Course Description and Objectives

The issue of the church's relationship to culture is important to one's pastoral vocation since all Christians must choose how to live and make moral decisions within a culture. The church must be able to communicate within and engage culture. Indeed, the very existence of the church depends on it. This class will study theological principles for guiding such an engagement between church and surrounding culture. It will guide the student through forming his/her own position on the church/culture relationship. This position should provide the basis for how each pastor will lead his/her congregation, shape the local congregation as a discerning people amidst the social and moral issues of our times, and provide strategies for witness, ministry and justice in the world.

This class then will achieve the following goals:

- Gain familiarity with the historical understandings of the church’s relation to culture including those represented in Medieval Christendom, Magisterial Reformation and the development of the Enlightenment democracies and the separation of church and state.
- Explore and gain familiarity with several theologians of theology and culture as resources for understanding the issues and articulating of one's own position and methodology.
- Read, discuss, engage and develop positions on several practical/moral issues the church must face today in its engagement with culture.

Through this course the student will:

1. Gain a foundational understanding of what culture is.

2. Develop a methodology that will enable students as pastors to discern and engage issues of culture as they would be confronted in a local church setting.

3. Come away with a framework for developing a local church's vision and ministry in relation to its Christ-given mission to engage the world's injustice, alienation, brokeness and lostness.

Course Organization

The class will be comprised of (A.) a first half of the class lecture covering the material, (B.) a second half of the class dialogue focused upon the readings, lecture and student presentations of research.
Course Requirements

Required Texts (for Purchase):


OR IF YOU’VE READ NIEBUHR


OR


Masters students will be responsible for the following:

1. Students must read all required readings as outlined for each day of class. The class’s reading requirement is “front loaded” (heavy reading first 5 weeks of class). Additional readings are offered to the student as a supplement for the writing of the integrative paper due on last day of class. The student chooses approximately 500 pages of reading from among the optional readings. The student should read 800 pages in total to complete the reading requirement for this class.

2. A Short One-Half Hour Exam on Readings. An exam will be given at the beginning of the 6th week. There will be one essay question and a series of multiple choice questions in order to test the student on his or her overall comprehension of the readings and lectures of the first six weeks.

3. Theology of church and culture paper (12-15 pages): The student will work out his/her theology of church and culture in relation to the various options studied in class. The paper should:
   - Describe and defend your position on the relationship between church and culture.
   - Be careful to use one or two author's to both define and defend your own view and critique an alternative view.
• Describe one challenge your particular church faces in engaging its surrounding culture. Describe then how you carry out this engagement based on your answer to the first bullet point.
• Paper is due the last day of the last week of classes. ABSOLUTELY NO EXTENSIONS. AN AUTOMATIC ½ GRADE MARKDOWN FOR EACH REGULAR DAY LATE.

4. Reading List: should be handed in last day of class detailing all reading the student did for the class. Students are required to read a total of 800 pages for this class.

5. Class Participation: The student is asked to be prepared for discussion in each class by having read the required readings and having questions for class. In accordance with Northern Seminary policy, failure to attend at least 80% of class sessions is grounds for automatic failure. Students are always expected to communicate with a professor in advance if they will be absent.”

The student grade will come from 50% theology paper, 30% exam, 10% reading list and 10% class participation.

Certificate/Diploma Credit Students Will Be Responsible for The Following
In order for the student to receive certificate/diploma credit for this course, the student must:

1. Read the H R Niebuhr text only as well as required articles.

2. Hand in a 5 page review of the Niebuhr text on the last day of class. In the review paper the student must a.) choose one position in Niebuhr’s text that best articulates the students own understanding of how the church is relate to culture. b.) articulate why the student chooses this position in terms of its strengths. C.) articulate any adjustments to the position the student feels are necessary in order to incorporate this approach in their own life, church and ministry.

3. Certificate students are excused from the midterm quiz.

The student grade will come from 70% theology paper, 30% class participation.

Grading Scale:

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**Schedule and Readings:**

**THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

**Class I. The History of the Church in Society**  
Christendom, Reformation, and Sectarianism. Foundations for the modern understanding of Church and Society - Ernst Troeltsch and H. R Niebuhr's Classic Christ and Culture

**Required Reading:**  
For those who’ve read Niebuhr, you have the option to choose:  
Stephen B. Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*  
OR:  

**Optional:**  

**Class II. John Howard Yoder's Response**

**Required**  

**Optional**  
Miroslav Volf. “Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter” (*Ex Auditu* 10, 1994)  
http://www.yale.edu/faith/resources/x_volf_difference.html

**Class III. - Current Theologians of Theology and Culture**

**Required**  

**Optional**  

**Class IV. Current Theologians of Theology and Culture 2**

**Required**

**Optional**

**Class V. – Summation of the Main Models of Contextual Theology. Correlationist, Confessional, Incarnational and their relationship to Roman Catholic, Reformed, Anabaptist. Which One Are You? And Why?**

**Required**
Catch up on/review all required reading from the previous four classes.
In preparation for exam and class period -write a 2 page reflection to be used in class discussing what positions (already discussed in class) you affirm, from which theologian(s) and why?

**PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENTS**

**Class VI. Is Technology Killing Us?**
In what ways is technology a good, and in what ways is technology taking us further and further away from God in Christ? How should the church respond?
*A mid term half hour exam.*

**Required Reading**

**Optional**

**Class VII. Democracy, Capitalism and our Form of Government**
How shall we live economically? Are we as church members in any way financially liable towards one another? If so, how? Is Democracy Christian? How has Democracy Formed the Way We Understand Salvation? In what ways does Capitalism and/or Democracy intrude into the life of your church? How should the Christian respond? How should you lead your church through these questions?

**Required Reading**
Stanley Hauerwas. *Community of Character,* ch. 4

**Optional**

**Class VIII. Racism, Homosexuality and Feminism**
Are the solutions of race, gender and sexual preference in our present culture a positive or a negative for those minorities in American culture. In this class we will survey mainly the issues of race and reconciliation in America. We will look at the past failures and approaches of the church, civil rights movement and Malcolm X. We may then ask how this applies to other issues within the justice matrix of race, gender, and sexual orientation relations. There has been consistent discrimination by the local banking system against African Americans on the south side of Chicago. This has harmed African Americans from being able to buy a house. It has created a slum district mentality because the only people who can own the buildings are those from outside the community. How should First Baptist church of the south side respond?

**Required**

**Optional**
Class IX  War, Violence, and Statecraft
Can Christians participate in violence? Can the church permit its own to go to war? The United States has declared war against N. Korea. N. Korea has threatened the United States with nuclear annihilation. The United States Selective Service has drafted two sons and daughters from the church congregation to send them to N. Korea for a preemptive invasion. Should the church allow the teenagers to report? Should the church leave the decision to each individual?

Required
Bell, Daniel M., Just War as Christian Discipleship Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005. (ON RESERVE)

Optional

Lecture X. Culture Industries - Is Disney Our Friend? Why VeggieTales is a Bad Idea.
It is Lenten season. A new church member decries the morality of the movies our teenagers are seeing. The youth pastor responds by calling the whole church to completely abstain from attending the cinema, watching TV, or going to Broadway shows. How will you as pastor/elder lead the church through this discussion. How shall we discern this issue.

Required

Optional

POLICIES FOR ALL MASTERS CLASSES

NOTE: All communications from the seminary will go to your seminary email account. Contact ithelpdesk@seminary.edu if you need help forwarding your seminary email address to your personal email address.

As a seminary community we hold integrity/hospitality as core values. Individuals are able to do their best work and thinking when their peers are fully present and engaged. We expect each person to both participate in class and carefully listen to others with the belief that everyone’s contribution is equally important. Therefore, the following policies have been established in order to provide clarity in regard to attendance expectations and relationships in the classroom.

Class Attendance Policy
It is expected that students will attend and participate in all class sessions. Failure to attend at least 80% of class sessions is grounds for automatic failure. A professor may set other attendance expectations. Students are always expected to communicate with a professor in advance if they will
be absent. Attendance expectations are higher for online and intensive courses (see syllabus for specific requirements).

**Class Tardiness Policy**
The third time a student is late to the start of class, it will be counted as a class absence. It is also expected that students will return from a break by the time specified by the professor.

**Late Work Policy**
If a student cannot complete the work for a course by the due date listed on the syllabus, they must submit a “Request for a Grade of Incomplete” form to the Registrar by 4:30 of the last day of the term. The form must be signed by the instructor and Dean of Students. The professor may set stipulations and grade reductions. In the absence of a formal request form, the student will receive a grade based upon work completed by the last day of the term.

**Turabian Format**
All papers, including footnotes and bibliography, must be submitted in the correct format according to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed., 2013.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one’s own the words or ideas of someone else without providing proper acknowledgement or documentation. See the “Academic Honesty Policy” in the Seminary Catalog for more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

**Electronic Format**
Unless otherwise specified by the professor, all work submitted electronically must be in a Word document format (.doc, .docx).

**Technology Use in the Classroom**
Unless it is directly tied to note-taking or research for the class, students are expected to refrain from using cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices during class.

**Course Evaluation in Moodle**
Students must complete an online course evaluation using the seminary Moodle system at [http://moodle.seminary.edu](http://moodle.seminary.edu) in order to receive a final grade for the course. The evaluation will be open for one week starting the last day of the term. If you need assistance connecting to Moodle or accessing the evaluation, please send an email to moodlehelp@seminary.edu.