

**PT 515/715: Readings in Culture: Globalization, Global Cities¹ & the Global Commons
Fall Semester 2009**

Meets Wednesdays, 9:00-12:00

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Purpose:

Global Cities have been emerging from the forces unleashed by earlier phases of industrialization and colonization, now globalization. **The global city** is the context in which the majority of this planet's people will live and the church must consequently function in the upcoming century. Fully 50% of humanity now lives in cities; and each year between now and 2030, "the world's urban population will increase by about 70 million, equivalent to 7 new mega cities"² Most of these new cities being added in Asia and Africa. The city will be the testing ground where humanity's best efforts to create just and sustainable habitats for ourselves and other life-forms will occur.

If the social collective of urban life as well as the arts, imagination, personal aspiration and creative energies draw us to the city, rapid urbanization may also represent one of the most challenging out-croppings of capitalist globalizing economics. Even as globalization appears to be exacerbating the modernist nature/culture split as well as the split between the wealthy and the poor, urbanization can also often come for any and all at the price of relational dislocation, the loss of the folds of kin and generational belonging and even at the expense of a sense of purpose, of trust into life. If challenged in these ways, issues of planetary peace and stability as well as climate change and ecological sustainability will also need be worked out from within the landscape of the global cities.³

But relational truncation also affects how persons access our ancient wisdom traditions, whether

¹A...the city is not to be understood primarily as a geographical space or as a historical and cultural event but more as a nexus of complex human and structural relationships. @ Bishop Laurie Green, Foreward to Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity & Global Order*.

²Statistics from *World Urban Forum III*.

³As Christopher Flavin of World Watch Institute observes, "The battle to save the world's remaining healthy ecosystems will be won or lost...on the most unnatural landscapes on the planet." And as Jaime Lerner, Former Mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, and one of the two leading experts on global cities notes, "The fiercest wars are happening in cities, in their marginalized peripheries, in the clash between wealthy enclaves and deprived ghettos." Further the power of nation-states is expected to be exceeded by global cities, the most explosive growth of such are expected to take place in Asia and Africa. Among the most notable challenges of life in global cities that have been noted are these--sustainability, human identity and meaning, justice, health and well-being, and infrastructure, including democratic citizenry.

towards a default “secular rationalism” or towards a metaphysical absolute. The worlds’ religions, all tempted in the face of globalization to reach for absolutes and identity and tribe, meet within any of the neighborhoods of these urban milieus.⁴ If taking religious truth to be a metaphysical absolute aggravates the encounters among the religions, the current planetary crises also suggest some of the problems of an uninterrupted rationalism. How do we empower persons with religious convictions that do not then succumb to these temptations of tribalism and identity which divide and separate? What shape might theologies take so as to speak with conviction and yet hold open the public space of hospitality to diversity? And if persons in such situations are looking for “paths of sacrifice” (Shariff Abdullah), then what ecclesiological options might here open out amid the new urbanism?

Given that cities will be those locations within which humanity’s relation with planetary futurity will be negotiated, how do we think theologically, including ecclesologically, about the city as livable horizon, about the city’s flourishing? How do we negotiate our own religious imaginary in relation to the city (Cities after all have been the pivot of the theological sublime, e.g., Zion, the New Jerusalem, Augustine’s “City of God,” as well as its abject, e.g., Sodom, Babel.)? Setting the hopes and aches of the global city into conversation with the theological imagination will involve not only assessing the pains of life in the global city, but its aspirations to creativity, personal and political freedom, “culture,” freedom from back-breaking labor in relation to “nature”Ball of these now meeting up against their inherent limits--the culture (now tyranny) of choice, the end of the subject-creating values of capitalism (efficiency, productivity, progress) and the end of an industrial, oil-based infrastructure.

Holding the emergence of global cities as places loosing desire and where desires meet their limits within a discourse of “Jesus, Dissent and Desire” (Cooey), the course turns to asking the ancient question echoing again in the contemporary landscape, i.e., “How shall we live?” How do we theologically and ecclesially respond to or interact with this energy field, this omniplex, of desires called “the global city?” If holy [W]isdom might be something like a “martial art,” a skill for living amidst the energies of the cosmos, with what skills do we meet up with so as to “liberate persons from luxury” into a life consistent with planetary flourishing? How might we imagine living our call to practice “justice, mercy and lovingkindness” in relation to this field of life?

This course locates theological reflection in relation to the horizon of flourishing of the Global City, its inhabitants, and the Global Commons at large, and assumes thereby a basic epistemological commitment to situated knowledges:

1) It seeks to understand the desires, creativity, hopes, etc., that draw persons to the life of the

⁴Historian Samuel Leuchli actually traces the decisions of the Council of Elvira generating the sexual codes which have been “the seismograph of Christian subjectivity” ever since (P Brown) and out of which we continue to navigate present day Christianity to the issues of urbanization impacting a cosmopolitan populus.

cities as well as to address the loss of meaning, human trust and purpose at the local level, such existential mistrust resulting from globalization and diaspora and from having reached the “futility point” in capitalist growth economics, the culture of choice;

2) The course provides a context within which to imagine Theologies & Ecclesiologies responsive to the diverse concerns of emergent global cities. While liberal theologies (a.k.a, “progressive” or “cosmopolitan theologies”) have assumed ourselves to assert justice in relation to bodies that “suffer” difference, these theologies not only now cognizant of their occlusions-- have also typically been cathected to high-culture mediums, i.e., truth as proposition and thus preached or pronounced. These theologies have not typically gone public, despite the postmodern breakdown of the secular/religious binary. Various considered, modern epistemology has tended to flatten the modes of theological engagement and its critical leverage. So how do we “popularize” theological truth-making? How do we relearn the arts of teaching sacred wisdom as a critical modality, as a way of sounding out wisdom for life that respects complexity and ambiguity? Or pass along religious wisdom as satire, comedy, ...as an “art of resistance” (James Scott) amidst cultural ideologies?

Further, globalization impacts the psychological demands made upon religions and religious practices. This course begins from the assumption that intellectual rigor can inform and learn to speak religious value and to act with religious commitment at the intersection of culture/s and Christianity in ways that are open, non-absolutist, attentive to religious pluralism, honoring religions as among humanity’s wisdom traditions for living well with the earth. The course assumes that intellect can be a tool to prevent religion from becoming ideologically foreclosed and that theology can hold open the imagination and be an impassioned discourse for communal flourishing.

The seminar will visit theologies of desire that attempt to respond to capitalism, the city in the religious imagination ancient and contemporary, wisdom theologies addressing the ancient question “How shall we live?,” religions as sources of activism in and for the city, and discussion of alternative ecclesiological models.

3) Social Theories and/or Leadership Studies: The seminar will include sessions on leadership in and for the global commons, social analysis of globalization, introduction to the economics and civic geography of global cities, “geographies of resistance” and/or theories of social movement and social transformation.

Competence Objectives:

1. Intellectually engaged and defensible analysis of the intersection of religious faiths and contemporary culture, especially a critically reflective articulation of how the student holds Christianity and culture in conversation as well as analysis of the impact of globalization upon religions and religious practice;
2. Theoretical analysis (social, economic, socio-psychological, postcolonial, ecological) of

concerns arising for human persons and human communities as well as ecological zones and indeed the planetary commons given the unleashed energies of globalizing capitalism. Further, students will articulate how Christianity's sense of desire or call might engage with or respond to such analysis or, variously, how such analysis occasions Christian dissent;

3. Intellectual acquaintance with theologies sustaining religious living (*askesis*) and with theologies emergent in the urban context as well as an introduction to skills for invigorating and/or mobilizing progressive theological discourses and religious wisdom so as to hold up or otherwise activate religious discourse as a resistant economy of value, as impassioned advocacy for planetary, including human, flourishing;

4. Incorporate into one's theological articulations awareness of the city as at the intersection of world religions—such that we speak/hold our religious convictions in ways that are open, non-absolutist, attentive to religious pluralism—and even holding open then the hospitality of the secular;

5. Leadership skills which pull together socio-cultural analysis, vision, community-based organizing, spiritual and/or ritual practice and theological reasoning;

6. Collective or collaborative work, a skill which much be patched into western humanist (individualist) subjectivity;

7. Acquaintance with radical teachings of Christianity motivating social activism and religious wisdom regarding practices of living the commons with attention to how these might inform our theological imagination today;

8. Understanding urban geographies, especially the economic, e.g., rich-poor divide, and political dimensions, e.g., differing applications of civil rights in various zones, of emergent global cities;

9. Shapes learning by asking how spiritual practice, e.g., a practice of ordered living, might affect how we view the world, our thinking, etc.

Format: Limited Enrollment Research Seminar (12 students)

Working as a research cohort, the seminar will engage the collaborative work of developing theologies and ecclesiologies, as well as models of theological leadership, appropriate to life in this planet's emergent global cities and within the ethos of a given commitment to the planetary commons. This seminar, admittedly experimental, will serve as an active research arm or think-tank for helping us reconstruct progressive theologies and practices correlated with cultural conditions and with the critiques of postmodernity, including postcoloniality, as well as for trying on the idea of "Theologies in and for the Global City" as a potential grounding concern or niche of our VST theological curriculum. Several of the course sessions will include outside speakers who can teach and provide over-views of dimensions of life in the global city (economics, ecological sustainability and civic politics as well as popular artists), biblical and historical theological reflections on the city and/or methods and models to be considered in thinking about emerging ecclesiology (Religious Social Activism, Third Order Franciscan, Urban Monastery Movement, Christian Peacemaker Teams, etc). Remaining sessions will be used for lectures and seminar engagement as introduced by the course facilitator. The general format for each session will be 1) Presentation of 75-90 minutes; 2) break; 3) 60 minutes of seminar engagement of the

topic and its theological implications; 4) brief introduction to the topic of the following week.

Required Texts:

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

Coupland, Douglas. *Life After God*. New York: Pocket Books, 1995. (ThM)

Davey, Andrew. *Urban Christianity and Global Order: Theological Resources for an Urban Future*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002;

Sheldrake, Philip. *Spaces for the Sacred*, 2001.

A reading pak will be developed and be made available through UBC bookstore.

Expectations/Evaluation: Since this has been conceived as a research seminar, work will be encouraged that attempts either to build or shape future curriculum units or engaged in field-based research, which tackles a lived concern. Projects, while likely to be focused more strongly in one dimension or another, are expected to touch upon all of the dimensions that shape this course: 1) theological and/or ecclesiological reconstructions, including spiritual practice; 2) social theory and/or socio-political, including economic and/or ecological, analysis of global cities; and 3) spiritual, social-communal or pastoral ministries which respond to the various dimensions of life in global cities.

Students, working individually or in pods, will write an initial research proposal due week 6 of the semester. Projects will be focused on or within re/constructions of theological and/or ecclesial practice/s towards the flourishing of the global commons, especially then life in the global city. Each project will, responding to a specific concern or vision of life in the global city, imagine a way in which Christian desire dissents from or swerves life in this location. Thus, each will include some socio-economic or psycho-social analysis. Theological reflection should include biblical exegesis or historical encounters with religious living as counter-culture.

The general parameters of research projects (depth of research as well as extent of written presentation) should follow VST degree guidelines. This should not, however, prevent students from exploring alternative modalities for their project phase (street theatre, liturgy, CD rom...).

The course presumes the VST attendance requirement of 80% participation in all seminars and guest lectures as basic for consideration of an evaluation of approved. Students will be expected to have prepared readings as assigned by the syllabus for each weekly seminar; evaluation will include student involvement in the seminar discussions.