

# Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

Theology 274

Tuesdays/Thursdays 1:00-2:15

Lewis 305

Spring 2003

Dominican University

Dr. Jeffrey Carlson

Office hours by appointment

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## **A. DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:**

Religions have always interacted with each other, but in modern times explicit and intentional dialogue has become more widespread and sustained. This course explores some key reasons for, approaches to, issues in and outcomes of Buddhist-Christian interchange and reflection. Emphasis will be on Catholic Christianity and a variety of Buddhist traditions. We will explore classical as well as contemporary texts. The course fulfills both the Multicultural requirement and the Theology area requirement at Dominican University.

When you complete this course successfully you will make progress on the following goals:

1. You will have an enhanced working knowledge of some significant elements of Buddhism and Christianity, past and present, especially in the areas of key experiences, beliefs and ethics.
2. You will develop your capacity to make critical comparisons between these two religious traditions.
3. You will increase your capacity to analyze and reflect on the meaning of Buddhist and Christian beliefs, practices and ethics.
4. You will increase your capacity to read and critically interpret religious and theological texts in general.
5. You will develop your written and verbal communication skills.

The course will be centered on texts, discussion and student writing. While many of our questions are profound, our approach is very straightforward. *This course is about each of us making the commitment to read books and articles outside of class, to think and write about them intensively, and then to come to class and discuss their deepest ideas with each other.* Our course has been designed with the expectation and requirement that you will spend **at least five hours per week outside of class** preparing readings and assignments. Being in college is hard work,

but hopefully it is work you enjoy doing, and take pride in doing well. You owe it to yourself, to others in the class, and to the integrity of the learning process to approach your academic work with sufficient seriousness. If you cannot make this commitment, you will not do very well.

## **B. STUDENT REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Careful completion of readings.** Come to each class session having completed any assigned readings, taken thorough notes, and having tried your best to find out the meanings of terms and concepts in the readings that are unfamiliar to you. If you do this carefully and consistently you will be well prepared for our discussions and you will have a strong foundation from which to write your discussion starters and your papers. Always bring the assigned readings to class—whether books or Blackboard printouts.
2. **Discussion starters.** For each class session, one or more students will be required to prepare one-page, single-spaced papers, called “discussion starters,” on a portion of that session’s assigned reading. These papers should summarize key concepts from the reading, offer some provocative questions for discussion, and offer some of the student’s own reflections on the material. *These discussion starters must be posted on the course’s Blackboard site (under “Discussion Board”) by 10:00 p.m. the day before the class session.* All students must read and print all of the discussion starters and bring them to class.
3. **Discussions in class.** Asking questions, raising concerns and offering your own ideas in discussions are crucial components of the learning process. The overall degree of intellectual engagement you demonstrate in the course will be assessed, focusing on the extent to which you are an active, informed, stimulating participant in class discussions.
4. **Papers.** You will be required to complete three papers, each no less than five but no more than seven pages in length, double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point type. These will be designed to allow you to demonstrate competence in any/all of the learning goals listed in part A of this Syllabus. Specific instructions for each paper will be distributed later in the semester.

<b>First paper assigned:</b>	<b>February 13</b>	<b>First paper due:</b>	<b>February 20</b>
<b>Second paper assigned:</b>	<b>March 20</b>	<b>Second paper due:</b>	<b>March 27</b>
<b>Third paper assigned:</b>	<b>May 1</b>	<b>Third paper due:</b>	<b>May 8</b>

## **C. GRADING:**

The total points possible for all work in the course is 1000.

- Class preparation and participation will be worth a total of 250 possible points. This includes preparation of readings, discussion starters, and participation in class discussions. *Students who arrive late for class, miss class or come to class without completing the readings will receive a lower score in this area.* You will be graded on preparation and participation five times throughout the semester—on February 4, February 20, March 20, April 8, and May 1, and it will be worth 50 points each time.

- Each of the three papers will be worth 250 possible points.

The final course grade will be determined according to the following chart:

<u>Total points accumulated</u>	<u>Final course grade</u>
930-1000	A
900-929	A-
870-899	B+
830-869	B
800-829	B-
770-799	C+
730-769	C
700-729	C-
600-699	D
Under 600	F

#### **D. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Please read the Academic Integrity Policy in the current *Bulletin of the Rosary College of Arts and Sciences*. It describes violations of academic integrity, including plagiarism and cheating. If the instructor determines that you have violated academic integrity, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment in which the violation occurred.

#### **E. REQUIRED TEXTS:**

1. Leo D. Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue*. Orbis Books, 1993.
2. *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics*, ed. Donald W. Mitchell. Continuum, 1999.
3. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Riverhead Books, 1997.

Other required readings are on the course's Blackboard site under "External Links/Variou Required Readings." See the handout distributed on the first day of class for instructions on how to gain access to the Blackboard site.

#### **F. SCHEDULE:**

##### **Thursday January 16**

Introduction and Syllabus.

#### **A Range of Catholic Approaches to Religious Diversity**

##### **Tuesday January 21**

ON BLACKBOARD: *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*.

ON BLACKBOARD: Paul F. Knitter, "Key Questions for a Theology of Religions."

**Thursday January 23**

ON BLACKBOARD: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Dominus Iesus."

ON BLACKBOARD: Francis X. Clooney, "Dominus Iesus and the New Millennium."

**Buddhist and Christian Approaches to Dialogue****Tuesday January 28**

Mitchell pp. 9-17, "Dialogue and Unity: A Buddhist Perspective."

Lefebure pp. xv-xxiii, "Invitation to a Journey: The Prospects of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue."

**Life and Teaching of the Buddha****Thursday January 30**

Lefebure pp. 3-19, "The Life and Teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha."

ON BLACKBOARD: *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* Part I: The Buddha-karita of Asvaghosha Books I-III.

**Tuesday February 4**

ON BLACKBOARD: *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* Part I: The Buddha-karita of Asvaghosha Books VI, XI-XIV.

**Preparation/Participation scores distributed.**

**Thursday February 6**

Lefebure pp. 19-27, "The Life and Teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha" (continued).

Mitchell pp. 101-107, "Teaching Meditation in the Buddhist Community."

Mitchell pp. 111-117, "The Role of Ch'an Teachers in China."

**Life and Teaching of Jesus the Christ****Tuesday February 11**

Lefebure pp. 28-38, "Jesus the Christ and Shakyamuni Buddha."

ON BLACKBOARD: New American Bible, Matthew Chapters 1-4, Luke Chapters 1-2.

**Thursday February 13**

Lefebure pp. 38-47, "Jesus the Christ and Shakyamuni Buddha" (continued).

ON BLACKBOARD: New American Bible, Matthew Chapters 5-7.

**FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED.**

**Tuesday February 18**

Lefebure pp. 47-56, "Jesus the Christ and Shakyamuni Buddha" (continued).

ON BLACKBOARD: New American Bible, Mark Chapters 14-16.

**Thursday February 20**

Discussion.

**FIRST PAPER DUE.**

**Preparation/Participation scores distributed.**

**Key Developments in the Buddhist Tradition: Zen/Mahayana**

**Tuesday February 25**

Lefebure pp. 59-81, "Ascending and Descending: The Structure of Mahayana Buddhist Experience and the Zen Tradition."

**Thursday February 27**

ON BLACKBOARD: Masao Abe, "God, Emptiness and the True Self."

**March 4 and March 6: Spring Break**

**Key Developments in the Christian Tradition: Negative Theology**

**Tuesday March 11**

Lefebure pp. 82-93, "Dionysius the Areopagite and Mahayana Perspectives."  
ON BLACKBOARD: Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*.

**Thursday March 13**

Lefebure pp. 93-101, "Dionysius the Areopagite and Mahayana Perspectives" (continued).

**Key Developments in the Buddhist Tradition: Pure Land**

**Tuesday March 18**

Lefebure pp. 102-114, "Pure Land Buddhism."  
ON BLACKBOARD: *Buddhist Mahayana Texts Part II: The Smaller Sukhâvatî-vyûha* (entire).

**Key Developments in the Christian Tradition: Augustine**

**Thursday March 20**

Lefebure pp. 115-140, "Augustine and Mahayana Buddhism."  
**SECOND PAPER ASSIGNED.**  
**Preparation/Participation scores distributed.**

**Themes in Explicit Buddhist-Christian Dialogue**

**Tuesday March 25**

Mitchell pp. 18-33, "Nirvana, Buddhahood and the Spiritual Life" and "God, Creation and the Spiritual Life."

**Thursday March 27**

Discussion.  
**SECOND PAPER DUE.**

**Tuesday April 1**

Mitchell pp. 135-152, “The Human Family,” “Worldly *Bodhisattvas*: Zen Awakening and Social Transformation,” “The *Bodhisattvas* and Society.”  
 Mitchell pp. 159-165, “Building the Reign of God.”

**Thursday April 3**

Mitchell pp. 169-193, “Topics in the Spiritual Life: Mind and Virtue.”

**Tuesday April 8**

Mitchell pp. 194-225, “Topics in the Spiritual Life: Method and Experience.”  
**Preparation/Participation scores distributed.**

**Thursday April 10**

Discussion.

**Tuesday April 15**

Mitchell pp. 226-255, “Topics in the Spiritual Life: Tragedy and Transformation.”

**Thursday April 17: No Class****Tuesday April 22**

Mitchell pp. 256-277, “Topics in the Spiritual Life: Epilogue.”  
 ON BLACKBOARD: Paul F. Knitter and Masao Abe, “Spirituality and Liberation: Buddhist-Christian Conversation.”

**A Buddhist/Christian Understanding of “Multiple Roots”****Thursday April 24**

Nhat Hanh pp. 1-59, “Be Still and Know,” “Mindfulness and the Holy Spirit,” “The First Supper,” “Living Buddha, Living Christ.”

**Tuesday April 29**

Nhat Hanh pp. 60-130, “Communities of Practice,” “A Peaceful Heart,” “For a Future to Be Possible,” “Taking Refuge.”

**Thursday May 1**

Nhat Hanh pp. 131-198, “The Other Shore,” “Faith and Practice.”  
**THIRD PAPER ASSIGNED.**  
**Preparation/Participation scores distributed.**

**Thursday May 8**

**THIRD PAPER DUE by 3:00 p.m. in instructor’s office.**