

CT/MC614: Theology, Art, and Christian Formation
A Global Education Course Based in Northern Ireland
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dr. Wes Vander Lugt—Summer 2024

Contact Information

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Course Format and Schedule: This course unfolds throughout the full summer 2024 term and requires participation in a residency in Northern Ireland from June 23-July 2. There will be one initial meeting via zoom and some required reading, watching, and listening before the residency, but most written assignments will be completed after the residency and will reflect on the discussions and experiences in Northern Ireland as well as the readings.

Course Description: This course elucidates biblical and theological foundations for the arts and provides a holistic framework for how the arts can impact Christian theology and spiritual formation, with a focus on Irish artists, theologians, and faith leaders. Based on a variety of site visits and experiences over a ten-day period in Belfast and surrounding areas, students will consider the practical implications of this framework for personal discipleship, corporate worship, pastoral leadership, global mission, cultural engagement, and creative fidelity in everyday life.

Relation to Curriculum: This is an elective course that can satisfy the requirement for a Christian Thought elective in the M.Div. and M.A.C.T. programs and a Ministry elective in the M.Div. It has no prerequisites.

Relationship to Gordon-Conwell's Mission: This course serves the following institutional learning objectives:

- To encourage students to become knowledgeable of God's inerrant Word, competent in its interpretation, proclamation and application in the contemporary world. [Article 1]
- To maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines. [Article 2]
- To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry. [Article 3]
- To work with the churches towards the maturing of students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society. [Article 4]
- To provide leadership and educational resources for shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society. [Article 5]
- To develop in students a vision for God's redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate the strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship. [Article 6]

Learning Outcomes: Through participation in this course, students will:

1. Build a biblical theology of the arts as it relates to God's revelation and human formation.

2. Assess contributions of Irish theologians, artists, and places as it relates to a biblical and Christian framework for the arts.
3. Develop a vision for the role of the arts in Christian formation, discipleship, worship, ministry, and mission.

Assignments and Assessment:

1. 1350 pages of required reading and select responses (20%). [Related to Outcomes #1-3]
2. Participation in preparatory meeting and residency (20%) [Related to Outcomes #1-3]
3. Biblical Reflection Essay (20%) [Related to Outcomes #2-3]
4. Art Encounter Essay (20%) [Related to Outcome #3]
5. Art and Formation Catechism (20%) [Related to Outcomes #1-3]

Required Reading:

Heaney, Seamus. *Death of a Naturalist*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. [56 pages assigned: read one poem per day beginning the first day of the term]

Hunter, George G. III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010. [130 pages assigned]

Lewis, C. S. "Epilogue," in *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge, 2012. [11 pages assigned; access on Canvas].

Lewis, C. S. *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017. [368 pages assigned]

O'Donohue, John. *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. New York: Bantum Press, 2004. [249 pages assigned]

O'Siadhail, Michael. *Testament*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2022 [approximately 90 pages assigned: read at least one poem per day over the course of the term]

O' Tuama, Pdraig. *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2017. [96 pages assigned]

Saint Patrick. "Breastplate." 433 A.D. Access online on pages 39-41 of Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*.

Vander Lugt, Wesley. *Beauty Is Oxygen: Finding a Faith that Breathes*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2024. [200 pages assigned]

Required Watching and Listening

Branough, Kenneth. *Belfast*. Film, 2021. [Watch on Amazon Prime or get a copy from your local library.]

Bregley, Cormac. "O'Neill's March." 2020. Live musical performance in Kylemore Abbey. Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQLMUHQtkKg>

Lankum. "NPR Tiny Desk Concert." 2020. [Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCLFShptAIA>]

Lindsay-Hogg, Michael. *Waiting for Godot*. Film of the play by Samuel Beckett, 2001. [Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuxISg9tjHk&t=168s>]

U2. *Achtung Baby*. Musical album, 1991. [You can listen to the entire album on YouTube or Spotify.]

Supplementary Reading

Cahill, Thomas. *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. New York: Anchor, 1996.

Gribben, Crawford. *The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Miller, Rod. *C. S. Lewis and the Arts: Creativity in the Shadowlands*. Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2013.

Root, Jerry and Neal, Mark. *The Surprising Imagination of C. S. Lewis: An Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015.

Course Schedule:

- **Preparatory Zoom meeting:** Monday, May 20, 7pm EST (please let Dr Vander Lugt know immediately if this time does *not* work for you)
- **Full summer term reading (May 20-August 26)**
 - Heaney, *The Death of a Naturalist* (one poem a day beginning on May 20)
 - O'Siadhail, *Testament* (one poem a day beginning on May 20)
- **Pre-residency reading, watching, and listening (May 20-June 22)**
 - Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (with reading response)
 - Vander Lugt, *Beauty Is Oxygen* (with reading response)
 - Branagh, Kenneth. *Belfast*. Film, 2021. [Watch on Amazon Prime or get a copy from your local library.]
 - Bregley, Cormac. "O'Neill's March." 2020. Live musical performance in Kylemore Abbey. Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQLMUHQtkKg>
 - Lankum. "NPR Tiny Desk Concert." 2020. [Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCLFShptAIA>]
 - Lindsay-Hogg, Michael. *Waiting for Godot*. Filmed play, 2001. [Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuxISg9tjHk&t=168s>]
 - U2. *Achtung Baby*. Musical album, 1991. [You can listen to the entire album on YouTube or Spotify.]
- **Residency in Northern Ireland (June 23-July 2)**
 - See Itinerary toward the end of the syllabus for a more detailed schedule
 - O' Tuama's *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community* and St Patrick's "Breastplate"
- **Post-residency reading and assignments (July 3-August 26)**

- Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (with reading response); “Epilogue” to *An Experiment in Criticism*
- O’Donohue, *Beauty* (with reading responses)
- Biblical Reflection Essay
- Reading responses to poetry books
- Art Encounter Essay
- Art and Formation Catechism

Course Assignments:

1. **Reading Responses** (20% of grade)

For the first four reading responses, summarize the main point of the book and then articulate your biggest takeaway for life and ministry (500-600 words). For the two books of poetry (Heaney and O’Siadhail), choose your favorite poem, summarize what you think it means, and explain its significance for you and your Christian faith (300-400 words).

- Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (due **June 1**)
- Vander Lugt, *Beauty Is Oxygen* (due **June 15**)
- Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (due **July 20**)
- O’Donohue, *Beauty* (due **August 3**)
- Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* (due **August 17**)
- O’Siadhail, *Testament* (due **August 26**)

2. **Participation** (15% of grade): All class meetings and residency activities are required, and full participation is expected barring sickness or some other unforeseen circumstance.

3. **Biblical Reflection Essay** (20% of grade):

The purpose of this short essay (900-1200 words) is to develop a deeper biblical foundation for the arts through sustained attention to one art form as expressed in Scripture.

- a) Choose *visual art* OR *music* OR *poetry* as the focus of your essay.
- b) Identify 3-5 examples of this art throughout Scripture and briefly explain the formative purpose of each, paying attention to the immediate context as well as their place within the biblical story as a whole.
- c) Summarize what you discover and identify *at least three* purposes of this art form within the overarching story and mission of God.
- d) Due on **July 27**

4. **Art Encounter Essay** (20% of grade):

The purpose of this paper (**1200-1500 words**) is to encounter and engage a particular work of art and reflect on its formative power for you personally and its formative potential for others, drawing on readings and biblical reflection.

- a) Choose any work of art that you experienced during this course as the focal point of your reflection. It could be something you experienced in Northern Ireland or one of the required items you read or watched.
- b) Take as much time as you need to take in, be attentive, and understand this work of art, and when you feel like you've given it enough time, give it a little more. Interrogate both the work of art and yourself in the process. Use questions like: What is the artist trying to express and communicate? What purpose is this artwork serving, and how is it formative, whether positively or negatively? What effect did this artwork have on me (intellectually, emotionally, habitually, relationally, socially, spiritually, etc.), and what did I learn about God, myself, and the world?
- c) Write an essay in which you 1) describe the artwork you interacted with and your experience of the process, 2) reflect on the formative nature of the artwork for you personally, whether positively or negatively (drawing on the holistic framework developed in class) and 3) indicate how this artwork could be formative for other Christians, whether individually or corporately.
- d) In doing so, you are not required to do research beyond the assigned readings (although you may if that's helpful), but you are expected to make connections within your essay where appropriate to the assigned readings and lecture material.
- e) Due **August 10**.

5. **Art and Formation Catechism** (15% of grade)

The purpose of this paper is to summarize what you have learned in this class in the form of a catechism, which can serve as a reminder of your main takeaways and guide any future teaching and leadership on these issues. Feel free to draw on some language from the class, but also seek to rephrase things in your own words where possible.

- a) Write a catechism with short answers (1-3 sentences) to the following questions:
 1. In what sense can we understand God as an Artist?
 2. What are some art forms through which God revealed himself in the biblical story?
 3. What is the purpose of art within God's drama?
 4. How is the process of making and receiving art tainted by sin and evil?
 5. What is the heart of the second commandment?
 6. How did Jesus fulfill this commandment?
 7. How did Jesus utilize art to accomplish his mission?
 8. How can art be formative dispositionally?
 9. How can art be formative intellectually?
 10. How can art be formative emotionally?
 11. How can art be formative habitually?
 12. How can art be formative socially?
 13. How can art be formative doxologically?
 14. How can art be formative missionally?
 15. What role can the church play in supporting the formative role of the arts?
- b) Due **August 26**.

Grading Scale: The point values listed above mean that the total number of points available for the course is 100. Final letter grades will be applied with cutoffs as follows: A 95, A- 90, B+ 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D+ 67, D 63, D- 60, F below 60. A grade of A+ will be given very rarely, when the student's work is truly exceptional. (At Gordon-Conwell, a grade of A+ and a grade of A are both counted the same way in calculating the student's GPA. Thus, a GPA above 4.0 is not possible.)

Late work: All late work will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade per week beyond the due date, unless arrangements are made ahead of time. Extenuating circumstances will be considered as appropriate. Work turned in later than Monday, May 8 (the end of the spring semester) will normally require that an extension be approved by the Registrar's Office. If you anticipate a problem, contact me as soon as possible.

Document Formatting and Citation Style Requirements: All written assignments should be submitted as MS-Word or PDF files. (If you use a word processor other than MS-Word, convert the file to a PDF before submitting it.) Assignments should be 1.5 spaced with 1" margins on all sides of each page, and should be typed in Times New Roman 12 point or another font of similar size and appearance. Citations should preferably follow Turabian or Chicago style. Assignments must be submitted electronically by posting on the Canvas site. Hard-copies will not be accepted.

Residency Itinerary

Sunday, June 23 (Departure)

- Depart from city of origin to Belfast, Northern Ireland

Monday, June 24 (Arrival)

- Arrive in Belfast no later than 2pm
- Check in at Union Theological College (UTC) or hotel
- Tour of UTC and walk in Botanic Gardens
- Beginning of team meetings and discussions

Tuesday, June 25 (Belfast)

- Morning prayer
- Class lecture and discussion
- Ulster Museum

Wednesday, June 26 (Day Trip: North Coast)

- Morning prayer
- Antrim Round Tower
- Giant's Causeway

Thursday, June 27 (Day Trip: St Patrick)

- Morning prayer
- St Patrick Centre
- St Patrick's grave and Down Cathedral
- Walk a portion of St Patrick's Way

Friday, June 28 (Day Trip: Dublin)

- Book of Kells and Trinity College
- National Cathedral
- Literary tour

Saturday, June 29 (Belfast)

- Morning prayer
- Class lecture and discussion
- C. S. Lewis tour
- Special C. S. Lewis lecture

Sunday, June 30 (Belfast)

- Corporate worship
- St George's Market
- Evening concert

Monday, July 1 (Belfast)

- Morning prayer
- Class lecture and discussion
- Tour of Belfast art
- Special guest, artist Ross Wilson

Tuesday, July 2 (Departure)

- Morning prayer
- Check out by 11am
- Depart for onward journey or home

Syllabus Addendum

Academic Standards

Cheating and plagiarism are considered serious breaches of personal and academic integrity. Cheating involves, but is not necessarily limited to, the use of unauthorized sources of information during an examination or the submission of the same (or substantially same) work for credit in two or more courses without the knowledge and consent of the instructors. Plagiarism involves the use of another person's distinctive ideas or words, whether published or unpublished, and representing them as one's own instead of giving proper credit to the source. Plagiarism can also involve over-dependence on other source material for the scope and substance of one's writing. Such breaches in academic standards often result in a failing grade as well as other corrective measures. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook.

ADA Policy/ Disability and Accessibility

The seminary complies with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A student with a qualifying and authenticated disability who is in need of accommodations should petition the seminary in accordance with the stated guidelines in the Student Handbook. Any student who has a learning, orthopedic, sensory or psychiatric condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities and who would benefit from accommodations may be eligible for assistance. Please contact the Registrar who coordinates services for students with disabilities at the Charlotte campus. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the professor of the documented accommodations at the beginning of the semester.

Cancellation of Class

In the event the seminary has to cancel a class meeting (due to professor illness, etc.), the Registration Office will send out an email notification to all students registered in the affected course. If the cancellation occurs the day of the scheduled meeting, the Registration Office will also attempt to contact students via their primary phone contact on record. The professor will contact the students (via GCTS account) regarding make-up.

Extension Policy

Arrangements for submission of late work at a date on or before the end date for the semester or term (as noted in the seminary's *Academic Calendar*) are made between the student and professor. Formal petition to the Registration Office is not required in these cases.

However, course work (reading and written) to be submitted after the publicized end date for the semester or term must be approved by the Registration Office. An Extension Petition, available online, must be submitted to the Registration Office prior to the stated date. Requests received after this date will either be denied or incur additional penalty. For a full discussion of this policy, please consult the Student Handbook.

Grades

Faculty are expected to turn in final grades by January 15 for fall-semester courses, by June 15 for spring-semester courses, and by September 15 for summer-term courses. Grades are posted online

within twenty-four hours of receipt from the professor. Students are expected to check their student portal in order to access posted grades (unless instructed otherwise). Those individuals who need an official grade report issued to a third party should put their request in writing to the Registration Office.