

## ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

### BTHM 640/MSSM 639/PTHM 640 The Decisiveness of Christ in a Pluralistic World

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Summer I, 2004

#### COURSE SYLLABUS

##### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

How should Christians present Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” in an increasingly globalized world marked by growing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity? This course seeks to equip students with biblical, theological and phenomenological resources for responding effectively to the challenges presented by religious pluralism to Christian Witness in the twenty-first century.

##### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course is designed to enable/ equip the student:

1. To understand the contemporary phenomenon of religious pluralism and the various impulses giving rise to its emergence
2. To introduce and evaluate alternative Christian responses to non-Christian religious tradition and experience
3. To offer an informed biblical and theological response to the ideology of pluralism
4. To identify and critically evaluate crucial issues involved in the Christian encounter with people of other faiths
5. To share Jesus with people of other faiths clearly, boldly and sensitively

##### TEXT BOOKS:

Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*. Leicester/Illinois: Apollos/IVP, 2001.

McDermott, G. R. *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?* Illinois: IVP, 2000.

Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict: Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World*. Leicester: IVP, 1999.

Stackhouse, John G. Jr. [ed.] *No Other Gods before Me?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

##### BASIC OUTLINE:

- 1 Introduction: Religious Pluralism in Context
  - 1.1 Our Changing World
  - 1.2 What is Religious Pluralism?
- 2 Encountering Religious Pluralism
  - 2.1 Shifting Perspectives: A Historical Overview
  - 2.2 Christian Faith and Other Religions: Three Approaches

### 3.0 Religious Pluralism and the Culture of Modernity

- 3.1 Modernity and Postmodernity
- 3.2 East meets West
- 3.3 The Challenge to Christian Faith

### 4.0 The Problems of Pluralism

- 4.1 John Hick's 'Copernican Revolution'
- 4.2 Raimundo Panikkar's Pluralist Spirituality
- 4.3 The Untenability of the Pluralist View

### 5.0 Issues in the Christian Encounter with Other Religions

- 5.1 Truth & Revelation in Non-Christian Religions
- 5.2 Salvation in Non-Christian Religions
- 5.3 Discerning the Spirits: Criteria for Evaluating Other Religions

### 6.0 Jesus and Non-Christian Religious Experience

- 6.1 Biblical Perspectives: Paul at Athens
- 6.2 Theological Perspectives: The Early Fathers
- 6.3 Phenomenological Perspectives: The Indian Experience

### 7.0 Conclusion: Sharing Jesus with People of Other Faiths

## **METHODOLOGY:**

1. Class Lectures
2. Question & Answer/ Class discussion
3. Small Group discussion

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Class Attendance** – [*As per existing academic policy*]
2. **Reading** – A minimum of 1000 pages pre-session reading from the prescribed text-books, and as assigned in class.
3. **Term Paper** – [*12-15 pages*] **40%**  
Any ONE of the following topics:
  - A] The Faith of Israel and Gentile Religion in the Old Testament
  - B] The Early Christians and Greco-Roman Religion in the New Testament
  - C] Divine Revelation and Non-Christian religions in the Early Church Fathers [Preferably any **one**, but no more than **two**]
  - D] The Nineteenth Century produced a significant number of Christian thinkers who reflected deeply on the Christian response to other religions such as: M. Monier Williams, Max Mueller, F.D. Maurice, B.F. Westcott, T.E. Slater, A.M. Fairbairn and J.N. Farquhar. Describe and assess the response of any one.

- E] Outline and evaluate the understanding of 'Revelation in Other Religions' in any one significant twentieth century theologian, such as: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Hendrik Kraemer, John Hick, Leslie Newbigin, Clark Pinnock, Gavin D'Costa and W. Cantwell Smith.
- F] Alternatively, the student may also select a topic of interest in consultation and with the written approval of the instructor.
- Due Date:**

**4. Reflection Paper – [5 Pages]**

**30%**

The reflection paper is designed to give the student an opportunity to reflect on and evaluate the extent to which he has assimilated the course. The student may select any one of the following two options:

- A] Research and select the written testimony of a convert to Christian faith. Reflect and respond to his / her experience based on what you have learnt through this course. OR
- B] Use the approach recommended in this course in a practical encounter with a person of another faith. Include portions of a verbatim with relevant comment in a brief report of your experience.
- Due Date:**

**5. Take-home Examination**

**30%**

The final examination will be distributed on the last day of the course, with instructions on how it is to be written. It will evaluate the student's essential grasp of the main themes of class discussion and the student's ability to integrate his/her reading in a creative and reflective response to the proposal outlined in this course. While the student may consult class-notes or bibliographical sources, and is encouraged to discuss the question[s] with fellow students, the final response must be his/her own synthesis.

**Due Date:**

**GRADING PROCEDURE:**

[As per existing academic policy]

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

**Journal Articles**

Evangelical Alliance [UK]. 'The Salvation of the Gentiles: Implications for Other Faiths,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 15/1 (1991) 36-43.

D'Costa, G. 'The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions,' *Religious Studies* 32 (1996) 223-232.

Richard, H.L. 'A Survey of Protestant Evangelistic Efforts among High Caste Hindus in the Twentieth Century,' *Missiology: An International Review* 25/4 (1997) 419-445.

**Books**

Adler, M.J. *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth*. New York: Macmillan, 1990.

Ariarajah, S.W. *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Barnes, M. *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.

- Barr, J. *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Bediako, K. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992.
- Braaten, C.E. *No Other Gospel: Christianity among the World's Religions*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.
- Clark, A. and B. Winter [eds.] *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Copley, A. *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late-Colonial India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Coward, H.G. [ed.] *Modern Indian responses to Religious Pluralism*. Albany: State University of New York, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993.
- Cracknell, K. *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, (1846-1914)*. London: Epworth, 1995.
- D' Costa, G. *Theology and Religious Pluralism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. New York: Orbis Books, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.
- Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. New York: Orbis, 1997.
- Fernando, A. *The Christian's Attitude toward World Religions*. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1987.
- Flanagan, K. 'Theological pluralism: A sociological critique' in I. Hamnett [ed.] *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Frei, H. *Types of Christian Theology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Gnanakan, Ken. *The Pluralistic Predicament*. Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1992.
- Heim, M. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. New York: Orbis, 1997.
- Hick, J. and P. Knitter [eds.] *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. New York: Orbis, 1987.
- Hughes, D.A. *Has God Many Names?* Leicester: Apollos, 1996
- Knitter, P.F. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes to World Religions*. New York: Orbis, 1985.
- Kraemer, H. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938.
- Lewis, Gordon R. and Bruce A. Demarest. *Integrative Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Lightner, R.P. *The God of the Bible and Other Gods*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998.
- Lipner, J. *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Maw, M. *Visions of India: Fulfilment Theology, the Aryan Race Theory, and the Work of British Protestant Missionaries in Victorian India*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990.
- Neil, S. *Christian Faith and Other Faiths: The Christian Dialogue with Other Religions*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Netland, H. *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Newbigin, L. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Pinnock, C. *A Wideness in God's Mercy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Race, A. *Christians and Religious Pluralism*. New York: Orbis, 1982.

- Rommen, E. and H. Netland.[ed.] *Christianity and the Religions*. EMS, 1995.
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- Sharpe, E.J. *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil: The Contribution of J.N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914*. Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Faith Meets Faith: Some Christian Attitudes to Hinduism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London: S.C.M. Press Ltd, 1977.
- Sullivan, F.A. *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*. London: Chapman, 1992.
- Tennent, T.C. *Christianity at the Religious Round Table*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.
- Ward, K. *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.
- Zacharias, Ravi. *Jesus among other Gods*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2000.

**SPECIFIC DATA:**

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