

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
GLOBAL CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES

IM-664/TS-664 (3 Units)
Spring 2006 (Jan. 9 - April 24)
Monday 8:30-11:30 AM

Professor: Mark D. Baker, Ph. D.
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Office Hours: Tues. 1:30-3:30 & Weds.
9:00-11:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The emphasis in the course is on the dynamic relationship between the Gospel and its cultural context. Students will reflect on both the content and method of contextual theologies through the writings of African, Asian, Latin American and Eastern European Christians. The course will include an exercise in doing contextual theology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through this course students will be able to:

- learn key socio-cultural traits of different regions and observe their impact, both positive and negative, on theological thinking in those regions
- develop the ability to critically compare and evaluate the writings of a number of theologians in different contexts explaining the same doctrine
- identify key themes in one theologian's work and observe the dynamic relationship between the Gospel and his or her context.
- articulate, in relation to at least three doctrines, how the student's theology has been enriched through seeing those doctrines through the lens of a different culture
- explain, through using examples, the missional importance of developing contextual theologies.
- reflect contextually on a theological theme.

Degree and Program Objectives

1. To be equipped with critical tools and a valid method in approaching theological issues.
2. To be able to express major theological concepts more clearly and creatively in the context of the 21st century.
3. To be equipped for a deeper engagement with local and global mission.

COURSE TEXTS

Required

Spencer, Aída Besançon & William David Spencer. *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God*. Baker Books, 1998. (On reserve in the library.)

Course Pack (CP) - a collection of photocopied articles and chapters will be distributed the first class session. You will be billed for the cost of copies and copyright fees.

COURSE OUTLINE

1- Jan. 9 - **Introduction to the course and models of Contextual Theology**

Before or after class read: William Dyrness (CP), 20-34.

1/16 No Class - MLK jr. Day

2- Jan. 23 - **Overview of African, Asian & Latin American context and theology**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):

Spencer & Spencer, 105-108 (D. Noëlliste)

Gustavo Gutiérrez (CP), "Liberation Theologies: Latin America," 131-133

João B. Libânio (CP), "Praxis/Orthopraxis," 172

Orlando Costas (CP), "Prophetic Significance of Liberation Theologies," 126-132

Kosuke Koyama (CP), "Ten Key Theological Issues facing Theologians in Asia," 76-81.

3- Jan. 30 - **Christology**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):

William Dyrness (CP), *Learning About Theology from the Third World*, 163-184

C. René Padilla (CP), "Christology and Mission in the Two Thirds World," 12-32

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (CP), "Doing Christ's Mission in the Pluralistic Context of Asia: A Critical Dialogue with Some Asian Christologies," 109-126.

4- Feb. 6 - **Christology, cont.**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):

Justo González (CP), *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, 139-156

Kosuke Koyama (CP), "Theology of the Cross," 240-261

5- Feb. 13 - **Christology, cont.**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):

Aloysius Pieris (CP), "Speaking of the Son of God in Non-Christian Cultures: The Two Christological Perspectives in Asia Today," 59-65.

William Dyrness (CP), *Learning About Theology from the Third World* 156-160.

Jones, E. Stanley (CP), "The Indian Interpretation of Jesus," 189-200.

Wayan Mastra (CP), "Christology in the Context of the Life and Religion of the Balinese," 157-174.

Kwame Bediako (CP), "Jesus in African Culture," 93-121.

2/20 No Class - Presidents Day

6- Feb. 27 - **Truth, foundations and contextual theology**

Preparation: Read the following and write a reflective response (see appendix):

Justo González (CP), *Mañana*, 48-53

Mary Solberg (CP), "Notes Toward an Epistemology of the Cross," 14-22

7- March 7 - **Doctrine of God** (Module week, class will meet)

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
 Spencer & Spencer, 17-20
 Spencer & Spencer, 89-103 (Aída B. Spencer, “God the Stranger: An Intercultural Hispanic American Perspective”)
 Spencer & Spencer, 104-126 (D. Noëlliste, “Transcendent but Not Remote: The Caribbean”)
 Vincent Donovan (CP), *Christianity Rediscovered*, 41-53 & 61-64
 Solomon Avotri (CP), “Genesis 11:1-9: An African Perspective,” 17-25.
Bibliography for Contextual theologian paper due

8- March 14 - **Doctrine of God, cont.**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
 Spencer & Spencer, 166-188 (Grace Y. May, “Viewing God Through the Twin Lenses of Holiness and Mercy: A Chinese American Perspective”)
 Spencer & Spencer, 231-248 (Tae-Ju Moon, “The Korean American Dream and the Blessings of *Hananim* (God)”)
 Kim Chung-Choon (CP), “God’s Suffering in Man’s Struggle,” 15-21
Response letter/essay due

9 - March 21 - **Atonement**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
 Green/Baker (CP), “Removing Alienating Shame: The Saving Significance of the Cross in Japan” 153-170
 Baker, (CP) “Freed to be Human and Restored to Family: The Saving Significance of the Cross in a Honduran Barrio” 1-17

10- March 28 - **Atonement, cont.**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
 David Shenk (CP), selections from *Justice, Reconciliation & Peace in Africa*, 19-21, 39-41, 44-54, 64-74, 87-90, 90-93, 99-104
 Z. M. Kisare (CP), *Kizare: A Mennonite of Kiseru*, 76-83
 Curtis Chang (CP), “He Shared Our Aches,” 1-8.

11- April 3 - **Doing Contextual Theology**

Preparation: Reflect on method and a topic for contextual theology project (see appendix).
 Read: Spencer & Spencer, 17-18
 Brian McLaren (CP), *Generous Orthodoxy*, 79-89
Contextual Theologian Paper due.

12- April 10 - **Sin and Salvation**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
 Orlando Costas (CP), *Christ Outside the Gate*, 21-39
 Carol Lakey Hess (CP), *Caretakers of Our Common House*, 31-54
 Justo González (CP), *Mañana*, 134-138

Loida Martell-Otero (CP), "Of Satos and Saints: Salvation From the Periphery," 7-37.

13- April 17 - **Reconciliation, Resurrection, Ecclesiology**

Preparation: Read the following and answer reflection questions (see appendix):
Miroslav Volf (CP), "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 158-172
I Cor. 15:1-58 and reflections by Elsa Tamez, François Kabasele Lumbala, and Daniel C. Arichea (CP), in *Return to Babel*, 185-198
C. René Padilla (CP), "The New Ecclesiology in Latin America," 336-354.
"Best draft" of Contextual theology project due.

14- April 24 - **Conclusion: Student Presentations**

Preparation: prepare presentation (see assignments).
Final draft of Contextual theology project due 4/26

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading: Unless otherwise noted it is expected that the reading for this course will be done thoroughly and in a careful and reflective way. This course requires about 550 pages in reading assignments. It is expected, however, that you will spend as much time reading and reflecting on these pages as you would reading the 1500 to 2000 generally required in a three unit course. Discussion of the reading will be a major part of each class session.

Reading reflections: The appendix lists questions to reflect on as you read the material for the next class. Before each class write responses to the questions (about to two pages single-spaced for each session.) These reflections will help students interact with the readings in a way that will lay the foundation for class discussion, other assignments and learning activities. (Grading standards: B for satisfactorily completing the assignment; B- or lower for not doing all the reading or not adequately answering a question; B+ for answers that reflect careful reading and thoughtful interaction with the questions; A- or A for outstanding depth of insight or analysis. Note, while longer answers, unless they are simply summary, increase the probability of getting a B+ rather than a B, length alone will not produce an A since more words written does not necessarily mean more insight.) *Because of the importance of these assignments to the class discussion, and because the answers will be discussed in class, any assignments handed in late (after the class session) will be reduced two full grade points.*

Response letter/essay: At the mid-point of the course students will write a two page single space reflection on material from class sessions and readings. You will write this letter/essay to a friend (partner in ministry, family member, church member, etc.); give one copy to your friend and give a copy to the professor at the next class session. This is not meant to be a summary of all we have done. You are to write about three or four things you found most engaging and important; describe the concept or ideas, and explain their importance to your friend. (This may include questions you have—issues that remain unresolved.) You are especially encouraged to reflect on methodological issues, and upon the missional importance of developing contextual theologies. These essays will help students sort through content and identify and reflect upon that which is of central importance to them. You will be graded on clarity of thought and

communication, and level of personal engagement. **Due 3/14.**

Contextual Theologian Paper: While the course as a whole attempts to capture the breadth and diversity of global Christian theologies this assignment will allow students to get to know the work of one theologian in a more in-depth way, and thus observe in a more sustained way how one person develops his or her theology in a specific context. You will select one theologian and read at least 250 pages of his or her work. The appendix contains a list of possibilities. (By no later than **3/7** you will need to report which theologian you have chosen and supply a bibliographic list from which you will read.) Students will each write a ten to twelve page paper (double-spaced) which will describe central themes of the theologian's work and critically reflect upon it. Description of the central themes should be no more than 30% of your paper. You may use the general reflection questions for evaluating individual writings (in the appendix) as the basis of your analysis and critical reflection. You may hand in a completed draft by 3/27 which you consider your best effort and receive the professor's input on how to improve the work. **The paper is due 4/3.**

Contextual Theology Assignment: Having observed how others have done contextual theology you will have a chance to do the same by writing about a particular theological theme from and for a particular context you know well. Similarly to what is stated in the "Introduction" of Spencer and Spencer you should describe an aspect of this particular theological theme that people from your context easily understand and connect with and also describe a way, in relation to this theological theme, people in your context need to be challenged or corrected. (Theme and context must be approved by the professor.) Students' work will be evaluated according to the same guidelines we use to evaluate the theologians we read in the course. You are encouraged, but not required, to interact with others about this assignment, and even if in just a small way, put into practice what Dyrness points to in his chart on page 30. (Or if you prefer another methodology--seek to start put into practice that methodology.) The paper should be 6-8 pages (double-spaced), a **best draft** should be completed **by 4/17**. The professor will grade it and then discuss it with the student. A revised and final draft is **due by 4/26**. The final grade will be the average of the grades given to each draft.

Presentation: As a way of facilitating learning from other students and as a way of helping students identify aspects of the course that have been of central importance each student will give a 10 minute presentation in the last class session. They should tell, in relation to three doctrines, how their theology has been enriched through seeing those doctrines through the lens of a different culture, and use examples to demonstrate the missional importance of developing contextual theologies. They may also reflect on methodological issues.

Attendance is included as part of the class participation grade. To get an "A" in this category you must have perfect attendance and make significant contributions to class discussion. An "A-" will be given to those with perfect attendance or with one absence and significant participation. Two absences will place a student in the "B" range; participation will determine whether it is a high or low "B." Three absences could move the student in to the "C" range. Four or more absences place the student at risk of receiving an "F" in class participation, but also at risk of having their course grade lowered a full letter grade or of automatically failing the class.

Students may talk to the professor about ways to partially make up for absences. Note that “significant participation” refers to quality of participation not just quantity.

Academic Policies:

MBBS academic policies are described at www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies . These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to the professor or consult the Registrar or Academic Dean.

Assignment policies for this course:

1. Students are expected to submit assignments on time; if they are late they will be graded down one grade level (a B+ becomes a B). Reading responses that are late will be graded down two full grade points (An A- [3.67] becomes a C- [1.67].)
2. All written work should have one inch margins and Times Roman 12pt font, double-spaced unless stated otherwise.
3. All assignments may be printed on scrap paper.

Grading Scheme

Attendance and class participation, 10%; Reading reflections 40%; Response letter/essay 5%; Presentation 5%; Contextual theologian paper 25%; Contextual theology project 15%.

As stated in the MBBS academic policies/grading a “B” is the baseline grade. A “B” means the student is doing satisfactory work. The “B+” or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The “C” grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level. I will write a letter grade on your assignments. In my grade book each letter grade will be given a numerical equivalent (B+ = 3.33; A- = 3.67). At the end of the semester your numerical average will determine your final letter grade based on the following scale:

- 4.00 to 3.83 = A
- 3.82 to 3.5 = A-
- 3.49 to 3.17 = B+
- 3.16 to 2.83 = B etc.

APPENDIX

Reflection Questions for Class Two

You do not need to write the response to these questions, but be prepared to share your answers in class:

- 1.) Noëlliste describes most of the approaches to contextualizing theology that we discussed in the first class, but he does not use the same terminology. Try to match up the terminology we used (such as “suitcase theology,” anthropological approach, etc.) with his descriptions.
- 2.) How does a Greek “idea” approach vs. a “praxis” approach change one’s concept of truth?

3.) From your perspective what is the most important contribution liberation theology can make to evangelical theology and churches in North America? Why?

Reflection Questions for Class Three

- 1.) State briefly the main characteristics of African, Asian, and Latin American Christologies. This may include pointing out more than one approach to Christology within a region, you are not, however, responsible to communicate all of the shades of distinction within a region.
- 2.) Observe how Dyrness, Padilla and Kärkkäinen evaluate various thinkers. What can we learn from them that will help us in the rest of the course as we read individual theologians? What are important evaluative questions to ask as we read theologians the rest of the semester?

General Reflection Questions for Evaluating Individual Writings (Classes 4-13)

We will use the following questions to guide our reading and discussion of individuals for the rest of the course. There is great flexibility in how you do this assignment. For instance, in a given week you may chose to write on three questions and within your answer to each question discuss all of the writings of that week. Or you may write in response to three questions about one author, two questions about another, and respond to one question that compares three different readings of that week. You should, however, clearly label what question you are responding to. In addition to these general questions, some weeks there are specific reflection questions that follow in the appendix, and that you are required to write answers to.

Contextual Character

1. How does the theology reflect its contextuality? How is it different from theologies written in other settings?
2. Are there ways you think the theology is not contextual enough?
3. How is it similar to and different from theology done by others in the same setting?

Gospel and Culture

4. In his or her work is the gospel simply rephrased in a culturally sensitive way, or does the gospel and culture interact to produce new theological insights? Give examples.
5. Which has the privileged role gospel or culture? (Other ways of asking this question are: Is the culture/people assimilated to the gospel, or is the gospel assimilated to the culture? [Dyrness, 168–from wk. 3]. Or, is it Christianization of culture or descralization through dynamic interaction of the gospel and culture? [Dyrness, 169]).

Other Questions

6. How does the writer deal with the “Scandal of Particularity”? (The incarnation of God in Jesus—a particular man in a particular time and place, and the claim that Jesus is the way of salvation.) Does he or she appear more minimalist or maximalist [Dyrness, 178-79]?
7. Does his or her work show evidence of dialogue with other contextual theologies? How could it profit from other theologies?
8. Does the author interact with Christian tradition? Does she or he utilize it, or only critique it?
9. Does the theologian use tools of social analysis? If so how?
10. What pre-commitments are evident?
11. Does he or she place more emphasis on God’s transcendence or God’s immanence?

12. What are the missional implications of this work?
13. How does Jesus' suffering/God's suffering play a role in his or her theology?

Contributions to Global Theology

14. How has reading this theologian enriched your theological understanding?
15. What can we learn from the methodology of this theologian that will help us in our own contextual theological reflection?

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Four

In Relation to **González** (The "Constinization" of God. refers to making the emperor God-like and God emperor like, discussed on page 108 of González's book.)

1.) González is a historian, and therefore it should not surprise us that there is such a strong emphasis on history in his book. On one hand so much attention to theological debates that happened centuries ago make this feel like a very un-contextual piece of writing, but in another way it is very contextual. In what ways is his discussion of the Councils and creeds an example of contextual theology?

In relation to **Koyama**: 2.) Choose one of the following themes and trace how he uses it throughout the essay. What can we learn from this? (circular/linear, brokenness/glory, periphery/center, confront/embrace)

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Six Five

In relation to **Pieris** 1.) Note how Pieris's is a maximalist (See earlier Dyrness reading, 178-179) and reflect on whether, in his case, that is the same thing as saying "all paths lead to God? Do you agree with Dyrness's description/critique of Pieris? Why or why not? (Dyrness, 156-159.)

In relation to **Mastra** 2.) Is this more an example of an interaction model or a translation model (see earlier Dyrness reading, 27-31)? Explain your answer.

Reflective Response for Class Six

You do not need to write answers to the general questions this week, instead: write a one to two page response to these two readings. Although this is primarily a response (how were they helpful, how did they excite you, disturb you, what questions did they help clarify what new questions did they raise?) please include some observations about their view of truth and how it is influenced by their context.

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Seven

1. Donovan, unlike others we have read, is working in a context that is not his own. What can we learn from him about contextualizing in a foreign culture?

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Eight

For more information on Shamanism see Spencer & Spencer page 222.

1.) Moon and Kim take opposite stances on relating shamanism to Christianity. Who do you agree with and why?

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Ten

You may read the first pages of **Shenk**, quickly. They provide the contextual background for the later theological reflection. Start reading slowly on page 71.

Curtis Chang is not writing to a “generic” North American context, yet it is a context more similar to “home” for most of us than Shenk and Kisare. In part we are doing this reading to help prepare for the next class—to help you imagine doing contextual theology in a context you are familiar with. Also, however, we are reading it to note differences and similarities with this week’s African writings.

1. What are ways that Chang’s presentation is theologically similar to the African ones even though he does not use the metaphor of sacrifice?
2. What are ways Chang’s work differs? How do the contexts change or modify the content of what is communicated?

Reflection Questions for Class Eleven

(Come to class prepared to share your reflections. You do not, however, have to hand them in.)

- 1.) What are various contextualizing moves that McLaren makes in this chapter?
- 2.) Based on your reflections on the methodology used by the various contextual theologians we have read, what are guidelines, directions or insights on how to do contextual theological reflection that will aid you in your contextual theology project?.
- 3.) What is the doctrinal issue you will write on? How does your context illuminate this doctrine? What are pressing contextual questions that relate to this doctrine? How might God’s Spirit challenge your context through this doctrine?

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Twelve

In relation to **Costas** 1.) How can you see his contextuality even in the first part of this chapter (pp.21-33) before he explicitly discusses Latin America?

Please pay special attention this week to how the various writings relate. 2.) What are similarities and differences and how is that due to their contexts?

Additional Reflection Questions for Class Thirteen

In relation to **Volf**, 1.) Even though he does not highlight it, how do you see evidence of his Croatian, former Yugoslavian, context? And, how does that help explain the difference between his essay and others we have read? (Cont. on next page)

In relation to the essays on I. Cor 15, take special note of each author’s approach to scripture and interpretation of scripture. This week’s reading especially lends itself to comparison because in each case we have three authors reflecting on the same text. 2.) What are differences and similarities you observe? What do you attribute to context and what do you attribute to method [praxis, interactional, etc.] and approach to scripture?

Additional Reflection Questions for the Contextual Theologian Paper

1. What other influences are evident (peers, educational, social)? How are they seen?
2. Is his or her work so focused on one contextual issue that it fails to deal with other issues that have importance, not just in a general theological sense, but even in his or her context?
3. Does he or she have a “canon within the canon of scripture” that leads to a distorted theology?

Contextual Theologian Paper

The following is a list of some of the possible theologians for this project. If you pursue another option check with the professor *before* the bibliography is due.

Africa:

Bediako, Kwame
Bujo, Benezet
Dickson, Kwesi A.
Mbiti, John
Oduyoye, Mercy Amba
Parratt, John
Shenk, David W.

Asia:

Beltran, Benigno
Endo, Shusaku (novelist)
Kitamori, Kazoh
Koyama, Kosuke
Mangalwadi, Vishal
Park, Andrew Sung
Phan, Peter C.
Pieris, Aloysius
Prabhakar, Joseph (in conjunction with other Dalit theologians)
Samartha, S. J.
Yung, Hwa

Latin America:

Evangelicals doing contextual theology:
Costas, Orlando
Escobar, Samuel
Padilla, C. Rene
Schipani, Daniel (in area of Christian education)

Roman Catholic Liberation Theologians

Boff, Leonardo
Gutierrez, Gustavo
Sobrino, Jon
Segundo, Juan Luis

Protestant Liberation Theologians

Miguez Bonino, Jose
Tamez, Elsa

Hispanics:

Gonzalez, Justo
Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria
Machado, Daisy
Pedraja, Luis
Villafane, Eldin

American Indian

Tinker, George

African American

Cone, James
Hopkins, Dwight
Jennings, Willie
Panell, William
Riggs, Marcia
Williams, Delores

Eastern European

Miroslav Volf