

**ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
AGTS WEST - CUPERTINO CAMPUS**

**PTH/THE 622: Communicating Christian Faith in a Pluralistic Society  
(3 Credits)**

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**Spring Semester, 2009**  
**February 10 – March 3**

**Course Syllabus**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed to equip the diligent leader with the understanding and tools needed to communicate the Gospel effectively in a pluralistic age and culture. Pluralism is both a fact of cultural diversity and a non-Christian worldview. Communicating the gospel and assisting new believers who have been converted from other traditions requires sensitivity and skill. Articulating the definitive claims of Christ in a world that considers an absolute statement questionable is one of the great challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Understanding the cultural and philosophical landscape (and landmines!), the necessity of supernatural insight and the particular challenges presented by the different “universes next door” (James Sire) are all part of the learning experience.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Though class presentations, discussion, reading and reflection, the diligent student will

1. Understand the different perspective on pluralism
2. Understand and articulate the basic concepts of the leading world views that compete for the hearts and minds of people in her/his immediate spheres of ministry influence
3. Be able to articulate and minister the gospel across cultural and philosophical boundaries
4. Have insight and be able to confront the various forms of syncretism that infiltrate 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian thinking, worship and reflection
5. Understand and experience how Pentecostal perspectives and power can make an impact
6. Begin to transform her/his ministry paradigms and community structures to more effectively reach people of non-Christian and non-Western background

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

Sire, James, *The Universe Next Door* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) InterVarsity Press.

Willard, Dallas, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Harper San Francisco

Zacharias, Ravi, *Jesus Among the Gods*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE**

Date	Topic	Reading and Assignments
2-10	Biblical Narratives and Pluralism	Isaiah 40-66; Luke-Acts
2-17	Understanding Pluralism	Sire – first essay
2-24	Religious syncretism	Zacharias – second essay
3-3	Globalism and Christianity	Willard – third essay

## **METHODOLOGY**

Class Lectures, guided discussions, interactive questions, video presentations and guest lecturers will all help us gain an understanding of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges of pluralism and how the Gospel more than meets them.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Consistent attendance and participation
2. Three essays of 4-5 pages will be due by the end of March:
  - a. Essay One: Compare the perspectives of Eastern Monism, New Age and Christianity regarding truth and reality, their view of God and moral norms.
  - b. Essay Two: Comment on three areas of syncretism that threaten Biblical Christianity today.
  - c. Essay Three: What is your understanding of the “core” of Christianity? What are the essential doctrines and disciplines that are the irreducible foundations?
3. There will be a final paper of 6-8 pages, with proper notes and a bibliography containing at least five sources outside of the class texts. The focus of this paper will be *how Pentecostal Christianity is uniquely equipped in its beliefs and practices to confront and transform the pluralism we face*. This paper is due by April 10.

## **GRADING**

Attendance and Participation: 50 points

Essays: 50 points each = 150 points

Final Paper: 100 points

Total: 300 points

Grades are determined on a percentage scale according to the AGTS norms. For each level, there are three gradations, for example: 99-100% = A+; 94-98% = A; 90-93% = A-

The same hold true for B, C, and D-level grades.

### **HELPFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT**

1. Stay up with the weekly reading and prepare written work at the graduate level. Feel free to submit drafts for the professor's perusal.
2. Active learning means speaking as well as listening. Do not be afraid to "think out loud" in class

Contact the professor at drcharlieself @ yahoo.com or 408-307-1339

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** – will be distributed in class

Go to the AGTS website for any help with the details of registration or payment or contact the Continuing Education office at 417-268-1044.

## Understanding Pluralism

Biblical assessments: “No god but God”

Historical roots

Greeks and Romans

Early Christian encounters

Christendom and Islam

The Modern World – Cartesian Revolution (1650)

The American Experience

The Enlightenment and 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals

Post-1914

Pluralism – the “universes next door”

Eastern Monism

New Age Syncretism

Naturalistic Secularism

The Wild Card – “spirituality”

Neo-Paganism

Communicating Truth in a world of truths

## Communicating Christ in a Pluralistic Age The Challenge of Religious Syncretism

The Biblical Perspective vs. The Secular Anthropological Perspective on the “evolution of religious consciousness”

The Conflict in Ancient Israel – why was idolatry such a problem?

Selah – Monotheism and Morality – the inseparable connection between theology, morality and justice

Syncretism – anthropological and historical perspectives

Syncretism and Christianity

The Early Church to 381

Medieval Missions

Reformation streams

Modern Missions and Contextualization

The Enlightenment legacy and the rise of Comparative Religion

Dialogue and Evangelization

Contemporary Accommodations

Materialism and the Prosperity Gospel

Theology, therapy and Self-Fulfillment

“The Medium is the Message” – the Humiliation of the Word

Hope for the future!

Communicating Christ in a Pluralistic Age

## The Authentic Gospel and Pentecostal Power

Authentic and Counterfeit Faith

Understanding the Kingdom

Synoptic traditions

John's Gospel and Epistles

Luke-Acts Narrative theology

Paul, Damascus and "The Mystery"

The Revelation – apocalyptic and presence

The paradoxes of Christianity

The Pentecostal Stream and Global Christianity

Christianity and Pluralism – Reprised

Fact and Ideology

The World-view Marketplace

Confronting the Powers

Final thoughts