

TH6/781 - A Secular Age  
Spring 2021  
Tuesday 9-12 a.m

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*Description/Purpose:*

This seminar takes the form of reading and discussing Charles Taylor's Templeton Prize Winning book, *A Secular Age*, as well as significant reviews/review essays and responses to it. The book chronicles the rise of Western secularity, signal features of which are the marginalization of religious institutions and their influence in public life. The central feature that Taylor identifies, however, is that belief in God has become a matter of choice, one human possibility among others. Taylor chronicles how it got this way in the North Atlantic and draws attention to what it might possibly mean for the world, as people struggle to make sense of their lives and give shape to their spiritual aspirations. Taylor, a Canadian Roman Catholic author, tells a story that Christian and other religious leaders need to hear as they attempt to live faithfully and well in a secular age. We will address how Taylor's story intersects with the experience of secularity in the Canadian West, and, in particular, British Columbia.

*Format:*

This is a seminar style class. The class will meet weekly for 3 hours over the course of 11 weeks. Seminar members will share in the leadership of the class as specified in the assignments/evaluation section below.

*Competence Objectives:*

In completing this seminar/course a student will be able to:

- 1) Describe, differentiate and critically assess central features of Western secularism(s) and its import for the life of religious communities
- 2) Demonstrate the ability to interact with scholarly literature on the topic of secularism and to communicate informed judgments in clear and effective form
- 3) Present to (lead) a group of academic peers in a critical discussion of a significant and influential academic text on the topic of secularism

*Assignments/Evaluation:*

This course engages in a reading of Taylor's *A Secular Age* and significant secondary commentary. The assignments for the course are as follows:

- 1) Each student will arrive having completed the assigned reading.

- 2) Each student will lead the seminar through one week's assigned reading (notes to be submitted)
- 3) Each student will submit at the end of the course:
  - a. a three-page bibliography of significant treatments of Taylor's book – book reviews, review essays or monograph treatments; the bibliography should be annotated with 3 to 5 sentence descriptors of the pieces included and
  - b. a response to the book in the form of their own critical and constructive and imaginative review essay that interacts with the body of scholarly literature on Taylor's book. This should include a section that specifically identifies what you believe to be valuable for the life of your religious community in a secular age. It should be approximately 12 pages. The deadline for the paper is the last day of the semester.

*Deadlines:*

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus for each course. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course. Particular faculty members will specify the extent to which repeated late submission of assignments will affect a student's final grade.

*Required Text:*

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Belnap Press, 2007 (pp. 874)