**IST 1019 Why the Church**

**Instructors:** Dr. Rubén Arjona and Dr. Katherine Turpin

**Course Description:**

This first-year interdisciplinary course explores different approaches to being the church in the New Testament, throughout history, and in the contemporary context.  By looking critically and appreciatively at these historically embedded understandings of church, the course encourages students to articulate their own theologies and visions of church responsive to their vocational identity, cultural context, and communal commitments.

Required Text for the Course: Bryan P. Stone.  *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (Routledge Contemporary Ecclesiology Series). Routledge, 2016 (original Ashgate 2012).

**Course Learning Goals:**

1. Students identify and describe characteristic approaches to the academic study of religion related to at least four of the six curricular areas identified in the core curriculum.
2. Students demonstrate critical reading skills, such as the capacity to identify the thesis of a text, its methodology, the contextual situation of the author’s argument in a larger discourse, the contours of its argument, and the implications of its constructive work.
3. Students demonstrate the capacity to write a brief, thesis-driven paper drawing on textual resources with appropriate academic citation and a writing style appropriate to the genre.
4. Students are able to identify appropriate academic resources through library research in order to address a research question of significance to them.
5. Students engage in critical, respectful, and constructive academic dialogue and reflection in a diverse cultural setting (the classroom).
6. Student motivation, curiosity, and commitment to the engaged academic study of religion and theology increases.

**Degree Learning Goals**

While we are introducing four areas of the core curriculum, this course supports academic development primarily related to the following degree learning goal:

**Constructive Theology (TH)**: critically engage historical and contemporary theological expressions of religious traditions and articulate one's own constructive theological position in relation to contemporary events and/or situations.

**Rhythm of the Course**

Except for the week of Journey Days and the week following, something happens for this class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Often that is engagement with a series of readings in a discussion forum, but it may also be an integration activity, a major written assignment that is due, or other class activities.

**Major Assignments**

1. **Autobiographical Essay** (3-4 pages, due Sept. 15, 10% of grade) Reflect on how you have come to understand the nature and function of “church” within your own life journey. If you have been a part of a Christian tradition, you might talk about your own experiences with rituals in the church, the role of the Bible in the tradition you are familiar with, experiences you have had with pastoral figures, places you struggled with the church, and what it meant to belong to the community you know best. If you have not had life experiences with church, you might talk about the places you came to be aware that church existed through relationships with other people who attended, through popular culture images, etc.  Reflect on what impressions you have had about the nature and function of church and where they came from. In both cases, this could include your earliest memories/understandings of church, major points of transition in your understandings of church, and laments/prophetic denunciations about the role of the church as you have experienced it.
2. **Observation and Analysis Paper** (3-4 pages, due Oct. 6, 25% of grade) Visit a worship service and have a conversation with a clergyperson or lay leader in a Christian community that is not from your denominational or cultural background.  Write a brief description and analysis of what constitutes the church in that place based on the analytical questions provided by your instructors.
3. **Historical Understandings of Church Research Project** (two submissions, due Oct. 27th and Nov. 3rd , 25% of grade together)
   1. *Annotated Bibliography, Thesis, Outline-*Using the online resources available to you through Iliff's library databases, identify at least three articles/chapters pertaining to the church in context that you are researching and read them. Create an annotated bibliography of the resources that includes bibliographic information and a brief annotation (1-2 paragraphs each, fairly informal writing is okay) noting how reading the article refined or furthered your understanding of the period, helped you gather data to create your argument for your paper, and influenced your thinking about the paper prompt. Then, tell us your current thesis statement and provide a rough outline of the 3-4 main supporting arguments you plan to make in support of it.
   2. *Research Paper-*Research a particular contextualized expression of church from a moment in history from the list of topics provided.  We will each choose a different moment in history to build our historical knowledge of the varied expressions of the church together. Each student will gather at least 5 credible academic resources using the Iliff library collection and online databases to document a particular expression of church. After a brief overview of the cultural context and historical moment in which it emerged, students will write the majority of the paper by choosing one element of that expression of church to highlight that captures the essence of the church in that time and place.  This could be a ritual practice, a way of being community, a form of pastoral leadership, an endorsed doctrine or popular belief, an architectural convention, or other element. Students will argue a thesis about why the chosen element captures something important about the nature of the church in that time and place (5-7 pages, double spaced).
4. **Final Paper** (due Nov. 17, 20% of grade, multiple forms of expression possible, page limit varies) Students are invited to articulate their own theology of the church in conversation with course materials, and then to describe what that theological understanding might look like fleshed out in an ideal embodied community. This could take the form of a media project, a video, a sermon, an educational resource, a paper, or an artistic expression with accompanying explanatory written materials.
5. **Class Participation** (ongoing throughout class, 20%) based on completion of course reading, regular participation in course discussion forums, and in-class activities during Journey Days.

**Grading**

Each major written assignment in the course will have a rubric posted with the assignment guidelines that will help you understand the criteria by which the project will be evaluated. We will do our best to provide feedback in a timely fashion to contribute to your constructive learning process. We share the grading in the class, so you will generally receive feedback from one of the instructors on any given assignment.

Low-stakes assignments, such as daily discussion forums, tend to be graded on an incomplete/complete scale, and will contribute to your participation grade in the course. These posts may be submitted after the deadline for half credit.

**Policies and Services**

***Incompletes*:**It is our hope that students will complete the work of this course within the confines of the quarter. Taking incompletes should only occur in extraordinary adverse circumstances. Please see the Masters Student Handbook for Iliff’s policies and procedures related to taking an incomplete.

***Pass/Fail:***Masters students wishing to take the class pass/fail should discuss this with the instructor by the second class session.

***Academic Integrity and Core Values:***All students are expected to abide by Iliff’s statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook, and to seek to live into the core values of academic engagement, intersectional accountability, relational respect, and dynamic spirituality.

***Accommodations*:**Iliff engages in a collaborative effort with students with disabilities to reasonably accommodate student needs.   Students are encouraged to contact their assigned advisor to initiate the process of requesting accommodations.  The advising center can be contacted at [advising@iliff.edu](mailto:advising@iliff.edu) or by phone at 303-765-1146.

***Writing Lab:***  Grammar and organization are important for all written assignments.  Additional help is available from the Iliff Writing Lab, which is available for students of any level who need help beginning an assignment, organizing thoughts, or reviewing a final draft.

***Inclusive Language:***It is expected that all course participants will use inclusive language in speaking and writing, and will use terms that do not create barriers to classroom community.