Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Course Profile
RHTH/CC 410 Christianity/ies in India in Its/Their Religiously Plural Context
[Travel Seminar]
J Term 2020

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This travel seminar to India aims to provide participants an introduction to and experience of Christianity in India in its religiously plural context. The course combines the rigors of a traditional seminar with the excitement and intensity of nearly round-the-clock learning and camaraderie on a trip.

During our sojourn in Hyderabad, India, we will have opportunities to see how people of different faith traditions live in harmony, what are the challenges and opportunities for the leaders in the church to lead the Christian community to peacefully coexist and promote religious harmony. Though the major focus is on Christian-Muslim relations and dialog, inter-faith relations and dialog in general is always considered in our visits to different places of worship, like visit to Christian churches, Hindu temples, Sikh Gurdwaras etc., lectures from experts of different faith and conversations. Students will also have opportunities to meet with people and leaders of different faith traditions and community, and discuss with them in a very non-threatening way the challenges of living in a multi-religious context and acquire skills needed to carry on dialog. In brief, this is a hands-on learning opportunity about different religious traditions in dialog. Besides the interfaith relations lectures by seminary and university professors would address various issues facing the Indian society today and how the church is responding to it.

During our sojourn in Guntur, we will have prospects for focusing on church life, with special reference to the Lutheran expression of Christianity in that region. We will spend a day in Bethel Theological Seminary interacting with the seminary community to get to know the ministerial formation and church life in India.

During our sojourn in Bangalore, a wide exposure to the religious tapestry of India will be pursued through our visits to different places of worship and in our lectures from experts of different faith traditions. Students will have opportunities to meet with people of different faith traditions and communities, and to discuss with them in a safe environment the challenges of living in a multi-religious context; the goal is to acquire the skills needed to carry on dialogue.

During our sojourn in New Delhi besides being introduced to North Indian culture and North Indian culture, we shall visit Taj Mahal one of the seven wonders of world.

The study tour abroad will be around 14 days. There will be 5 hours of class meetings prior to the study tour abroad to orient ourselves with Indian culture and customs and religions in India and a 2-hour class meeting following the travel abroad. By its very nature, this travel seminar encourages students to discover new areas of knowledge while nurturing intellectual and personal maturation. Exposure to a culture and literature outside of the United States invites
students to think critically about the past, present, and future of people whose experiences differ substantially from their own. Active participation, a sense of community among members, and critical thinking will all happen on a constant basis as we travel, study, and think together in this seminar.

LOCATION

Hyderabad is located in the State of Telangana in the central part of India. The old city has Old Hyderabad City has 65% Muslim majority and the rest other Indian religious communities. Urdu [a modified form of Arabic] and Telugu are the two major languages of communication in the city, though significant number of young people will speak English as well.

Guntur is a city in the state of Andhra Pradesh with heavy Christian presence besides other religions. Telugu is the main language of communication in the city.

Bangalore is the capital city of Karnataka. Our travel between these three cities will provide a more rural experience and a glimpse to the day today life of the people. Kannada and Tamil are the main languages of communication in the city.

New Delhi is the capital of India and Hindi is the local language.

Course Rationale

(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning competencies does it address?):

This class will address a number of LSTC’s stated Learning Competencies for its masters programs. For example, it will be an opportunity for Spiritual formation as they get to know spirituality in other Christian and non-Christian traditions (Competency #1), learn arts of ministry from how Christians in another region have carried out their tasks of ministry and mission (Competency #4), and “think contextually, is culturally sensitive, and creatively engages a pluralistic world in interpreting the message of the gospel.” (Competency #5). Most importantly the students will have opportunities to expand their horizon of knowledge of Christian traditions by acquainting themselves with the history and theology of Christianity in India. (Competency 3)

Course Learning Outcomes (Learners will be able to):

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

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

• identify and describe major contours of Christianity in India and key themes and issues in the experience of Christian communities in India.

• analyze and assess various Indian religions in general and, in particular, Indian Islam (in its diversity) and Hinduism as practiced in India.

• compare Indian cultural and social realities and dynamics with that of their own.
• prepare and evaluate attitudes and skills needed for successful ministry in a religiously plural world.

• compile and critique ways to develop and appreciation for a rich and complex culture other than one’s own.

• identify empathetically spiritual practices and heritages other than their own; and to do research and present results articulately in oral and written form.

• demonstrate and assess skills in inter-religious conversation and research, in which participants engage as committed believers, eager to learn about the faith traditions of others in their own particularity, density, and beauty; and who, through the encounter, come to reflect more deeply upon their own faith tradition.

• The previous outcome implies not only the acquisition of skills but also the development of attitudes of appreciation and respect for Christians from another part of the world as well as people of other faith traditions.

Strategies for Learning:
(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)
To benefit as much as possible from this course, all students must participate regularly, rigorously, and with readiness to learn. Our expectations for outstanding participation in this seminar include:

• Reading, viewing, and taking notes on all assigned readings before arrival in India
• Listening to other classmates respectfully in daily discussions
• Attending and speaking thoughtfully at each discussion session during travel
• Travelling safely and responsibly with the group
• Following all travel instructions provided or requested by the professors
• Checking your LSTC e-mail account daily before and after travel and responding promptly to requests from professors and/or questions from peers. If, at any point, you have questions about the course or our travel, please do not hesitate to e-mail or call the professors. We will respond promptly.

REQUIRED TEXTS
A collection of essays and articles will also be made available in the course-website.

DAILY JOURNAL:
Writing about what you experience during the seminar will help you to understand the various cultural and religious sites we visit and to synthesize ideas. To these ends, every day, we will set aside time to debrief and then to write a substantive journal entry in response to what you’ve observed that day. These journal entries should also help you to engage articulately in our daily
discussions. We may ask you to read aloud from your journal entries; be prepared to share your insights with the rest of the group.

Your daily journal entries should address all the lectures heard and places visited that day, although you may give more attention to some particular experience, focus on a particular thread that you identify in all of the lectures and sites, or contrast what you see as differing perspectives offered by the day’s events. You should feel free to draw on and make connections to the readings for our seminar or to bring in examples and concepts from other classes, if appropriate. You should not merely summarize the day’s events unless that is a necessary step to understanding them (and then any summary should be short); rather, aim for reflection, analysis, comparison, critique, and ways in which you are being challenged or stretched by the experience.

**FINAL PAPER**

Writing the final project should give you the opportunity to reflect on the work you have done in your daily journals and help you to think through the issues that we have encountered in our seminar. For your final project, we ask you to select no more than five of the sites and texts with which you have engaged during our seminar and to examine them in relation to one another.

In this project, you should feel free to work with the questions and perspectives that interest you most and to draw from the daily journals as you articulate your argument. However, the final project should be a development, rather than a repetition of what you have written in your journals; that is, you should use the writing you’ve already done to build a more complex argument with a specific thesis, using the texts and experiences as support for your claims. The final project, then, should reflect not only those initial responses you recorded in your journals, but also the ways in which your thinking developed through our group discussions and your continued analysis. (Note: You may reference other sites and texts to provide further evidence for your analysis, but the primary focus of your final project should be only a handful of sites and texts, so that the essay remains coherent.)

The finished version of the project should be 15 pages for M.A/M. Div and 25 pages for doctoral students (doubled-spaced) and must follow Chicago Manual of Style format.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

Class Participation:  25%  (Attendance at all planned meetings and events, and active participation in discussion)
Daily Journal:  25%  (*Keep a journal* during the seminar. Your entries may include your observations, experiences, insights gleaned from the conversations with peers, religious leaders, lecturers, and people in all walks of life with whom you come into contact, as well as your own reflections on what all this means to you as a Christian and as a leader of Christian communities.)
Final Paper 50%
ATTENDANCE

Enrollment in this seminar requires that you attend all mandatory meetings and all planned group events as outlined in the syllabus, as well as the seminar brochure/travel itinerary. During our travel, you must remain with the group for all scheduled excursions. Prior to departure, you will receive a detailed schedule for each day of the trip (but please remember that patience and flexibility are among travelers’ essential virtues).