

Union Theological Seminary

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Seminar: Theologies of Religions

ST 511 / Fall 2008 / Tuesday 1:10-4:00

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

- We hope to achieve in-depth study and in-depth class discussions of the various ways in which Christian communities and theologians are trying to understand the plurality of religions – and themselves in light of other religions.
- While trying to lay the foundations for a fruitful Christian participation in *inter-religious* dialogue, we also hope to realize a fruitful *intra-religious* dialogue among Christians about how they can faithfully and effectively engage other religions.
- We hope that the course will better enable us to speak with persons of other religions and with our fellow-Christians about other religions.
- A more remote, but nonetheless real, goal of the course is to produce a publishable collection of student essays that would articulate a Union Theological Seminary analysis of contemporary efforts to formulate a Christian theology of (and dialogue with) other religions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Texts for pre-reading, before the semester begins:
 - Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.
 - Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religion: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarity Press, 2004.
- Text for the semester:
 - Hick, John and Paul F. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005. (Originally published by Orbis Books, 1987.)
 - Okholm, Dennis L. & Timothy R. Phillips, eds. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
 - Tilley, Terrence W. et alii. *Religious Diversity and the American Experience: A Theological Approach*. New York: Continuum, 2007.

- Tillich, Paul. *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Yong, Amos, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Other required readings are available on Blackboard.

PROCEDURES/EXPECTATIONS

1. Engagement

- It's a seminar, a small group, so we expect to mix it up and to hear from *everyone* – as clearly, forthrightly, succinctly, and respectfully as possible.
- We want discussions to be focused – topic-based, which means text-based. We can go beyond the readings, but that's where we start. This will require careful, critical reading of assigned materials. (To make this possible, I've tried to keep required readings to between 150-200 pages a week.)
- I would not want anyone (including the instructor!) to miss more than one class over the semester. If you might need to do that, we'll need to talk about it.

2. Opening Statements

- Each member of the seminar will prepare an Opening Statement on the assigned readings that will be the springboard into our conversation. It should contain three ingredients:
 - *Analysis*: Your own assessment of what the readings are about, what they're proposing, what they're claiming. This is not a summary of the readings but a distilling of their intents or direction.
 - *Critique*: Your own critical assessment – where you see the soft arguments, incoherence, inappropriate use of the tradition, ethical disregard or danger.
 - *Construction*: Given your assessed strengths and weaknesses of the readings, how do you think we can move forward – that is, how avoid the dangers/weaknesses, how to elaborate an understanding of other faiths that is both appropriate to the Christian tradition and adequate to meet the needs of the world.
- The paper will be read to the seminar within the space of 15 to 20 minutes. Thus its written form should be about seven to eight pages (double spaced).
 - Aim for a quality paper that could be presented at an AAR session – coherently constructed, clear, with appropriate references.

- Papers should be submitted under “Assignments” on Blackboard before class and then posted on the “Discussion Board” by the end of the week (Friday), with whatever further reflections you might like to make in light of our class discussions.

3. Book Reviews

- Each member of the seminar is asked to do one book review. I’ll try to make it a book of your choice, but we want to have one or two book reviews for each class, to complement the readings and the Opening Statement.
- Titles “For Book Review” are provided for each day of class. I prefer you to stick to those titles (they are something like “classic texts” for the perspective we are discussing that day). But if you have another book that you would really like to get into, let me know.
- About five to six pages, the Reviews should contain two parts:
 - A summary of the book’s contents and argument. (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of your review), and
 - Your own critique of the book, especially in the light of our readings and discussions.
 - To be posted on Blackboard, both under “Assignments” and under “Course Documents” – by midnight of the day before class.

4. Seminar Papers

- This should be your major project and contribution to the course – and, we hope, to the book.
- While it’s hard to pinpoint the precise intent of these papers, it would be something like the following:
 - The paper should lay out your own *critical analysis* of the various models or perspectives for a theology of religions that we studied in the course – from whatever *critical lens* that interests you most and/or that you think will provide a helpful analysis.
 - After this analysis, you can turn your critical lens into a *constructive lens* and offer constructive proposals, directions, guidelines for formulating a more coherent and effective Christian theology of or encounter with other religious communities.
- Your own approach, or your critical-constructive lens, is for you to choose. For instance, it could be:
 - *biblical, patristic, historical, pastoral*;
 - *contextual*: African-American or Latino or Asian or Indigenous perspectives ... Feminist/Womanist/Mujerista experience;

- *ethical or political*: globalization ... neoliberal capitalism ... post-colonial realities ... ecological-environmental concerns ... liberation theology violence and peacemaking.
- I would like to meet with each of you early in the semester to determine a topic and perhaps help with resources. (With the book in mind, I'll try assure that the topics or diverse and balanced.)
- About 15 to 20 double-spaced pages, with notes and bibliography. (no smaller than 12 point formatting, no smaller than one inch margin)
- Deadlines:
 - For submitting topic, outline, and sources: Oct. 3.
 - For delivering paper, in class and on Blackboard: Nov. 11, Nov. 18, Dec. 2.

5. Class structure

- We hope to make extensive, but uncomplicated, use of Blackboard, primarily for communication, providing required readings, sharing Book Reviews; but also for carrying on our conversations.
 - After class, if you have any further observations or brilliant ideas, please post them in folder for that class on the Discussion Board.
- Generally, we will try to follow this structure for our meetings:
 - 1:10-2:30: Opening Statements, followed by conversation. (In the conversation, we would like to hear brief reports from the Book Reviewers.)
 - 2:30-2:40: Break
 - 2:40-4:00: Open with five minutes of silent mindfulness Comments/mini-lecture by instructor...conversation.
- For our last three classes, we will critically and constructively discuss our papers, trying to help each other with suggested revisions that will make the papers better entries for our book.
 - We'll take four papers per class, which makes for about 35 minutes each.
 - Papers should be posted on Blackboard by Monday, 9:00 A.M., of the week you are presenting.

GRADING

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| - Participation in discussions: | 10% |
| - Opening Statement: | 25% |
| - Book Review: | 25% |
| - Seminar Paper: | 40% |

OFFICE HOURS

COURSE CONTENT AND READINGS

- Sept 9 **Introductory:**
- Personal introductions and hopes for the course.
 - Determining criteria or guidelines for assessing Theologies of Religion. (You'll receive some suggestions before class via email.)
 - Prospects for publishing seminar results

No Other Gospel! (Replacement/Exclusivist Perspectives)

- Readings
 - Barth, Karl. "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," *Church Dogmatics I/2*, par. 17.
 - Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices, Chapters 5 & 7*.
 - Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Chs. 7-9, & 14.
 - William Edgar, "Exclusivism: Unjust or Just?" in *Faith Comes by Hearing*, Christopher W. Morgan ed., pp. 78-97.
- For Book Reviews
 - Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*
 - Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*.
 - Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church*.

Sept 16 **A Wider Mercy?** (The Contemporary Debate among Evangelicals)

- Readings
 - Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, pp. 93-270.
 - Harold Netland, "Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions," in *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 308-348.
- For Book Reviews
 - Ida Glaser. *The Bible and Other Faiths: Christian Responsibility in a World of Religions*.
 - Clark H Pinnock. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*.
 - John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*.

Sept 23 **"Rays of Truth...Ways of Salvation"** (Fulfillment/Inclusivist Perspectives)

- Readings
 - Paul Tillich. *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*
 - Karl Rahner. "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions."
 - *Nostra Aetate*. Second Vatican Council.
 - Jacques Dupuis. "'The Truth Will Make You Free': The Theology of Religious Pluralism Revisited."
 - Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 99-142
 - Kenneth Cracknell. "Ambivalent Theology and Ambivalent Policy: The World Council of Churches and the Interfaith Dialogue 1938-1999."
 - Tilley, *Religious Diversity*, Ch. 4: "Classic Inclusivism" and Ch. 5: "Contemporary Inclusivism."
- For Book Reviews
 - Jacques Dupuis. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*.
 - Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*.
 - Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*.
 - Francis A Sullivan. *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*.

Sept 30 **A Rainbow of Religions** (Philosophical/Mystical Pluralism)

- Readings:
 - John Hick, "A Pluralist View" in *Four Views*, 27-59.
 - Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth*, 16-36.
 - Langdon Gilkey, "Plurality and Its Theological Implications," in *The Myth*, 37-50.
 - Gordon Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christianity Theology," in *The Myth*, 3-15.
 - Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Idolatry," *The Myth*, 53-68.
 - Raimon Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges," in *The Myth*, 89-116.
 - Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, " 31-96.
- For Book Reviews
 - John Hick. *An Interpretation of Religion*.
 - Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*.
 - S.J. Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions*
 - David Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology*.
 - Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism*.

Oct 7 **A Multi-Religious Response to Eco-Human Suffering (Ethical Pluralism)**

- Readings
 - Aloysius Pieris, “The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation,” in *The Myth*, 162-77.
 - Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 69-110.
 - Marjorie Suchocki, “In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective,” in *The Myth*, 149-60.
 - Paul Knitter, “Toward a Liberative Theology of Religions,” in *The Myth*, 178-201.
 - Paul Knitter, “Religion and Globality: Can Interreligious Dialogue Be Globally Responsible?”
 - Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 156-97.
 - Tilley, *Religious Diversity and the American Experience*, Ch. 6: “From Pluralism to Mutuality.”
- For Book Reviews
 - Paul Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions*
 - Aloysius Pieris, *As Asian Theology of Liberation*
 - Anselm Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*

Oct 14 **One Spirit, Many Religions (Pentecostal/Pneumatological Perspectives)**

- Readings
 - Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*
- For Book Reviews
 - Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*
 - Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practice, and the Neighbor*.

Oct 21 **The Dominance of Diversity (Acceptance/Particularist Perspectives)**

- Readings
 - Ernst Troeltsch, “The Place of Christianity among the World Religions,” in Hick/Hebbethwaite, *Christianity and Other Religions*, 11-31.
 - George Lindbeck, “The Gospel’s Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability.”
 - J.A. DiNoia, “Pluralist Theology of Religions,” in D’Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, 119-34.
 - Paul Griffiths, "The Properly Christian Response to Religious Plurality."

- Griffiths, "Why We Need Interreligious Polemics."
 - Kenneth Surin, "A 'Politics of Speech,'" in D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, 192-212.
 - Joseph Stephen O'Leary, *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth*, 1-36.
 - Tilley, *Religious Diversity*, Ch. 7: "Is Religious Diversity a Problem to Be Solved? Not Particularly."
- For Book Reviews
 - Griffiths. *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study of the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue*.
 - J.A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*.
 - Joseph Stephen O'Leary, *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth*

Oct 28 **Radical, Deep Diversity** (Radical Particularism/Multiple Ultimates)

- Readings
 - S.Mark Heim, *Salvations*, Chs. 5 & 8
 - Heim, *The Depth of Riches*, Ch. 7
 - Heim, "God's Diversity: A Trinitarian View of Religious Pluralism."
 - David Griffin, "Whitehead, Cobb, and Deep Religious Pluralism," in Griffin, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Chs 1 & 2.
 - John B. Cobb, Jr., "Some Whiteheadian Assumptions about Religion and Pluralism," in Griffin, *Deep Religious Pluralism*, Ch. 12
 - Tilley, *Religious Diversity*, Ch. 8: "Many Salvations"
- For Book Reviews
 - S. Mark Heim. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*.
 - _____ . *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*.
 - Cobb, John B. Jr. *Transforming Christianity and the World*.
 - Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*

Nov 4 **Dialogue before Theology** (Comparative Theology/Double Belonging)

- Readings
 - Francis Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*, 1-13, 153-55, 187-208.
 - Clooney, "Reading the World in Christ: From Comparison to Inclusivism." In D'Costa, *The Uniqueness of Christianity Reconsidered*, 63-80.
 - James Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths*, Chs. 7 & 8.
 - Peter Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging" in Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 60-81.
 - Catherine Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions."

- Jeannine Hill-Fletcher. “We Are All Hybrids” in *Monopoly on Salvation?* Ch. 4.
- Tilley, *Religious Diversity*, Ch. 9: “Dialogue before Theology?” and Ch. 10: “Multiple Religious Belonging.”
- For Book Reviews
 - Catherine Cornille, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*
 - Francis Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*
 - Jeannine-Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*.

Nov 11 Students Essays

Nov 18 Students Essays

Dec 2 Students Essays