

BRIERCREST

THEO 759 Theology Specialty: Left to our own De[vices]? Theology, Technology, and the Future Winter 2022

Professor: Dr. Joel Houston, PhD, FRHistS
Email: jhouston@briercrest.ca
Phone: 306.756.3245
Course Dates: February 28—March 4, 2022

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This iteration of the Theology Specialty is a theological appraisal of our technological age, habits, and trajectory. This course seeks to understand the broad currents of technological development and their influence upon contemporary ways of being-in-the-world. Resourcing the classical doctrines of Creation and the Incarnation, the class will endeavor to formulate a distinctly *Christian* response to our modern condition; one that seeks to strike a balance between an outright rejection and uncritical embrace of technological expansion.



INSTRUCTOR'S INTRODUCTION

G.K. Chesterton once observed that the “huge modern heresy” of living within a technocratic society is that it “alter[s] the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul.” It is difficult to escape the notion that our technological tools are quickly becoming our technological masters. But is this the final word? *Left to Our Own De[vices]* is a class that seeks to respond to, and resist, the current “technological takeover.”

Students will be encouraged to evaluate their contemporary technological climate (with special emphasis on screen-based technologies, such as mobile phones and personal computers) and respond critically, thoughtfully, and most important, *theologically*. Instead of a privatized examination, THEO 759 is structured in such a way as to maximize opportunities for both personal *and* corporate discernment. Ultimately, this course is designed to create an opportunity to critically assess our technological habits and step into the future a more theologically informed and technologically responsible follower of Jesus Christ.

COURSE INTEGRATION

THEO 759 is deliberately aimed at the intersection of life, ministry, family, the academe, and indeed, the soul. Course readings, activities, and research assignments are intended to explore the rich cross-sections of life that are affected by, and intimately tied to, the usage of technology and our understanding of the person and work of God. As such, students can expect a broad and diverse approach to the questions that surround technology and theology and will also benefit from a decidedly praxis-oriented exploration of these themes.

COURSE TEXTS

Borgmann, Albert, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Capon, Robert Farrer, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

Gay, Craig, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

Kim, Jay T., *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

THEO 759 Course Reader (available on Canvas).

OTHER TEXTS REQUIRED FOR CLASS

The Holy Bible (a translation of your choosing).

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

COURSE OUTCOMES

- 1) Students will have the opportunity to critically evaluate the integration of technology into their personal life and assess the personal and spiritual impact of this integration.
- 2) Students will develop a theologically robust framework for appraising the usage of modern technologies.
- 3) Students will gain an understanding of the development of modern technologies and examine the implicit values inherent within these developments.

- 4) Students will be able to articulate a biblically and theologically informed vision of human flourishing.
- 5) Finally, students will have the opportunity to develop the skills (both inside class and as a result of class assignments) to apply this vision to a variety of contexts (personal, ministerial, academic, or otherwise).

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT¹

A full course outline, including modules, assignments, extra-curricular reading, and discussions will be posted to Canvas in advance of the course. Students are encouraged to become familiar with the Canvas page for this course early on and check it often.

ASSIGNMENTS

Pre-Course Assignments:

Please submit all assignments via Canvas.

Critical Review of Borgmann, "Modern Technology" – 20%

Albert Borgmann's seminal work *Modern Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* remains a high watermark in the discussion concerning technology, theology, and the intersection with human life. It is, however, not a *light* work. In preparation for engaging in class discussion, and towards developing a framework for understanding the role of technology in human affairs, students will read and digest the contents of Borgmann's book and generate a **2500-3000 word** critical review. Successful reviews will include summative elements but will retain a focus on the argument(s) presented in the book—their legitimacy and applicability especially. As such, this critical review remains a creative endeavor. Students are asked to assess what, in their estimation, is the most important argument / contribution of the book, not only in the context of the book itself, but also in the context of contemporary discourses concerning technology and contemporary life. Excellent reviews will demonstrate a mastery of the text, and thoughtful consideration of Borgmann's thesis and construction of his argument(s).

Borgmann Critical Review Due: 28 February 2022

Baking Bread / Breaking Bread – 20%

The philosophical bridge between Borgmann and Capon might appear quite wide indeed ("what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?"), but a close reading of both authors narrows the gap considerably. Indeed, the late Robert Farrar Capon embodied a life of "focal practices" in a way that few priest-theologians (or philosophers!) have. This assignment has 5 components. In his work *The Supper of the Lamb*, Capon includes a recipe for baking bread (pages 192-3). In an effort to encourage students to embody focal practices themselves, and apply the central argument of this course:

¹ The instructor of record reserves the right to alter the course outline and content at any time before, or during, the delivery of the course.

- 1) *Students will read *The Supper of the Lamb* in its entirety.*
- 2) *Students will bake a loaf of bread in accordance with Capon's recipe.²*
- 3) *Students will proceed to host a humble meal with friends or family (strangers are welcome and discretion is advised!), making use of the bread they have baked. Students are welcome to furnish the meal with any other nourishment they deem appropriate.*
- 4) *Students will conduct intentional conversation with their guests surrounding the topic of theology, technology, and contemporary life.*
- 5) *Students will write a 1500-2000 word report of their experience, highlighting the process, outcomes, and reflections in a creative and engaging synthesis. At the conclusion of the paper, students will include an attestation that they have read the text in its entirety.*

Students must include the questions posed to the guests at the dinner party to give a sense of the basis for conversation. Students are encouraged to reflect in a candid and informal manner about the experience, but importantly, will also link the assignment to the course readings, demonstrating a continuity of understanding and application. Creative presentations of the report are highly encouraged. Excellent reports will include all the above components, show theological insight into the process and outcomes, and consider the relevance of this activity to the question of technology and human activity.³

Baking Bread / Breaking Bread Report Due: 28 February 2022

Mid-Course Assignments:

Modern Technology In-Class Presentations - 20%

Students will, in groups corresponding to the total class number, present the contents of the reading from Craig Gay's *Modern Technology* for the day (1 chapter per day of class), and lead the class in a discussion. Students are expected to develop a seminar-level presentation which includes, but is not limited to, appropriate visuals (e.g., power-point), suitable handouts and appropriate facilitation of class interaction (suggestions for discussion, in-class activities, etc.). Students will be evaluated for their ability to comprehensively account for the contents of their respective chapters. Additionally, creativity and quality of presentation will account for the grade constitution. Groups will be selected by the instructor and announced via Canvas. In preparation for this presentation,

² This assignment poses a plenitude of logistical difficulties but remains an essential aspect of this course. Students are encouraged to reach out to the instructor of record to discuss any concerns or logistical difficulties with this assignment. Accommodations will be joyfully supplied on a 1:1 basis.

³ The execution of this assignment *in no way* entails an endorsement of violating any health ordinance (express or implied) with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. Students must discuss any relevant restrictions in their area of residence with the instructor of record; accommodations, as above, will be happily provided.

students are advised to be well-read in *Modern Technology* and prepared to communicate with each other in advance of their presentation. A suitable presentation will run between 45-60 minutes of class time. Finally, students will submit their presentation materials to the instructor of record for final evaluation.

Modern Technology Chapter Presentations: 28 February – 4 March 2022

Post-Course Assignment:

Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper – 40%

Students will write a **10-page** paper relating to the intersection of theology and technology. The description of this paper is deliberately vague, allowing students to explore a creative approach to asking and answering questions related to theology and technology. Furthermore, the broad nature of the topic should encourage students to research and write with a specific focus on their current vocational trajectory. Papers that explore theology and technology as it relates to ministry, counselling, leadership, philosophical or academic theology, and pastoral care are strongly encouraged. A *minimum* of 10 scholarly sources must be resourced for this paper including monographs, journal articles, systematic theologies, primary and secondary sources. **Students must approve their topic with the instructor of record by 4 March 2022.** Please submit the final paper to Canvas.

Theology and Technology Synthesis Paper Due: 29 April 2022

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the

student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Course Schedules

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Director of Student Success in person (L234 in the Library), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (egordon@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.).

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