

# MPhil in Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (IT&IS)

## Course Overview 2021-22

The MPhil in Intercultural Theology & Interreligious Studies (IT&IS) is an interdisciplinary course that explores some of the complex relationships within and between faith communities and their traditions. It pays close attention to the interplay of faith and society/politics and the conflicts generated by it while critically reflecting on the relationship between faith, and class, caste, race, ethnicity, nationhood, gender, sexuality and ecology. The course focuses on the practical and theoretical possibilities of engaging in the challenging praxis of justice, peace and integrity of creation. By offering a wide range of critically reflective faith perspectives from the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East, it blends together themes of liberation theologies, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

There are three main strands in the course:

1. Religions, ethics and pluralism with a particular focus on religion and secular; religion and human rights; religion, conflict and peace; religion and race, caste, gender, sexualities; and religion and postcolonial/decolonial critique.
2. Intra-religious dialogue with a particular focus on ecclesial communities and the ecumenical movements
3. Interreligious dialogue and themes of liberation involving Buddhist-Christian, Buddhist-Muslim, Hindu-Muslim, Christian-Muslim and Jewish-Christian and indigenous traditions

Students must take **six** taught modules (10 ECTS each), comprising one core module (Research and Methods) and five elective modules, and write a dissertation (30 ECTS). It is recommended that the students take a module each from the above three strands as outlined below for the two semesters. Students may also take modules for credit or audit modules from the other three MPhil courses in the School of Religion. However, the number of modules taken from the other courses (for credit) should not exceed more than two. Students can consult the module coordinator for guidance in essay writing. In the second semester, each student will be given a dissertation supervisor. Key dates and the deadlines for essay and dissertation submissions can be found on a separate document.

## First and Second Semesters

### **The Core Module: Research and Methods (Dr Andrew Pierce and Dr Jude Lal Fernando)**

This module will engage the students in conducting a needs-analysis towards their fruitful pursuit of research, including choosing appropriate modular pathways; research writing (essays

and dissertation) seminar presentation, fieldwork, library resources, study skills, peer interaction and supervision. It will discuss the role of hermeneutics in relation to substantive religious traditions in their texts, contexts and cultures, acknowledging their uniqueness and interaction with other belief systems. The module will critically evaluate a range of research methods – deductive, inductive, analytic, action-based, social, participative, with particular attention to the challenges raised by research activity in the interests of justice, peace and integrity of creation. It will distinguish between proper academic use of the work of others and inappropriate plagiarism. In the second semester, each student will be given an opportunity to present their work in class in preparation for the dissertation.

## **First Semester**

**Religion and Ethics in a Pluralist World (Prof Linda Hogan, Dr Andrew Pierce, Dr Jacob J. Erickson and Dr Jude Lal Fernando)**

**Intensive module (hybrid delivery: online and face to face)**

**The online component of this module will run from 2-6 pm, Monday 06 – Thursday 09 and 2-4 pm, Friday 10 September.**

The module examines the changing meaning of religion and secularity in contemporary society by drawing on historical and recent debates in ethics, theology, philosophy, sociology and politics. It explores the interdependence/conflict between religion and secularity, and ethics in societies that are at once secular and multi-religious, and considers how political deliberation on issues of critical moral global concern (sexuality, gender, race and ecological relations, human rights, religious freedom/freedom of speech, political economy, state formation, war, peace and geopolitics ) can be pursued. In particular, key insights in the debate on modernity, secularisation and pluralisation will be discussed while delving into the questions; is critique secular and can religion be critical. A range of case studies representing particular regions, religions and ethical traditions will be conducted in scrutinising varying relationships between religion, secularity and ethics. Having analysed the key points of reference in historical and contemporary debates this module will then focus on the concept of justice, peace and integrity of cosmos (or Common Good) as it has been understood, theorised and debated in different political theologies and philosophies in various religious and ethical traditions, and cosmovisions of indigenous traditions. The main objective is to identify the prospect of shared values in a globalised world self-reflectively, contextually, dialogically with a praxis-based orientation towards the public sphere.

**Authority, Tradition and Experience (Dr Andrew Pierce)**

Privileging liminal and dialogical perspectives, this module explores Christian theological approaches to the experience of *oikoumene*. The module engages explicitly with the Faith & Order ecumenical tradition of theological reflection in an inter-confessional context. ‘Christian

unity' became a widely-acknowledged ecclesiological imperative in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its emergence went hand-in-hand with a broader late-modern cultural distrust of the imperial and colonial mechanisms through which Christianity had emerged as a global presence (a 'world religion') in the nineteenth century. This experience of *oikoumene*, therefore, presupposes a critical, self-critical and explicitly *repentant* dynamic in efforts to articulate Christian identity in a religiously and non-religiously pluralist world. Having begun as an intra-Christian attempt to stage and contain conflict, Faith & Order concerns have also – inevitably – been implicated more widely in discussions of how non-doctrinal factors (gender, politics, society, culture, etc.) help to shape normative claims about Christian identities. This module incorporates materials that are deeply ecclesiocentric, alongside approaches that attempt to relativise ecclesiocentrism. After exploring key developments in ecumenicity, the module focuses on how ecumenically pivotal themes (authority, tradition and experience) might be expanded through engagement with disciplined extra-theological reflection.

### **World Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue ( Dr Jude Lal Fernando)**

In our modern age, a pressing need has arisen to take other religions seriously other than one's own. Both proximity and polarisation of diverse religions and their various traditions have increased as never before in history. At the same time an awareness has grown that there is no one single universal theology or philosophy of one religion that can dominate the entirety of its communities of believers across the globe. Traditional understanding of religion is changing rapidly. Instead there is a call to recognise its contextual expressions associated with *culture/other religions* and *social structures*. The main aim of the module is to identify key Christian theological shifts in theology of religions (theologies of religions), both in theory and practice and explore the interrelationship between pluralism and liberation (justice, peace and integrity of creation). It will identify similarities and differences between interreligious studies and interreligious dialogue, and introduce a range of contextual interreligious theologies that will provincialize the dominant Western theological thinking. The debate between theologians of religions and comparative theologians will be examined. The module will engage in a critical reflection on the relationship between dialogue and common ethical concerns based on experiences of multiple forms alienation and empowerment, and introduce alternative theological/Christological perspectives that interlink religious pluralism, indigenous traditions and liberation.

### **Issues in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue (Dr Jude Lal Fernando and Dr John O'Grady)**

This is NOT a meditation course, NOT an exercise in comparative religion, and NOT an actual dialogue with Buddhists, though it contains elements of all three. The course discusses Buddhism as a specific historical, geographical and ethical-religious tradition that represents one of the strands within the Indic Movement. Buddhism's diverse doctrinal, political and ideological interpretations, and interactions with primal traditions in Asia are explored in appreciating its heterogeneous nature (including its later Western variant). Issues arising from

Buddhism's encounter with Christianity within colonial and postcolonial settings are identified in an attempt to understand the challenging complexities in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The course aims to provide students in Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies with the basic historical and doctrinal information they need to develop theological perspectives on Buddhism, and to introduce Peace Studies students to the problems involved in understanding the peacebuilding potential of an Indic or 'Eastern' worldview in its manifold Asian and Western contexts. Attention also will be paid to issues in Buddhism, Conflict and Peace within interreligious contexts. Issues related to Buddhist-Hindu and Buddhist-Muslim relations in Asia will be discussed as a way of overcoming the Christianity-centred approach to interreligious dialogue. The course is structured in such a way that the students will be equipped with the disciplinary and methodological tools to correlate issues in Buddhist-Christian dialogue and the public sphere of the present historical moment of globalisation.

### **Engaging Religious Fundamentalism ( Dr Carlo Aldrovandi, Dr Andrew Pierce and Dr Jude Lal Fernando)**

This interdisciplinary module will provide students with a critical understanding of the global resurgence of religious fundamentalism in the wake of 9/11. We will tease out and unpack fundamentalism's key theological underpinnings within the Abrahamic spectrum and other world religions and address its historical emergence within US Protestantism as well as different cultural contexts. The course will also discuss the drives behind religious fundamentalism's involvement in (or withdrawal from) the realm of politics, while mapping out the doctrinal responses that different religious traditions have deployed to tackle the so-called 'fundamentalist challenge' within their midst. Furthermore, we will probe the validity of the common assumption that the 'fundamentalist mind-set' represents some sort of religious-ethnic tribalism or a form of deviant psychology. Building on seminal ideas from various scholarly fields, we will interrogate fundamentalism as a complex, multiform and evolving phenomenon which creatively reacts and adjust to rapid cultural-social change. An emphasis will be placed on the controversial relationship that fundamentalism entertains with globalization trends, post-colonialism as well as the secular values of Western Modernity.

## **Second Semester**

### **Nature, Grace and Triune God ( Dr Andrew Pierce)**

This module analyses the contentious relationships in Christian tradition between understandings of the mystery of God on the one hand, and of the human person on the other. This relationship is pivotal to the experience of ruptured communion amongst Christian churches; between East and West; between the Churches and communities shaped by the Western Reformations; and, more recently, between churches of the Global North and South. Focusing on the paired theological themes of Nature and Grace, module-participants

interrogate the extent to which existing tensions may be addressed in the context of ecumenical convergence, closely focusing on the continuing reception of the paradigmatic Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999).

**Muslim God, Christian God: Islam and Muslim-Christian Comparative Theology ( Dr Zohar Hadromi-Allouche, Dr Victor Edwin and Dr Shadaab Rahemtulla)**

This module has two parts. The first part will focus on Jesus in Islam while exploring diverse sources for the Islamic Jesus and making an attempt to craft a biography of Islamic Jesus as the word and spirit of God and the Messiah (birth and salvation vs. crucifixion). It will also reflect on Mary in Islam. As a way of conclusion of this part the module will discuss Jesus in the teachings of contemporary North American Muslim preachers. The second part of the module will start by examining the origin of Islam; Islam as critique and its relationship with the People of the Book and Tribal Religions. Furthermore it will critically reflect on the history of changing political and theological dynamics of portrayals of Muhammad in Christian Europe and the history of Muslim-Christian relations. In search for a dialogical relationship, the module will examine modern Christian and Islamic theologies of liberation by reflecting on the works of Malcom X and Martin Luther King, Jr and discuss diverse possibilities of imagining Jesus and Muhammad as Prophets in relation to issues of gender, class, race and imperialism. As a way of conclusion it will map new initiatives and possibilities for the future of Muslim-Christian dialogue.