

**Lutheran Theological Seminary
2022-2023 Spring Semester**

PT2075/MC2029 Being Human in a VUCA-World and the Church's Mission

Dr. Robert Doornenbal (Ph.D., The Netherlands)

A visiting professor in Practical Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Hong Kong, and active in various Dutch churches, among which the *Arc of Light* (Dutch: *Lichtboog*) in Houten, a congregation of >2,000 persons in which he served for over seven years as their teacher-pastor. For many years, Dr. Doornenbal was a teacher, mentor, and theological researcher at the theological faculty of the University of Applied Sciences in Ede, The Netherlands. In 2012, he graduated *cum laude* at the Free University of Amsterdam with a practical theological dissertation with the titled *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and its Challenges for Theological Education*.

Course Schedule

Date: April 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 2023 (9 days)

Time: HKT 09:00-12:30

Venue: LTS campus (50 To Fung Shan Road, Shatin)

Language: English

Course Outlines & Objective

It is said that we live in a VUCA-world, i.e., a world that is increasingly characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. While some people thrive in such circumstances, many others are increasingly confused about their personal identity – including even their *gender* identity – and their purpose in life. More than ever before, people in their twenties, thirties or forties tend to manifest a diffuse or fragmented sense of self. Frequently they feel overwhelmed, tired, and alienated from their own feelings. They experience powerful forms of anxiety and depression too vague to be named, while increasingly being haunted by shame rooted in a nebulous sense of personal failure. These developments should be understood against the background of the neoliberal consumer culture with its emphasis on continuous high-speed change and innovation, and its treatment of people as algorithm-driven data sets. Fast-moving young men and women with their head in their phone and earplugs in their head seem to be living an authentic good life. On the surface it looks like they found the wellspring of lasting fulfilment and happiness. However, chances are that they actually feel restless, forever wanting and discontented, because – among other things – they have difficulty to imagine living a life that respects limits and that is satisfied with *enough*.

In this intensive course, we survey these and related developments with the goal of discerning what aspects of a Christian view of humans – a theological anthropology – may be especially pertinent today. We also ask the question, *what does this mean for the mission of churches and Christian organizations, and also for our personal callings?* We will start by outlining a deep tension within contemporary views of humanity, i.e., the tension between 'Romantic' and 'Modernistic' approaches. The contemporary search of many people to find their "authentic" and "unique" selves is typical for the Romantic approach – and it can be discerned in Hong Kong as well as in Amsterdam, in Indonesia and Malaysia, in South Korea as well as in Australia. On the other hand, the belief in technological progress – the development of AI, genetics, and nano- and biotechnology – with their promise of making us into (functional) "transhumanists", is typical Modernistic. Hidden drives behind these and related developments are those of (digital) capitalism

and neoliberalism with their many accompanying problems that manifest themselves on a global scale. In this course it is assumed that a retrieval & update of what it means that *humanity is created in the image of God* would be helpful, especially if we learn to live out its practical implications.

Are you ready to learn more about current (global) societal-cultural developments? Are you willing to reflect deeply on various aspects of what it means to be 'human'? Are you curious as to how this might be relevant for Christians and churches-in-mission today? Are you eager to be inspired by new insights and capable – at least mentally – to cross borders, including conversing with other course participants from various backgrounds? Then, this course is for you!

Overview of Subjects

The lectures in this course are not just about various *ideas* about being human; we will also discuss (practical) *implications* for Christians & churches of the discussed topic or theme.

12/4 Introduction:

The “Saturated Self” in a VUCA World: ‘Romantic’, ‘Modernistic’, ‘Postmodern’ (?)

13/4 The ‘Romantic’ Self 1:

“My Heart’s Desire”: *Consumer Culture and the ‘Homo Desiderans’* (Augustine & others)

14/4 The ‘Romantic’ Self 2:

“My Authentic Self”: *The Entrepreneurial Self, the Search for Authenticity, and ‘Third Order Suffering’ in a Neoliberal Age*

17/4 The ‘Romantic’ Self 3:

“I Choose My (Gender) Identity”: *The Rise and Triumph of the (Post) Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to the Sexual Revolution*

18/4 The ‘Modernistic’ Self 1:

“I Love/Hate These Restless Devices”: *Modernity, Acceleration & (Digital) Technology, Restlessness (& Acedia) and Its Cure*

19/4 The ‘Modernistic’ Self 2:

“We Can Transcend Our Humanity”: *Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and (Functional) Transhumanism*

20/4 Being Human through a Christian Lens 1:

“I am Only Human”: *Learning to Live Within Creaturely Limits*

24/4 Being Human through a Christian Lens 2:

“Love Thy Body”: *Implications of Our Being Embodied*

25/4 Being Human through a Christian Lens 3:

“Imago Dei: Being Created In God’s Image” & Final Presentations & Conclusions