Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

RHTH-406 Grace Incarnate: Lutheran Confessional Heritage
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Course Profile

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Classroom 208

Course Description
Lutheranism began as a reform movement in Wittenberg University, grew to become a world-wide confessional communion and faith tradition. What holds together global Lutheranism are its confessional documents. This course will examine the content and scope of the Lutheran confessional writings and their normative nature for Lutheran ministry, theology and church life today. As historical documents, we will allow the context of the writings to illuminate their meaning and theological commitments. Recent ELCA ecumenical agreements reached as a result of inter-confessional dialogues are also reviewed and assessed in the light of the Confessional documents. This course is intended to serve as a thematic introduction to, and exploration of, the Lutheran confessional writings, and it will encourage the learners to consider their implications as identified above.

Course Rationale and Description
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?)

Lutheran confessional documents and Scripture are considered normative resources for the mission and life of the church by the ELCA. This reflects the conviction of the ELCA that the Book of Concord is a faithful witness of Christ and of the gospel. Because the rostered leaders of ELCA are expected to preach, teach and live in accordance with Scripture and the Confessions, it is crucial that those leaders are well acquainted with the confessional writings, that they evaluate and interpret them with the gospel as the hermeneutical key, that they explore their own faith commitments in light of the Confessions and that they consider the meaning and significance of the confessional subscription for their own ministries and lives of faith. 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:
- Conveying a developed sense of being a person created and called to live ethically in community. (ELCA);
- Conveying a developed sense of being created and called to give witness to Jesus Christ, Trinitarian faith, care for creation, and community with human neighbors. (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Competency #1);
- Drawing the wisdom of our forebears in the faith in Scripture into active engagement with emerging challenges. (LSTC MDiv/MAM Learning Competency #2); and
- Within and around each of these competencies, manifests the ability to know, interpret, and affect particular situations, values, and meanings through methodologically grounded historical, socio-cultural, ethical readings/analysis of one’s own denomination and broadly cultural-historical traditions. (LSTC MDiv/ Learning Competency #5).

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

1. The participants in the class on successful completion of the course will have:
   a. understood the context within which the Lutheran Confessions were written.
   b. recognized the contextual and normative natures of confessional writings.
   c. clarified and evaluated the theological witness of the Confessions in the light of the gospel.
   d. elucidated the meaning of confessional subscription and its significance for their ordination/consecration vows.
   e. evaluated the ecumenical significance of the Lutheran Confessions in light of the catholic tradition.
   f. examined the meaning and importance of a Lutheran Christian identity.
   g. developed abilities to communicate Lutheran theology that are faithful to Scripture, ecumenically sensitive and intellectually defensible effectively and rationally, both orally and in writing.
   h. clarified the role of the confessional heritage in shaping their own theological development and faith commitments.

2. We shall have learned and practiced a variety of skills:
   a. of reading primary texts (in English translation); reflecting on them, bringing them into a conversation with today’s contexts for ministry; and articulating these reflections in oral and written form.
   b. of finding up-to-date information and responsible scholarship about topics of interest, and then making use of that scholarship, through analysis and interpretation, to enrich the conversation about the meaning, past and present, of being a disciple of Jesus, or of being the Church in mission.

It is hoped that students will leave this course with an abiding appreciation for the Lutheran heritage and will find joy in its study. This joy includes a readiness to be surprised and delighted by it, confidence in its relevance to the ministry of the Gospel today.
Strategies for Learning:
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the learning competencies?)

1. Each session [other than the one devoted to the historical background of the confessional writings, delivered as a lecture by the instructor], will be led by an assigned student/s. Student presentations will be followed by group/class discussions. In other words, the class takes a seminar format. Students will sign up for the topics they choose to do for presentation and class discussion by December 15. This course will be treated for what it is: a graduate level class!

Students are expected to send the full script of their presentation to the instructor at least a week before the presentation for approval, preferably by January 3rd, and distribute their lecture notes by email to their classmates at least 24 hours before the class.

2. Assigned Readings: For every session you will have assigned reading. Read carefully and critically and take good notes. Readings are divided into “required” and “recommended.” Please use your own judgment concerning how much of the “recommended” reading you are able to do that week. One way of making maximum out of the recommended readings is, dividing them among the fellow students, who would share detailed notes with the entire class. Student presenter of the day is expected to include the recommended readings for their assigned presentation and discussion, and to include reference to those insights in their presentation.

3. Regular Active Participation in the Class: Students are required to attend each class fully prepared to participate in that day’s class. This means beyond just showing up, students are expected to have done the readings and be ready to engage actively in the day’s work.

To assist in this, students are encouraged to come up with a page or two of notes with insights gleaned from the readings, questions/comments based on that session’s assigned readings and later post them in the course-website. The following are some questions to think about as one does 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 Lutheran theology been affirmed or modified? What are some of the questions and issues you wish to explore with the class? These notes are to be posted in the course website 24 hours before the class. Students are encouraged to read these postings and enter into conversation with each other in the course website.

You are expected to post at least four reading reflections in the course website for fellow students to comment and discuss. You are also required to comment on at least five postings of fellow students. Please refer to the model posted in the course website for the posting.

Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. Unexcused absence will adversely affect your final grade and more than two absences, including the excused, may result in a failing grade. Please note, Federal Student Loan guidelines require that more than one unexcused absence be reported to the Registrar –and may have consequences for loan eligibility.
4. A reflection paper on confessional authority and subscription [about 1250 words].
   Please refer to p. 7 for specific instruction regarding the paper. [Due date Jan. 9th]
5. A confessional analysis of one of the ecumenical statements [about 1500 words]. Please
   refer to p. 8 for instruction regarding the paper [Due Date Jan. 24th].
6. Take-home Examination: The exam will be taken on the honor system in one sitting. It is
   a closed book exam and self-monitored. The student blocks out 180 minutes to complete
   the exam. You may send your completed exam as an email attachment [Exam Date January
   26th].
7. Term Research Paper:
   Submit a 10-15 page term paper on a topic of interest to you pertaining to a Lutheran
   theological theme. Please refer to p. 11 for instruction regarding the paper. You are
   encouraged to rework on your presentation topic or an aspect of it for your final paper.
   [Proposal due on February 8th and the paper due on February 20th.]

Bibliography:

Required Text:

Arand, Charles P., James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb. The Lutheran Confessions: History and

Ecumenical Documents of the ELCA:
   A. "Called to Common Mission" - A relationship of full communion with The Episcopal
      Church
      http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/agreement-full-communion-called-common-mission

   B. A Formula of Agreement - Between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the
      Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of
      Christ on Entering into Full Communion on the Basis of A Common Calling
      https://www.pcusa.org/resource/ecumenical-formula-agreement/

   C. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification - The Lutheran World Federation and
      the Catholic Church
      http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_do
      c_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

      97808066627106]
      You may download this document as well
      http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Vision_Of_The_ELCA.pdf

Gassmann, Günther, and Scott Hendrix. Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions.


**Recommended Text:**


**Helpful Web Resources**

ELCA
[http://www.elca.org/communication/brief.html](http://www.elca.org/communication/brief.html)

CONCORDIA HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

LUTHERAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
[http://www.lccarchives.ca/](http://www.lccarchives.ca/)

THE SWEDISH COLONIAL SOCIETY

WORKS BY AND ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER AND OTHER LUTHERANS [Wittenberg Project]

TEXTS RELATED TO REFORMATION [An extensive collection of links to electronic versions of works by Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, Zwingli, Bullinger, Mennonites, Schwenkfelder, and Ignatius Loyola.]

**Assessment**

(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the learning competencies?)
1. **Regular feedback from the instructor:** Written feedback on the student presentation drafts, reflection essays and research proposal will be provided in a timely manner (normally within a week); feedback on the final paper will be provided before the end of February. All papers will be graded with attention to:
   a. The Student’s ability to locate appropriate scholarly sources;
   b. The student’s comprehension of the materials read;
   c. The quality of reflection, including the student’s capacity to connect issues in the confessional documents with contemporary issues of Christian life and practice;
   d. Clarity of articulation and writing;
   e. Proper documentation.

2. **Grading Procedure**
   Reflection Papers 30% [2 X 15]
   Final Exam 25%
   Final Paper 15%
   Class Presentation 20%
   Call participation 10%

3. **Student Evaluation of the course:** The Registrar will not release a student’s grade until the 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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**Abbreviations Used in the Syllabus**


G&H= Gassmann, Günther, and Scott Hendrix. *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*


The rest of the abbreviations are books within the *Book of Concord* [Kolb, Robert, and Timothy J Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord*]

AC= The Augsburg Confession (Confessio Augustana)

Ap= Apology of the Augsburg Confession

FC= Formula of Concord

SA= Smalcald Articles

FC Ep= Epitome of the Formula of Concord

FC SD= Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

LC= Large Catechism

SC= Small Catechism