noon on Monday (in advance of our class meeting on Tuesday).
    - 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 (please note if any vocabulary was unfamiliar or confusing for you and I will try to address it in class)

- 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 previous 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 1.**
- **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.) in 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 28.
  - *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 has thought deeply about the course material and how it might best apply to their unique 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 12]
- Integration paper #2 (Bodies, Sexuality, and Death) [Due Nov 9]
- Integration paper #3 (Technology) [Due Nov 30]
- *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 7.**

### Course Schedule

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

Date	Theme	Readings and Assignments
Aug 25	Course Introduction Syllabus Orienting Questions	
Sep 1	Learning to see the World Liturgically	Williams, "Silence in the Face of Mystery"* Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> xi–82 <b>Unplugged Assignment Due</b>
Sep 8	Worship and Discipleship: On Being the Church	Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> , 83–110 Kenneson, "Gathering: Worship, Imagination, Formation"* Hauerwas, "Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the 'And'"*
Sep 15	Worship and Discipleship: On Being the Church, cont.	Smith, <i>You Are What You Love</i> , 111–190 Hauerwas, "The Church as God's New Language"*
Sep 22	Living in a Secular Age	Smith, <i>How (Not) to be Secular</i> , vii–139
Oct 29	The Sacramental Tapestry	Schmemmann, <i>For the Life of the World</i> , 7–138 <b>Ministry Context Profile due Sep 28</b>
Oct 6	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 13	Consumerism and	Cavanaugh, <i>Being Consumed</i> , 89–100

	Christian Desire, cont.  Discussion of Integration Paper #1	McCarraher, "We Have Never Been Disenchanted"* Tawney, "Conclusion" from <i>Religion and the Rise of Capitalism</i> *  <b>Integration Paper #1 due Oct 12</b>
Oct 20	Bodies: Sex and Marriage	Hauerwas, "Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians are Doing It"* Hauerwas, "Resisting Capitalism: On Marriage and Homosexuality"*
Oct 27	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 3	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 10	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"* <b>Integration Paper #2 Due Nov 9</b>
Nov 17	Technology	Gay, <i>Modern Technology and the Human Future</i> , ix- 92
Nov 24	Technology	Gay, <i>Modern Technology and the Human Future</i> , 93- 227
Dec 1	Technology  Discussion of Integration Paper #3	Brock, "On Becoming Creatures"* <b>Integration Paper #3 Due Dec Nov 30</b>
Dec 8	Wrap up and discussion of bibliographies	<b>Annotated Bibliographies due Dec 7</b>

### Course Policies

Attendance: Because we only meet one day a week, there are no allowances for unexcused absences. One unexcused absence will have a substantially negative impact on your grade. When a legitimate need for an excused absence arises, communicate with me and we will make accommodations.

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 strongly discouraged because they inhibit discussion and promote distraction. I highly recommend bringing printed copies of the course readings to class (or to have them near you if you're joining through Zoom).