Course Profile

CC/RHTH 517 (A)  Christianity in Asia
Instructor: Peter Vethanayagamony  Semester/Year: Spring 2020

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Christianity in Asia is as old as Christianity itself. However, not enough attention has been paid to the history and theology of Christianity in Asia. This course attempts to correct this imbalance and examines the historical encounter between Asia and Christianity against the backdrop of the broader contacts between Asia and the West. It explores in particular the role of Christianity in the political and social changes as well as cultural transformations of modern Asia. Besides acknowledging various agencies that were instrumental in taking Christianity during the modern period, it attempts to examine the dynamics at work in those who received the message, the new forms of Christianity the converts constructed out of the gospel message, and the materials of their indigenous culture.

Given the geographical vastness of Asia and diverse cultures, languages, and religions the course focuses the story of India, China, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines and Korea during the Modern Period.

RATIONALE

Why is this course offered in the curriculum? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning competencies does it address?:

The advice Job had, “Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers (and mothers) learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?” (Job 8:8-10), is highly instructive to all those who prepare for various ministries in the church and society locally as well as globally. The ecclesial landscape of the United States is shifting and the voices of Christians from around the world can be heard not only in faraway lands but also in our own backyards. The implications and opportunities of these changes for local ministry are enormous. In the given situation adequate acquaintance and appreciation of World Christianity is of utmost importance for effective ministry in this glocal age. By connecting on multiple levels with “living voices of people who just happened to be dead,” and glean wisdom from these “clouds of witnesses” from scores of generations and regions from Asia, we not only know about the past; we may also learn how to live more faithfully in the present. It is hoped that understanding of how Asian Christians have addressed the realities of minority status, poverty, marginalization of the peoples, political changes, imperialism, modernization,
religious and cultural pluralism, would enable us carry out the ministry and mission of the church in our time and context more effectively.

This class will address a number of LSTC’s stated learning competencies.

This course meets LSTC’s curricular goals by providing learning opportunities for a student to develop and to demonstrate:
• Knowledge of and ability to communicate his/her Christian heritage in its rich diversity (LSTC MATS Learning Outcome #3) and in its Lutheran expressions (LSTC M.Div/MAM Learning Outcome #3).

Although this course is an opportunity to focus on religious heritage, it is assumed that one’s religious heritage is always in a reciprocal relationship with spiritual formation, biblical exegesis, and visionary ministerial and public leadership. As such, this course serves LSTC’s curricular goals by providing students the opportunity to integrate study in religious heritage with:
• The embodiment of spiritual vitality and personal/professional integrity (LSTC Learning Competency #1); and
• An understanding of the Bible that is thorough and comprehensive (LSTC MATS Learning Competency #2) in order to effectively communicate and embody the witness of Scripture in ministry (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Outcome #2).

OUTCOMES
(What difference will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

1. The participants in the class will be able to:
   a. recognize that Christianity today is essentially polycentric and multi-traditional and not Euro-American centric and homogenous.
   b. recall the contributions of significant Asian leaders that have shaped Christianity in their respective context.
   c. describe and identify the contours of Christianity within the particular Asian cultural centers.
   d. analyze and explain the heritage and traditions of Asian Christianity.
   e. assess the influence and role of Asian Christianity in the global church and within diasporic communities.
   f. differentiate the context and then compare how Asian Christians from different countries have addressed the realities of poverty, marginalization of the peoples, political changes, imperialism, modernization, pluralism, and many cultures of Asia from their own theological perspective and convictions.
   g. Formulate ways and means of appreciating and welcoming Christians from other parts of the globe, especially Asia, and embrace them as siblings in Christ, members of the body of Christ and Communion of saints, whom one may lovingly interrogate and from one can learn.
   h. Recognize and interpret a range of contextual theologies developed in Asia.
i. Create appropriate spiritual practices for today both for the individual and collective life in the light of the Christian past.

j. Communicate the “results” of historical and theological analysis in both oral and written forms.

k. Recognize the ecumenical developments in Asia.

2. The participants shall also have learned and practiced skills:

a. of reading primary texts (in English translation); reflecting on these, bringing them into a conversation with contemporary concerns; and articulating these reflections.

b. of finding up-to-date information and responsible scholarship about topics of interest, and making use of these resources through analysis and interpretation to enrich conversations about the meaning, in past and present, of being a disciple of Jesus, or of being the Church in mission.

Strategies for Learning:
How shall we go above achieving the above Outcomes?

1. **Regular Active Participation and Attendance!** You are required to attend each class fully prepared to participate in that day’s lecture. This means beyond just showing up, you are expected to have done the reading and be ready to engage actively in the day’s work. To assist in this, you are expected to come with a (handwritten or typed) page of notes with questions/comments based on that session’s assigned readings. The following are some questions to think about as you do the assigned readings: What did you find well-articulated? What did you find intriguing? What did you find troubling or annoying? In what way has your previous understanding of Christianity in Asia been challenged, affirmed or modified? Did you learn anything from these sessions that seems relevant for today in your ministry setting? These notes are to be posted in the course-website for others to comment and learn 24 hours before the class. These notes to be organized under three heads (1) Five significant insights gleaned from the readings; 2. Three questions/issues you want to explore further and 2. Two implications for ministerial and personal life today.

2. **Assigned Readings:** The readings from Moffett and handouts posted in the course-website will be important background for understanding the lectures and student presentation. The readings from Koschorke (collection of primary sources) form the basis for our designated class discussion time (either in small group or in plenary).

3. **Mid-semester Exam:** Successful completion of the take-home mid-semester exam (closed book). The exam is self-monitored and to be taken on the honor code system.
4. **Biographical Essay:** Submit a biographical essay no longer than five pages, in which you reconstruct the historical context of a prominent Asian Christian leader and his/her contribution to the church and society.

5. **Research Project:** A 10-15 page term paper on a controversy/issue, event, person or movement within the history of Asian Christianity in the modern period. The student must submit a 250-word topic proposal by March 31st for review, approval, possible redirection, and bibliographic suggestions. Your proposal should provide a justification for your research [why is this topic important to you?], a thesis statement, working bibliography, and an outline [your course of argument].

6. **Class Presentation and Discussion:** Each student should sign-up for leading the class-discussion at least once. This includes 20-30 minutes presentation highlighting any one or more of the major events, persons, and issues in a given Asian country, and leading the subsequent discussion.

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**Assessment**

(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

1. **Regular feedback from the instructor:** Written feedback on the biographical essay and the research proposal will be provided in a timely manner (normally within a week); feedback on the final papers will be provided in two weeks. All papers will be graded with attention to:
   a. The student’s *comprehension of the material read*;
   b. The *quality of reflection*, including the student’s capacity to connect issues in the history of the church with contemporary issues of Christian life and practice;
   c. *Clarity of articulation and writing*.

2. **Grading Procedure**

   - Biographical Essay 20%
   - Mid-Semester Test 25%
   - Final Paper 30%
   - Class Presentation, participation and discussion 25%

3. **Student Evaluation of the course:** The Register will release a student’s grade until online course evaluation has been completed. This evaluation will include the student’s evaluation of the course and instructor as well as a self-assessment as to how much progress was made toward the Outcomes listed above.

4. **Contribution to the student’s portfolio:** The final paper should be thought of as a candidate for inclusion in the student’s portfolio, as an artifact of progress towards LSTC’s stated Learning Outcomes.

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**Bibliography [Required Texts]:**


Online Readings: Selection of journal articles/essays on issues related to the Asian Christianity posted in the course website. [Compliments the story lines of Moffett’s book]

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**Outline and Content of the course**

1. Religio-cultural and political context of Asia at the eve of sixteenth century
2. Christianity in India
   a. The Beginnings of both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity and Indian responses
   b. Major Issues
      i. Caste and Christianity
      ii. Attempts to Indigenize Christianity
      iii. Colonialism and Christianity
      iv. Ecumenical Developments
      v. Nationalism and Christianity
      vi. Dalits’ Response to Christianity and the Emergence of Dalit Theology
3. Christianity in China
   a. The Beginnings of Christianity and Chinese Response
   b. Major Issues
      i. Colonialism and Christianity
      ii. The Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant)
      iii. House Church Movement
4. Christianity in Korea
   a. The Beginnings of Christianity and Korean Response
   b. Major Issues
      i. Colonialism, Nationalism and the Church
      ii. Culture and Christianity
      iii. Rapid growth of Christianity
      iv. Fundamentalism and the Rise of Minjung Theology
5. Christianity in Japan
   a. The Beginnings of Christianity and Japanese Response
   b. Major Issues
      i. Persecution of Christians
      ii. The Hidden Christians
      iii. Pluralism and Christianity
      iv. Ecumenism: Formation of NCCJ and UCC in Japan
iv. Church and State Relations
6. Christianity in Philippines
7. Christianity in Indonesia
8. Ecumenical Developments in Asia.