

Christian Witness in the Secular Age

Fall 2017

Credit Hours: 2 semester hours

Total Class time: 28 hours

Location: Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Lancaster

Time: 6:30-9:30 pm

Dates: September 11, 25; October 9, 23; November 6, 20; December 4, 18.

Faculty: Wesley Furlong

Contact Information: wfurlong@icloud.com

Course Description:

Christian Witness in the Secular Age explores the question, "What does a faithful and fruitful witness to the Gospel look like in our modern western context?" The course will draw from New Testament theology, Church History, Practical Theology, and modern social theories. Theory and practice will remain together through each section of the course. Ultimately, a good reading of Scripture and our cultural milieu should draw us closer to echoing Jesus's testimony in John 5:19, "...We do what we see the Father doing." Our engagement with texts like, "The Secular Age," "Theology and Social Theory," and "Evangelism in the Early Church," will broaden and deepen our perspective on the place of evangelism in the life of the Church and how we collaborate with God's redeeming work in the world.

EMS Mission: Eastern Mennonite Seminary prepares men and women to serve and lead in a global context. In response to God's saving grace, we educate students to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God's Spirit as wise interpreters, mature practitioners, discerning communicators and transformational leaders. The complete purpose statement can be found at <http://www.emu.edu/seminary/about/mission/>.

Course Objectives: Lead students to be:

1. Wise interpreters who engage the text of Scripture, the history of the church, and central beliefs of the Christian faith.
2. Maturing persons in formation who practice theological ways of thinking, speaking and writing.
3. Discerning communicators contextualizing the Gospel from an Anabaptist frame of reference in dialog with other Christian traditions and the current context.
4. Transformational leaders who examine theological convictions and spiritual practices and experiences and do theological reflection.

Specifically, this course will lead students to become:

5. Conversant with influential modern social theories, particularly philosophical naturalism.
6. Well-versed on the history of evangelism in the early church.
7. Confident and fruitful in offering testimony to the Gospel.

Required Books: The required reading helps students meet the course objectives for understanding central beliefs of the Christian faith and understanding Anabaptist theological emphases, while affirming the diversity of the Christian faith.

James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, Oxford, 2010.

Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Eerdmans, 2004.

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Eerdmans, 1989.

James K.A. Smith, *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, Eerdmans, 2014.

Additional Readings (Texts we will discuss):

John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Wiley Blackwell, 2006.

Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Oxford, 2011.

Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age*, Harvard, 2007.

Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture*, Wiley Blackwell, 2005.

Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, Templeton, 2014.

David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, Yale, 2010.

Alan Hirsh, *The Forgotten Ways*, Brazos, 2009.

Dr. Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, Moody, 2009.

John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, Herald Press, 2002.

Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, Oxford, 2011.

Bruce Olson, *Bruchko*, Charisma, 2006.

Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition*, Oxford, 2009.

Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room*, Zondervan, 2006.

Course Activities and Requirements (100 total points)

1. Preparation: Read the assigned materials *before* class. This requirements helps students to realize the interpretation and formation objectives. Addresses Objective 2.

2. Attendance and Participation: Attendance is taken and you are expected to be here. Class times will mostly supplement the readings; generally, they will not reiterate or explain the reading. Because we will be discussing issues and ideas, this class will not work well without your active involvement. Sometimes the class will break into smaller groups for discussion. In all discussion, you are encouraged to be honest but tactful and sensitive but forthright. Our discussions—which will constitute major parts of many class periods—will be based on the assumption you are current in the assigned readings. Class activities help students meet the course objectives of formation, contextualization, and performance. Bring your course syllabus, a Bible, and the books for that days reading to class every day. Attendance and participation are worth 15 points. Addresses Objectives 2-4.

3. Class Journal: Maintain a journal focused on the question, “Influences on my views of evangelism.” At least five entries are required for full credit, one per book, and one offering a personal reflection on experiences with evangelism. The Journal is worth 20 points and will be turned in at weeks 3, 6, and 9. Addresses Objectives 1 and 3.

4. Critical Review: Students will write a review of either, “To Change the World,” or “The Gospel in a Pluralist Context.” A rubric will be distributed by week two. The Critical Review is worth 25 points and will be turned in by December 4. Addresses Objectives 1 and 4.

5. Evangelism Reflections: Students will engage in at least two conversations about the Gospel with non-Christians. Oral summaries of the experiences will be worth 15 points.

6. Final Presentation: Each student will create a presentation for a church seminar on evangelism. Presentations will be shared on December 4 and December 18 and are worth 25 points.

GRADING

Your course percentage grade will be calculated as follows:

Attendance and Participation	15
Journal	20
Critical Review	25
Evangelism Reflections	15
Final Presentation	25
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TOTAL	100

Grading Rubric:

- An **“A”** indicates superior performance that represents mastery of the assignment. This requires excellent content, organization and presentation. All facets of the assignment are fulfilled in a timely manner.
- A **“B”** indicates commendable performance that represents adequate fulfillment of the assignment, with no major weaknesses. All essential facets of the assignment are fulfilled in a timely manner.
- A **“C”** indicates marginal performance that represents a clear deficiency in some part of the assignment, such as content, organization or presentation. At times, even commendable work may be considered marginal if it is submitted late.
- A **“D”** indicates inferior performance that fails to meet the assignment in a major way or in regard to a number of important aspects. At times, marginal work may be considered inferior if it is submitted late.
- An **“F”** indicates unacceptable performance that fails to meet the criteria for reasons such as poor quality, insufficient effort, insufficient material, or lateness.

Grading Scale:

- 95-100 = A
- 93-94 = A-
- 91-92 = B+
- 85-90 = B
- 83-84 = B-
- 81-82 = C+
- 75-80 = C
- 72-74 = C-
- 65-71 = D
- Below 65 = F

Attendance Expectations: As stated in the EMU Graduate Catalog (2007-2008, 6): “Because of the interactive nature of graduate classes at EMU, we believe that students who miss class for the equivalent of six 50-minute periods or four 75 minute periods (300 minutes) in a three semester hour course (200 minutes for a 2-semester hour course, 100 minutes for a 1-semester hour course) have not fulfilled necessary requirements to receive an “A” in the graduate class. Grades may be lowered for absences of less time at the instructor's discretion.”

Academic Integrity: The responsibility to foster and guard academic integrity rests with all members of the academic community. A foundation of mutual trust is essential to the learning community. Any incidents of academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the work submitted and a "Record of Academic Dishonesty" filed in the graduate dean's office. Students are asked to meet with the professor (and other affected persons, where appropriate) to examine the effects of the dishonesty on others and to develop an accountability plan.

Special Accommodations Statement: If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability, or has emergency medical information to share, please contact the instructor personally as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate equal educational opportunity. All information and documentation of the disability is confidential and will not be released without permission.