

## **PTHM468 Ministering in a Technological World**

*"It is no longer adequate to adopt the view that our responsibility as a society is to simply further scientific knowledge and enhance technological power. We must find a way of bringing fundamental humanitarian and ethical considerations to bear upon the direction of scientific development."*

*-The 14th Dalai Lama*

*"If we would have our creations be true, beautiful, and good we must attend to our hearts."*

*-Frederick P. Brooks*

### **Course Description**

This course will explore ethical questions raised by modern technologies and how to do ministry, particularly with youth, in a technologically saturated culture. We will consider technologies such as genetic engineering, AI, robotics, social media and video games, examining how these technologies alter our conception of what it means to be human and our relationships to each other, to the self, and to God.

### **Goals of the Course**

The goals of the course will be for each student:

1. to understand different models of how religion and technology might interact
2. to confront the ethical questions raised by the applications of technology
3. to be able to place current issues arising from modern technology in a larger context
4. to develop strategies to minister to those who are troubled by technology

### **Professor**

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### **Course Format and Pedagogy**

This course is a seminar. Think of it as an intensive book group. Each week you will be responsible for from 100 to 200 pages of reading. Do the initial reading rather quickly, then go back to passages you have marked for more thoughtful re-reading and reflection. Keep a reading journal so that when you come to class you will have questions, comments, and reflections handy. Discussions of readings will be supplemented by videos, guest speakers, and by occasional lectures. I will introduce each new topic, in order to prepare you for your reading.

## Required Texts

Twenge, *iGen*

Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion*

Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*

Brynjolfsson and McAfee, *Race Against the Machine*

Vest, *Friend of the Soul*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, online

Shelley, *Frankenstein*, online at multiple sites (even as a graphic novel!)

## Evaluation

The following criteria will be used to assess your written work in the course:

- accuracy in representing an author's viewpoint or presenting data
- organization and coherence of your argument
- a clear thesis
- appropriate grammar, spelling, and proofreading
- creativity or evidence of mulling over the question

Late papers will be accepted for up to one week but will lose points for each day they are late. Work that is more than one week late will not be accepted unless you have a prior arrangement with me.

Your grade will be based on the following:

Two papers	20% each
Major project and presentation	30%
Participation in class discussion and on-line	30%

Since this course is based on reading and discussion, attendance at all sessions is crucial. Your final grade will drop half a grade (2.5 points) for each unexcused absence after one. In case of illness or other unavoidable extremities, contact me as soon as possible.

## Reading Schedule and Reflection Questions

For each day you will be expected to have completed the readings listed under that date. Please keep a reading journal with your thoughts on each reading, any questions you have, a few great quotes (or page numbers), and your initial thoughts about the questions that are assigned. You will post your thoughts on one question on Canvas no later than 9 pm each Sunday in the appropriate discussion link and respond to at least two other postings by Monday noon.

### January 21      **What is Technology For? How do we pursue it responsibly?**

Read: 1. *Frankenstein* in any version (book, graphic book, movie) and two commentaries:

*Frankenstein*: <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/frankenstein.pdf>

<http://www.uzickagimnazija.edu.rs/files/Frankenstein%20graphic%20novel.pdf>

*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (best movie adaptation, on Netflix)

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2016/jun/16/what-frankenstein-means-now>

<https://aeon.co/essays/what-frankensteins-creature-can-really-tell-us-about-ai>

2. Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion*, chapter 1 and

[https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/15/faith-lost-if-adopt-technology-amish-resist-modern-world?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Outlook](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/15/faith-lost-if-adopt-technology-amish-resist-modern-world?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Outlook)

Write: 1. record in your reading journal your thoughts, quotations, questions, and reflections on each of 1 & 2 above.

2. Write a blog post of 2-3 paragraphs on one of the following questions and post on Canvas.

A. What did Viktor Frankenstein do wrong? In what ways was he an irresponsible scientist? How does this pertain to scientists today? If you were giving Viktor a bit of pastoral advice, what would it be?

B. Is technology morally neutral? Is it inevitable? Do we control technology or does it control us? How do these questions relate to both Viktor's experiment and technologies you are familiar with?

### January 28      **Ministering to iGen: Friendship, Loneliness, and Community in an On-line World**

Read: 1. Twenge, *iGen*, chapters 1 through 5 and

<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/social-media-and-sin>

<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/how-facebook-transforming-religion>

[https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/may/27/jaron-lanier-six-reasons-why-social-media-is-a-bummer?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Outlook](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/may/27/jaron-lanier-six-reasons-why-social-media-is-a-bummer?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Outlook)

2. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, chapters 1 and 2

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading and A and B below in reading journal, as usual.

2. Blog post on one of these two questions:

A. Twenge and Lanier tell us “what is going on” with social media and young people (or even us). Choose one issue Twenge or Lanier raises relative to social media. How has this aspect of social media changed life for young people (Osmer’s “what is going on”)? What traditions, either developmental or religious, can you draw on for Osmer’s second step—to help determine “why this is going on”?

B. How are the Internet and social media changing religion? Is this a change for the better or worse? Will Christianity as we know it survive the digital age? How? By adopting and co-opting technology or by providing a technologically free space?

#### **February 4     Ministering to iGen: Shopping, Sex, and Identity in an On-line World**

Read: 1. Twenge, *iGen*, chapters 6 through conclusion and

[https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/kids-apps-ads-smartphones/574588/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=family-weekly-newsletter&utm\\_content=20181103&silverid-ref=NDA3NDYzOTc3MDg2S0](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/11/kids-apps-ads-smartphones/574588/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=family-weekly-newsletter&utm_content=20181103&silverid-ref=NDA3NDYzOTc3MDg2S0)

<https://www.wired.com/story/wired-guide-to-internet-addiction/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia>

2. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, chapters 3 and 4

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading, as usual.

2. No blog post today. Instead write a 4-5 page paper that applies Osmer’s method to one of the issues raised by Twenge.

A. “What is going on?” How have the Internet and social media changed life for young people relative to this issue?

B. “Why is this going on?” Use a theory of psychological or moral development and/or a theory of religious anthropology (sinfulness, being in God’s image, etc.) to explain why what is happening is happening.

C. Now consider Osmer’s third step. What should be going on? What needs to change?

D. Finally, what could the church do to support this change on a social level? How might you minister to an individual or family that needs to make a change?

For example, a parent comes to you with a real concern that her child is addicted to one of the following: video game playing, social media, on-line pornography. Using Osmer’s steps, how might you respond in order to minister to this family (parents and child)?

**February 11 Authentic Relationship: Can You Love a Robot? Can It Love You?**

Read: 1. Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion*, chapter 3

2. The following on-line articles:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andreamorris/2018/09/25/prediction-sex-robots-are-the-most-disruptive-technology-we-didnt-see-coming/#10bdcc826a56>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/dec/13/sex-love-and-robots-the-end-of-intimacy>

<https://qz.com/1049138/sex-with-robots-is-on-the-cusp-of-becoming-a-worrying-reality-warns-a-robot-ethicist/>

[https://qz.com/871815/sex-robots-experts-predict-human-robot-marriage-will-be-legal-by-2050/?utm\\_source=qzfb](https://qz.com/871815/sex-robots-experts-predict-human-robot-marriage-will-be-legal-by-2050/?utm_source=qzfb)

[https://qz.com/1128586/obedient-cheerful-robots-are-making-us-terrible-at-relationships/?mc\\_cid=79bbe3da0c&mc\\_eid=3d5c1cbe6e](https://qz.com/1128586/obedient-cheerful-robots-are-making-us-terrible-at-relationships/?mc_cid=79bbe3da0c&mc_eid=3d5c1cbe6e)

3. Excerpts from Danaher and McArthur, *Robot Sex*, on canvas

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading and A and B below in reading journal, as usual.

2. Blog post on one of these two questions:

A. How would you counsel a person considering a robotic sex partner? A robotic companion? What factors (age, infirmity, life situation) might make a difference? What would you say to a parishioner who wanted you to officiate at a wedding with a sex bot?

B. Is love or a romantic relationship with a robot real? What makes a real relationship? How important is emotion? Would robots “have” emotions or just fake them? Do relationships with interactive robots or even Siri or Alexa mess up our relationships with other humans? Where do you “draw the line” and why?

**February 18 Identity and Work: Vocation and Stewardship**

Read: 1. Brynjolfsson and McAfee, *Race Against the Machine*

2. Vest, *Friend of the Soul*, Introduction through chapter 3

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/taming-demon>

“Taming the Demon: How Desert Monks Put Work in Its Place”

<https://aeon.co/ideas/how-to-reduce-digital-distractions-advice-from-medieval-monks>

“How to Reduce Digital Distractions”

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading and A and B below in reading journal, as usual.

2. Blog post on one of the following:

A. "What is going on?" How have computers changed work, the economy, and Western society? Which factors or issues that Brynjolfsson and McAfee raise are likely to most affect or concern your parishioners or community? In what ways? What is the proper place for work and vocation for our identity and our place in community?

B. Do two of exercises 1 & 3 on pages 50-51 and 2 & 3 on pages 98-99 of Vest. What was your experience? What did this teach you of work? Of stewardship? How does technology help or hinder your work and/or your stewardship of things?

### **February 25 Technology Goes Global: Taking Care of Our World**

Read: 1. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

2. Paul Douglas: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/reuter\\_lectures/1/](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/reuter_lectures/1/)

3.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/opinion/green-new-deal-ocasio-cortez-.html?emc=edit\\_th\\_190216&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=18584190216](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/opinion/green-new-deal-ocasio-cortez-.html?emc=edit_th_190216&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=18584190216)

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading and A and B below in reading journal, as usual.

2. Blog post on one of the following:

A. Consider Osmer's first two questions: "What is going on? Why is it happening?" Why do many religious people dispute or deny climate change? What has religion got to do with this? What might theories of human moral or psychological development or theological anthropology say about why this is happening? Does this point to a way to overcome people's resistance?

B. What does Pope Francis think "should be happening?" Suppose you were asked to give a sermon or teach an adult education class on Earth Day. How might you go about addressing climate change and creation care to your parishioners? What religious sources and themes would you use? Give us a preview.

### **March 11 Biotech: When Healing the Sick Raises Hard Questions**

Read: 1. Meilaender, *Bioethics*, chapters 1 through 6

2. <https://cbhd.org/issues> Choose two different issues on this page of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. Read several resources on each issue.

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading and A and B below in reading journal, as usual.

2. Blog post the following:

A. Consider Osmer's first two questions: "What is going on? Why is it happening?"

Describe for us what the new technology is that raises or changes and ethical dilemma in medical care. How has the technology made medical decisions more difficult? What are the pros and cons of using this technology?

B. How would you respond? If you were pastor or chaplain to a family dealing with one of the issues raised by Meilaender or on the Center for Bioethics website, how would you respond? What might you say or do?

### **March 18      Biotech: Should We Build a Better Human?**

Read: 1. Meilaender, *Bioethics*, chapters 10 through 12

2. Herzfeld, *Technology and Religion*, chapter 2

3. *The Transhumanist Reader*, excerpts on Canvas

Write: 1. Reflections and questions on all the reading, as usual.

2. No blog post today. Instead write a 4-5 page paper that applies Osmer's method to one of the issues raised in your reading.

A. "What is going on?" Describe one way technology might be used to enhance the human person.

B. "Why is this going on?" Use a theory of psychological or moral development and/or a theory of religious anthropology or Biblical hermeneutic to explain why this enhancement is desired by some.

C. Now consider Osmer's third step. What should be going on? What position would you take on this type of enhancement and why? Support your position theologically.

D. Finally, how might society, the church, or you personally address this issue?

### **March 25      What Have We Missed? Technology and Morality Today**

Read and Write: Your turn. Find a technological issue that is in the news today. Read several sources about this issue. Now tell us:

- A. What is happening? What is the technology?
- B. Why is it religiously, ethically, or morally relevant?
- C. What is being done about it right now?
- D. How would you address this issue with a parishioner or in front of a congregation?

**April 1 No class—Work on Your Final Project and Presentation**

**April 8-15 Presentations**

**April 29 Finish Presentations and Sum Up: How Do We Minister/Live in a Technological World?**

### **Pastoral Ministry/Research Project**

The goal of this assignment is to allow students to integrate practice and theory, employing a practical theology method that is attentive to lived experience, contemporary scholarship, theological interpretation, and pastoral response.

Students will begin by choosing a focus and theme for their research or ministry project. Possible approaches and topics include but are not limited by the following:

#### **1. Religious approaches to technology:**

- Focus on the work of a person: Jacques Ellul, Albert Borgmann, John Haught, Ted Peters, etc.
- Look at different bioethical or computer ethics related institutions and examine or compare their approaches
- Look at a particular issue outside technology and how technology helps, hinders, or causes: e.g. school shootings, the opioid crisis, political/religious tribalism

#### **2. An examination of ministry to special populations:**

- Ministry to the unemployed
- Beginning-of-life Care
- End-of-life Care
- Technology and the Aged
- Technological Abuse and Addiction (e.g. social media, internet, gambling, pornography)
- Technology and Children

#### **3. An examination of theological and pastoral issues related to technology:**



- What it means to be human
- What it means to have authentic relationship
- What is immortality
- What is lost with a technology
- How technology enhances or hinders belief, transmission of information, prayer, spiritual life, worship

### **Option One: Ministry Project**

In the ministry project, the student will design and lead a project in a local context, such as a [parish](#), [senior living community](#), [campus ministry](#), or [hospital/hospice](#). The ministry could include an educational session, retreat, small group process, sermon series, etc.

#### **Written Reports for the Ministry Project**

1. **Design:** Identify the group and topic you want to address. Secure participants and schedule the event(s). What are your goals? What activities will you do? What will you teach? How will you integrate story-telling, theological reflection, and biblical perspectives?
2. **Research:** Identify at least 2 written resources for your project in addition to course materials.
3. **Interviews:** Interview 2 ministers who carry out this ministry: what are their approaches? Challenges? Resources?
4. **Implementation:** By April 1, carry out the project. You should have a minimum of 5 hours of contact time with people.
5. **Evaluation:** Once the project has been carried out, reflect on the following questions:
  - a. What ideas and experiences most engaged participants?
  - b. What were people least attracted to?
  - c. What were your strengths in carrying out the project?
  - d. What could you improve upon?
6. **Written report.** Prepare a 6-8 page written report that includes the design, research, interviews, implementation, and evaluation of your project.

### **Option Two: Research Paper or Podcast**

A good research project poses a question, problem, or issue that faces people and seeks to explore how experts approach the issue. In this paper, students will compare 2-3 perspectives. The project has 4 parts:

1. **Identify the research question.** You will need to change a topic into a research question. there are research question generators on-line to help you do this (e.g. <https://umich.instructure.com/courses/824/modules/items/79077> )
2. **Create a bibliography.** Identify readings and sources on your question.
3. **Conduct the research.** Select the readings and authors to be discussed in the paper. Focus on 2 or 3 main approaches.
4. **Interviews.** Identify 2 or 3 people who are experts to interview and discuss your project.
5. **Write the paper or record the podcast.**
  - Write a 6-8 page paper that sets out the research question, discusses various points of view, evaluates the perspectives, and reaches a conclusion.
  - Record a 10-15 minute podcast that does the same. If you do a podcast, you will also need to submit a written outline and bibliography.

#### **Oral Research Presentation.**

No matter which option you choose, you will be required to prepare and present a **40-45 minute class presentation**. The purpose of the assignment is to develop communication skills in teaching other ministers or parishioners. Each presentation will summarize basic information about the topic and how caregivers can think about approaching the situation. The presentation should include the following:

- Describe the question you are approaching. Offer expert definitions of the issue and explain its importance/relevance
- Offer a theological interpretation, based on reputable sources and make connections with other course materials
- Select an article or book excerpt for the class to read and lead a discussion of the reading (to be posted the week before)
- Prepare a list of resources for the class
- Gather resources for prayer and lead class prayer related to the topic

**All written reports and papers should be double-spaced, include footnotes and bibliography, and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines (see Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., University of Chicago Press, 2013) <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>**

**Each student is required to discuss and finalize project plans with the instructor. Students will need to meet with the professor by February 15 to discuss his or her project choice.**

