

BIG QUESTION COURSE: FALL 2022

Theme: Attention

Mondays 1:30-4:20

Gardencourt 206

Instructors: J. Bradley Wigger (bwigger@lpts.edu) and Christopher Elwood (celwood@lpts.edu)

Course description

Who (or what) stole my focus?

Religious traditions, including the Christian, have often concerned themselves with questions of focus, concentration, the depth and the deepening of our experience.

- What dynamics are attention-draining?
- How do we resist patterns of distraction?
- How do we develop habits conducive to sensing more clearly what we conceive to be vitally important?

Theologians and scholars across disciplines affirm the importance of paying attention. It is intrinsic to the way we communicate and experience care, to praying and learning, to artistic endeavors and the sciences. Christian theologies posit that we are created to tend and attend to the created world. In this class we will explore the role of attention across various realms and contexts of theological and pastoral practice – for example, attending to people and situations, to biblical and theological texts, to cultural knowledge and political conditions, and attending to the presence of the Holy. Along the way, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of attention will be important, that is, the relationship between attention and what or who is valued. Who is rendered invisible? What is beautiful? What matters to our communities? What matters to the body of Christ?

In all we will be considering the ways in which faith itself may be a kind of attention giving rise to ways of attending in the life of faith.

Prerequisite: Systematic Theology. The course fulfills the Big Question course requirement for the MDiv. In certain circumstances, with agreement from Professor Wigger, the course may count towards the concentration in educational ministry.

Course goals

This course will provide an opportunity for students to integrate theological study with pastoral practice and build their capacity for contextual theological-ethical interpretation and analysis. The instructors will work with students to create a space for free, creative, and collaborative theological experimentation/play and discovery. Students will

1. Bring their passions for ministry and theological reflection into productive conversation with religious and cultural traditions,

2. Gain practice in collaborative theological methods,
3. Refine their skills of constructive theological and ethical reflection and expression,
4. Work towards a deeper understanding of the role of attention in the practices of ministry and the life of faith,
5. Continue processes of vocational discernment that are theologically grounded, ethically informed, and that draw on several theological disciplines (biblical studies, historical and constructive theology, ethics, practical theology).

The following student learning outcomes (SLOs) will be emphasized:

MDiv SLO 3: Students will be able to think theologically and ethically in relation to particular traditions and contemporary needs; and MDiv SLO 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to reflect critically and self-critically on relationships between Christian faith and various forms of systemic injustice. For MA(Religion) students the following may be relevant: MAR SLO5: Students will be able to conduct independent critical research and write clearly and convincingly on a topic of biblical, theological, historical, or ethical concern.

Course requirements

1. *Preparation and participation:* Students are expected to attend all class meetings, read all assigned material, and enter into thoughtful discussion of the matters the class takes up. Students are partners to one another in their work for this course, so conscientious preparation for each meeting is essential.

2. *Final essay or project.* The culminating project of the seminar will focus on an area of interest that relates in some way to the course topic. The project's theme should emerge from the student's own theological interests and passions. The final version may be expressed in the writing of a substantial essay (about 20 pages). It may also be a performance, a particular practice of ministry, a liturgical project, curriculum, or a work of art, in which case the project submitted would include some demonstration of the practice (where applicable) together with an interpretive reflection. The final determination of the project, its scope, and resources necessary to produce it will be the work of the student together with the instructors, in collaboration with the class as a whole. Students, thus, will have an opportunity to draw on the perspectives of their colleagues as the project is conceived and undertaken. To serve this end is the following work.

A. *Topic description:* Students will be prepared to introduce the topic on which they will work Week 2, with revised descriptions to follow. A pre-course meeting will take place with registered students in the spring in order to prompt ideas for the project over the summer.

B. *Draft Presentation and Bibliography/Resources*: Students will present to the seminar their work in progress (Weeks 8-9), submitting five days in advance of the presentation a written summary (4-6 pages) or sample of the work in progress (e.g., artwork or performance) for the class to discuss. In addition, students will prepare a brief annotated bibliography/resource list.

C. *Final presentation of final project*: in class (Weeks 10-12).

Project examples will be shared with students enrolled in the course at a preparatory meeting near the end of the spring semester, 2022. (See the calendar, below).

Evaluation and Grading

This course is graded on a pass/fail basis. In keeping with Seminary policy, a student who feels they need or would like to have a grade for this course is welcome to discuss this with the instructors. To pass the course, the student must submit all required assignments with a passing grade.

Required texts

Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997 edition. ISBN: 0689809654

Lawrence, Jacob. *The Great Migration: An American Story*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. ISBN: 0064434281

Odell, Jenny. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. Brooklyn, Melville House, 2019. ISBN: 1612198554

Recommended text

Hari, Johann. *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again*. New York: Crown, 2022. ISBN: 9780593138519

Other required reading assignments are indicated (*) in the calendar, below and are available on library reserve (or on Canvas). **In addition, there will be other short tasks or assignments each week in relation to your projects (for example, create a timeline for completion).**

Calendar of Classes and Assignments

****Preliminary Meeting: May 16**

This meeting is to help students orient themselves to the work of the course in the fall and to give them suggestions for reflection and some advance reading and listening for the summer months.

Early reading: Jenny O'Dell, *How To Do Nothing* (a required text for the class)

Early listening: "It's Not Your Fault You Can't Pay Attention. Here's Why." *The Ezra Klein Show* (podcast, 1 hour and 6 minutes)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-johann-hari.html> (interview with Johann Hari, author of *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again*; also available on other podcast platforms).

Week 1: September 12

Creating Something Beautiful

Crafting good projects
Attending to sacred texts
Devotions

Resources:

Andy Goldsworthy's Rivers and Tides: Working with Time (Documentary). Thomas Riedelsheimer, director. Docurama, 2004.
Booth, Wayne C.; Colomb, Gregory G.; and Williams, Joseph M. *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago, 1995/2003.
Core, Deborah. *The Seminary Student Writes*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000.
Epperly, Bruce, and Epperly, Katherine Gould. "Creating something Beautiful for God." Alban Institute: *The Alban Weekly*, 2008.
Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997 edition.
PBS News Hours: Andrew Goldsworthy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsezrORBFj0>
Zinsser, William. *Writing to Learn: How to Write – and Think – Clearly about any Subject at All*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Week 2: September 19

Attending to God and Neighbor

*Dykstra, Craig and Gardner, Freda. "Attending to the Presence of God," in *Presbyterian Outlook*, (Vol. 171, No. 16), April 24, 1989, 12-13.
*Weil, Simone. "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," in *Waiting for God*. (trans. by Emma Craufurd). New York: Capricorn, 1951.
*Peluso-Verdend, Gary. *Paying Attention: Focusing Your Congregation on What Matters*. Herndon, Virginia: Alban Institute, 2005. (Chapter 2)

Resources:

Aleshire, Daniel O. *Faithcare: Ministering to All God's People Through the Ages of Life*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia, 1988.

- Bien, Thomas. *Mindful Therapy: A Guide for Therapists and Helping Professionals*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006.
- Brady, Mark (ed.) *The Wisdom of Listening*. Somerville, MA: 2003.
- Boff, Leonardo. *When Theology Listens to the Poor*. (Robert Barr, trans.) San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.
- Gerkin, Charles V. *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode*. Nashville: Abindong Press, 1984.
- Jackson, Cari. *The Gift to Listen: the Courage to Hear*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003.
- Justice, Emma J. *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hyperion, 1994.
- Talvacchia, Kathleen T. and Pak, Su Yon. "Attentive Teaching in Diverse Communities and Lifelong Faith Formation," in *Lifelong Faith*, (Volume 2.3, Fall 2008)
- Wigger, J. Bradley. *The Power of God at Home: Nurturing Our Children in Love and Grace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. (Especially Chapter 1, "Paying Attention.")
- Wood, Charles M. and Blue, Ellen. *Attentive to God: Thinking Theologically in Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Week 3: September 26

Resisting the Attention Economy

- *Odell, Jenny. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. Brooklyn, Melville House, 2019.
- *Summaries of projects (under 200 words each)

Resources:

- Borgman, Albert. *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Gopnik, Alison. "What Is It Like to Be a Baby?" in *The Philosophical Baby*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009, especially chapter 4.
- Iyer, Pico. "The Joy of Quiet," *The New York Times*, 1.1.12. [Link](#)
- Jackson, Maggie. *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus. 2008.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Reclaiming Conversation*. New York: Penguin, 2015.
- Vendantam, Shankar. *Hidden Brain Podcast* (with Tim Wu), 1.1.18. [Link](#)

Week 4: October 3

Attention and Aesthetics – the art of Jacob Lawrence

- *Kidd, Richard, and Sparkes, Graham. "Jacob Lawrence: The Beauty of Struggle," in *God and the Art of Seeing: Visual Resources for a Journey of Faith*. Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2003.
- *Lawrence, Jacob. *Harriet and the Promised Land*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1997 edition.
- *Lawrence, Jacob. *The Great Migration: An American Story*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- *Nesbett, Peter. *Jacob Lawrence: The Complete Prints (1963-2000)*. Seattle: Francine Seders Gallery in association with University of Washington Press, 2005 (On library reserve shelf).

Resources:

- Dillenberger, Jane. *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*. New York: Crossroad. 1990.
- Edwards, Cliff. *Van Gogh and God: A Creative Spiritual Quest*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1989.
- Eusden, John Dykstra, and Westerhoff, John III. *Sensing Beauty: Aesthetics, the Human Spirit, and the Church*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998.
- Farley, Edward. *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001.
- Fujimura, Makoto. *Faith and Art: A Theology of Making*. Yale University Press, 2021.
- García-Revera, Alejandro. *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics*. Collegeville, Minnesota: 1999.
- McEntyre, Marilyn Chandler. *The Color of Light: Poems on Van Gogh's Late Paintings*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- Miles, Margaret. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1985.
- Nesbett, Peter, and DuBois, Michelle. *Jacob Lawrence, Paintings, Drawings, and Murals (1935-1999)*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000.
- Plantinga Pauw, Amy. "Broken Beauty" in *Mosaic of Louisville Seminary: The Intersection of Art and Theology*. Vol. 14, no. 1. Spring, 2007.
- Tillich, Paul. *On Art and Architecture*. New York: Crossroad. 1987.
- Jacob Lawrence: An Intimate Portrait* (VHS). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993.

Week 5: October 10

Prophetic Vision

- *Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets (Vol 1)*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. (Intro. and chs. 1-2)

- * _____ "Awe and Reverence," in *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism*. New York: Free Press. 1959, pp. 51-54.
- *NBC Interview (1972): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEXK9xcRCho> (37 mins)

Resources:

- Alves, Rubem. *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet*. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing, 2003.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel Remembered* (VHS). Radio & Television Dept., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993.
- Carvalhoes, Cláudio. "Oppressed Bodies Don't Have Sex: The Blind Spots of Bodily and Sexual Discourses in the Construction of Subjectivity in Latin American Liberation Theology." Nicolas Panotto, ed. *Indecent Theologians: Marcella Althaus-Reid and the Next Generation of Postcolonial Activists*. Borderless Press, 2016.
- West, Cornel. *Prophecy Deliverance*. Louisville: WJK, 2002.

Research and Study: October 17-21

Week 6: October 24

Poetic Vision

- *Selected poems drawn from below (or ones shared by students)
- * Cook, Carol J. "Emily Dickinson: Poet as Pastoral Theologian." *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 3 (June 2011), 421-435.
- *Jennings, Willie James. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. (Prologue: "Secrets")

Resources:

- Angelou, Maya. *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*. New York: Random House, 194.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998.
- Coal Black Voices: a documentary featuring the Affrilachian Poets* (VHS). Media Working Group, 2001.
- Finney, Nikky. *Rice*. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1995.
- Johnson, James Weldon. *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*. New York: Viking Press, 1927.
- Lorde, Audre. *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.

- Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldua, eds. *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table: women of Color Press, 1983.
- Oliver, Mary. *New and Selected Poems, Volume One*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Oliver, Mary. *New and Selected Poems, Volume Two*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.
- Oliver, Mary. *Thirst*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.
- Walker, Frank X. *Affrilachia*. Lexington, Kentucky: Old Cove, 2000.

Week 7: October 31

Attention and Wonder in the Community of Creation

Possible Field trip: *The Falls of the Ohio*

- * Jürgen Moltmann. *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*. San Francisco: HarperCollins. 1985. (Chapter 1)
- *Parker-Pope, Tara. "Natural Settings Help Brain Fatigue," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2008. [Link](#)
- *Richtel, Matt. "Outdoors and Out of Reach, Studying the Brain." *The New York Times*, August, 16, 2010. [Link](#)

Resources:

- Berry, Wendell. "Christianity and the Survival of Creation" in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Washington, D.C: Counterpoint. 2002.
- Berry, Wendell. *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998.
- Carson, Rachel. *The Sense of Wonder*. HarperCollins, 1998 edition. Photographs by Nick Kelsh.
- Dillard, Annie. "Seeing" in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Bantam Books, 1974.
- Eisley, Loren. *The Immense Journey*. New York: Vintage. 1959.
- Eiseley, Loren. "Science and the Sense of the Holy," in *The Star Thrower*. New York: Harcourt. 1978.
- Kingsolver, Barbara: *Small Wonder: Essays*. Harpercollins. 2002. (Especially "Fist in the Eye of God.")
- Paterson, Katherine. "In Search of Wonder," and "The Invisible Child," in *The Invisible Child*. New York: Dutton Children's Books. 2001.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Week 8: November 7

Short presentations

Week 9: November 14 Short presentation

Week 10: November 21 Final presentations

Week 11: November 28 Final presentations

Week 12: December 5 Final presentations

Seminary and Course Policies

1. Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. See for further assistance, <http://www.lpts.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-support-center/online-writing-lab/avoiding-gender-bias>.

2. Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

3. Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu) during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange

appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with one of the instructors.

4. Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

5. Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Three or more absences (1/4 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

6. Covid19 Measures: Social Distancing and Face Masking (if still applicable):

In accordance with LPTS's Covid19 mitigation policies, everyone meeting for a class must practice social distancing and wear a face mask at all times, including when speaking. Face masks must be worn properly, so as to fully cover the nose and the mouth.