

# Christians and Religious Neighbors

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Comes from the experience of teaching within the Graduate Theological Union, a consortial program in graduate theological and religious studies in Berkeley, California; an entry-level graduate course, taught as a 3 hours/week (36 hours/term) seminar; and enrolled approximately 10 students.

This course represents an effort to introduce students to fundamental philosophical, theological, ethical, and historical issues surrounding the ongoing encounter between Christian and other religious communities within the North American context of religious pluralism. The theologically-oriented students who took the course responded most enthusiastically to the self-consciously theological material presented, and seemed to find the ethics- or moral philosophy-oriented material least accessible, with a few exceptions. The most important feature of the course is its built-in trajectory: movement from initial rigidity and fragmentation of student views toward final consensus-building exercises, all the while modelling the kind of honest discourse and consensual process required through the judicious moderation of classroom discussion.

## *Introduction*

This course is an introduction to both "constructive" (theological-ethical) and "descriptive" (historical-anthropological) approaches to understanding Christian interaction with non-Christian religious neighbors. Students are invited to participate in the collaborative and personal construction of informed theological, historical-critical, and ethical perspectives on Christian participation in the challenge of "liveability" among religious neighbors.

Throughout the course, we will keep the following questions in mind:

- How might religious neighbors live together?
- Within Christianity (as we may variously understand it), what viable openings exist toward other religions?
- What's at stake for us as Christians in working toward "liveability" with our religious neighbors?

There are no prerequisites for enrollment in the course but, because the course is designed as a seminar, and thus requires an intimate learning community, enrollment in the course must be limited to 15 persons. Unfortunately, auditors cannot participate.

## *Course Requirements*

Each student is expected to:

- participate in the seminar's **discussions and exercises** (EVERY WEEK);
- bring a set of **critical questions** to class, as a way to help frame the issues at stake in each week's assigned readings (EVERY OTHER WEEK);
- write and turn in a short (1-2 pp.) **response paper** before class, as a way to develop a personal position on that week's material (EVERY OTHER WEEK);

- contribute to the **presentation of denominational positions** on religious pluralism (ONE WEEK);
- help to **lead one class discussion** on the assigned readings for that week (ONE WEEK);
- generate and **present a project**
- (a paper, a course design, a workshop proposal, a sermon series, a cross-cultural immersion experience with written analysis of learnings, or other creative, reflective effort) which effectively presents a personal position on the issues surrounding life among religious neighbors (ONE WEEK);
- participate in the achievement of a group consensus on strategic options for negotiating religious diversity in our communities (ONE WEEK).

**Required Texts** (for sale at GTU Bookstore, 2465 LeConte; also on reserve at GTU Library)

- Judith A. Berling, *A Pilgrim In Chinese Culture: Negotiating Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997)
- Gavin D'Costa, ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth Of A Pluralistic Theology Of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990)
- Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey From Bozeman To Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) (cont'd.)
- S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth And Difference In Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995)
- John Hick & Paul F. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward A Pluralistic Theology Of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987)

*Calendar of Meetings* \*Asterisked items are on reserve at GTU Library

Week One (14 September) **INTRODUCTIONS** (no preparation necessary)

- Introductions to one another and to the course
- Assignment of denominational position reporting
- Discussion of handout: "Judgements on God's ordinances must be embarked upon with prudence" (\*Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection* [London: Penguin, 1993]: 93-96)

Week Two (21 September) **THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES (I)**

Establishing a shared vocabulary: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism

- W. C. Smith, "Idolatry" (*MCU* 53-68)
- Rowan Williams, "Trinity And Pluralism" (*CUR* 3-15)
- John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity" (*MCU* 16-36)
- Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims" (*CUR* 96-106)

Week Three (28 September) **THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES (II)**

Theologizing from life among religious neighbors

(First round of denominational position reports)

- M. M. Thomas, "A Christ-Centered Humanist Approach..." (*CUR* 49-62)

- Stanley J. Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow" (*MCU* 69-88)
- Raimundo Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges" (*MCU* 89-116)
- Francis X. Clooney, "Reading the World in Christ" (*CUR* 63-80)

Week Four (5 October) **THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES (III)**

Assumptions and presumptions of "pluralism"

(Second round of denominational position reports)

- John B. Cobb, Jr., "Beyond 'Pluralism'" (*CUR* 81-95)
- Langdon Gilkey, "Plurality and its Theological Implications" (*MCU* 37-52)
- Lesslie Newbigin, "Religion for the Marketplace" (*CUR* 135-148)
- Tom F. Driver, "The Case For Pluralism" (*MCU* 203-218)

Week Five (12 October) **HISTORICAL APPROACHES (I)**

"Pilgrimage" among religious neighbors: intentionality & narrativity

- Judith A. Berling, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture* (chapters 1-3, 6-9)

Week Six (19 October) **HISTORICAL APPROACHES (II)**

"Encounter" with religious neighbors: spontaneous & episodic

- **Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God* (chapters 1, 3, 4, 7, 8)**

*NO MEETING ON 26 OCTOBER: READING WEEK*

Week Seven (2 November) **ETHICAL APPROACHES (I)**

Common and uncommon morality among religious neighbors

(Prospectuses for presentations **DUE**)

- Henry Rosemont, Jr., "Beyond Post-Modernism," (*\*Chinese Language, Thought, & Culture*, ed. P. J. Ivanhoe [Chicago: Open Court, 1996]: 155-172)
- Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "In Search of Justice," (*MCU* 149-161)
- John Macquarrie, "Rethinking Natural Law" (*\*Readings in Moral Theology #7*, ed. C. E. Curran & R. A. McCormick, SJ [New York: Paulist Press, 1991]: 221-247)

Week Eight (9 November) **ETHICAL APPROACHES (II)**

The search for justice and the need for consensus

- Jeffrey Stout, "On Having a Morality in Common" (*\*Prospects for a Common Morality*, ed. G.

Outka & J. P. Reeder, Jr. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993]: 215-232)

- Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" (\**Multiculturalism & "The Politics of Recognition,"* ed. A. Gutmann [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]: 25-74)

- Paul F. Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," (*MCU* 178-202)

Week Nine (16 November) **THE QUEST FOR "LIVEABILITY"**

Critical perspectives/prospecti

- S. Mark Heim, *Salvations* (chapters 4-8)

Week Ten (23 November) **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (I)**

Week Eleven (30 November) **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (II)**

Week Twelve (7 December) **BUILDING A CONSENSUS**

Final projects due !

Exercise: Caucus for consensus-building

Week Thirteen (14 December) **EXAMINING OUR CONSENSUS**

A look at where we have been and where we have yet to go...