DRAFT SYLLABUS
Cultures and Contexts: Global Christianity
CORE-UA 500.010

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Recitations
Time:
Location:

Virgin and Child with Saints, Detail, 1428-1430, Fra Angelico, Tempera on panel, 212 x 237 cm

Course Description
This course examines the ongoing global formation and reformation of Christianity, from its origins in a pluralistic ancient Mediterranean world and spread throughout Europe and the Middle East, to its historical and ever-transforming role in Africa, Asia, and the New World. Rather than attempting to identify an essential core of this complex religious and cultural
formation, we will explore the problems and possibilities Christian texts, concepts, institutions, and narratives have posed for a diversity of populations over distinct historical periods. We will gain an appreciation both for how various populations have responded to Christianity and the ways in which these encounters have subsequently disrupted and transformed Christian narratives. Exploring this global multi-sided conversation will allow us to consider how Christians have not only justified and reproduced, but also critiqued and questioned the power of empires and nations, elites and tyrants, and reformers and critics.

The course is divided into three sections. In the first, we will look at the broad narratives that tend to accompany Christianity in its various global expressions. We will cover concepts such as the incarnation and resurrection, God’s presence and absence, and sin and suffering. In the second section of the course we will look at Christian institutions and structures of power, placing the concepts we have covered in the first section in a range of political and historical contexts, including the Roman Empire, European colonial expansion, and the challenge of maintaining a church of and in the world. In the final section of the course, we will explore a variety of Christian actors, including Popes and reformers, relics and images, language and bodies, and texts and traditions.

Recitation discussions will focus on the week’s theme, often through a close reading of a primary document, or a careful examination of an image, object, or short film connected to the week’s readings.

Cultures and Contexts is intended to prepare you for life in a globalized world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, it introduces you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. By taking Global Christianity you will learn a great deal about the remarkable diversity of the most populous religion on the planet. Rather than attempting to create a narrow definition of Christianity and ascertain whether or not its various “incarnations” measure up, we will expand that which we understand Christianity – and religion – to be. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, this class is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

Course Texts
COURSE EXPECTATIONS
Participation and Attendance (15%)
Attendance is absolutely mandatory at lectures and recitations sessions. Despite the myriad of other obligations we all have, classes need to be your priority during the semester. Teaching assistants will take attendance at all lectures and recitations and 0.5 points will be deducted from the final grade for every absence after the first. Lecture classes will include some small group work and opportunities for class discussion (and questions are always welcome!), all students are expected to actively contribute to the discussions in their recitation sessions.

Assignments
Pop Quizzes (5%)
Five times throughout the semester, the lecture will begin with a surprise (and very short) pop quiz on the day’s readings.

Summary Papers (10%)
Five times throughout the semester, students will submit a 1-page, 3-paragraph discussion of selected course readings. The first paragraph will summarize the central argument of the text(s) assigned. The second paragraph will put this argument into conversation with one other text we have read this semester. The third paragraph will describe what the argument brings to our ever-evolving understanding of global Christianity. These assignments are not reviews of the readings. Put your personal opinions aside and attempt to describe the reading’s central argument and how it fits into our ongoing conversation.

Thematic Papers (20%)
Twice throughout the semester, students will be required to submit two short (2-3-page) papers that explore one of the following themes: incarnation, passion, resurrection, sin, suffering, conversion, or salvation. In the paper, students will explore the theme 1) conceptually and 2) as it is expressed in a specific historical or present-day site. Students must make reference to at least two readings from the course and identify one object or image that expresses the tensions, possibilities, and anxieties connected with this theme.

New York’s Christian Spaces (10%)
Student will visit one of New York City’s many Christian spaces. Students will photograph the site, research its history, and find some aspect of its current day use in which some of the central themes of Christianity we have been exploring remains present. Students will then write a 4-5-page paper describing and analyzing the site in light of course themes.

Midterm (15%)
The midterm exam will be based on the readings, discussions, films, and images we explore in weeks 1 through 8. The midterm will include multiple choice, short, and long answer questions. Study questions will be provided on Wednesday, March 8.

Final Exam (25%)
The final exam will be based on the readings, discussions, films, and images we explore throughout the semester. It will include multiple choice, short, and long answer questions. Study questions will be provided in class on Monday, May 8.
PART I: CONCEPTS, PROBLEMS & TENSIONS

Week 1: What is Christianity?
Monday, January 23, 2017
Course overview.

Wednesday, January 25, 2017


Week 2: Incarnation & Presence
Monday, January 30


Wednesday, February 1


Recitation Discussion: Materiality and Presence

Week 3: Passion, Resurrection & Absence
Monday, February 13


Wednesday, February 15

*Recitation Discussion*: Crucifixion and Salvation

**Week 4: Sin & Suffering**

*Monday, February 20*
President’s Day – NO CLASSES

*Wednesday, February 22*


*Recitation Discussion*:

**PART II: STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONS, AND POWER**

**Week 5: Circulations & Empires**

*Monday, February 27*


*Wednesday March 1 (Ash Wednesday)*

Recitation Discussion: Tradition and Orthodoxy

**Week 6: Conversion & Mission**

*Monday, March 6*


*Wednesday, March 8*


Recitation Discussion: Christianity & Culture(s)

**Week 7: SPRING BREAK**

*Monday, March 13 and Wednesday, March 15 – NO CLASSES*

Recitation Discussion: Christianity & Culture(s)

**Week 8: Church of this World**

*Monday, March 20*


*Wednesday, March 22*


Recitation Discussion: Christian Economies

**Week 9: Critique & Reform**

*Monday, March 27*


*Wednesday, March 29*


*Recitation Discussion: The Reformation and the Bible*

**PART III: ACTORS, SYMBOLS, AND OBJECTS**  
**Week 10: Politics, Global & Local**  
**Monday, April 3**


**Wednesday, April 5**


*Recitation Discussion: The Vatican Archives*

**Week 11: Mystics, Martyrs & Saints**  
**Monday, April 10 (Passover)**


**Wednesday, April 12 (Good Friday)**


*Recitation Discussion: Women in/and Christianity*
Week 12: Relics, Images & Texts
Monday, April 17 (Easter Sunday)


Wednesday, April 19


Recitation Discussion: The Book of Kells & Chapelle-des-Moines at Berzé-la-Ville

Week 13: Revelation & Tradition
Monday, April 24


Wednesday, April 26

Recitation Discussion: Coffee with God

Week 14: Language & Embodiment
Monday, May 1


Wednesday, May 3


*Recitation Discussion: Words and Practice*

**Week 15: Review**  
*Monday, May 8*