Cultures and Contexts: Global Christianity
Spring 2017
Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00-12:15
Room:

Professor Elayne Oliphant
Office: 726 Broadway, Suite 554, Room 564
Office Hours: Mondays 1:30-3:30
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Teaching Assistants
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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 Christian forms 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.

**Course Texts**

**COURSE EXPECTATATIONS**
**Participation and Attendance (10%)**
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 each and every absence. 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 (10%)**
Four times throughout the semester, the lecture will begin with a surprise (and very short) pop quiz on the day’s readings.
Reading Responses (15%)
Five times throughout the semester, students will submit a 1-page, 3-paragraph response to 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.

Thematic Response Papers
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 (15%)
By the tenth week of the semester, students will be expected to visit one of New York City’s many Christian spaces. These spaces may currently be occupied by a Christian congregation or may now house a very different set of practices (such as those found in an exercise facility). 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 an 8-10 page paper describing and analyzing the site in light of course themes.

Midterm (20%)
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 on course material from throughout the semester. Study questions will be provided on Wednesday, March 8.

Final Exam (30%)
The final exam will include multiple choice, short, and long answer questions on course material from throughout the semester. 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
The Bible. Luke, Chapter 2
Matthew, Chapter 26: 1-30.


*Wednesday, February 1*

*Recitation Discussion: Reading the Bible in the Classroom*

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

*Wednesday, February 15*

*Recitation Discussion: Crucifixion and Salvation*

**Week 4: Sin, Suffering & Hell**
*Monday, February 20*

*Wednesday, February 22*

*Recitation Discussion: Suffering, Hell & Dante*

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

**Week 5: Circulations and Empires**
*Monday, February 27*
Isaiah, Chapters 58-66.


*Wednesday March 1*

*Recitation Discussion*: The Old Testament and the New

**Week 6: Mission and Conversion**

*Monday, March 6*


*Wednesday, March 8*


*Recitation Discussion*: Christianity & Culture(s)

**Week 7: SPRING BREAK**

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

**Week 8: Church of this World**

*Monday, March 20*


*Wednesday, March 22*


*Recitation Discussion*: Christian Economies

**Week 9: Politics, Global and Local**

*Monday, March 27*

Wednesday, March 29

*Recitation Discussion*: The Vatican Archives

**PART III: ACTORS, SYMBOLS, AND OBJECTS**

**Week 10: Critique and Reform**

Monday, April 3


Wednesday, April 5

*Recitation Discussion*: Documents of/and the Reformation

**Week 11: Martyrs, Saints & Mystics**

Monday, April 10


Wednesday, April 12
Week 12: Relics, Images & Text  
Monday, April 17  

Wednesday, April 19  

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

Week 13: Revelation and Tradition  
Monday, April 24  


Wednesday, April 26  

Recitation Discussion: Coffee with God

Week 14: Language and Embodiment  
Monday, May 1  


Wednesday, May 3  

Recitation Discussion: Women in/and Christianity

Week 15: Review
Monday, May 8