

Engaging Religious Pluralism:
An Introduction to the Christian Theology of Religions
Reformed Theological Seminary – Orlando
Keith E. Johnson, Ph.D.
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Spring 2012
Monday, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Course Description

As a result of globalization and mass migration, western Christians live in an increasingly pluralistic environment. Growing awareness of this diversity has raised some important questions for the church regarding its identity and mission: How, as Christians, should we view the teachings, practices, and presence of non-Christian religions within God's providential ordering of all things? To what extent can we affirm the presence of truth and goodness in non-Christian religions and, if so, on what basis? Is it possible for adherents of non-Christian religions to experience salvation apart from the witness of the church? How should we think theologically about the phenomenon of human religiosity? In what ways are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present and active in the lives of adherents of non-Christian religions? Finally, in a pluralistic environment, how do we continue to affirm that Jesus Christ is not merely *a* savior but *the* universal savior of all peoples? These questions touch on a host of theological issues ranging from Christology and pneumatology to missiology and ecclesiology. The purpose of this course is to explore how Christian theologians have attempted to answer these questions. Formally, these matters are discussed under the heading of the "Christian theology of religions," which emerged as a distinct theological discipline following Vatican II. We will approach these issues from historical, theological, and practical perspectives. Special attention will be given to recent attempts to bring the doctrine of the Trinity into conversation with religious diversity. One week will also be devoted to exploring Islamic approaches to religious diversity. As a result of this class, students will be better equipped for ministry in an increasingly pluralistic world.

Course Objectives

1. Better appreciate the profound challenge of religious pluralism for Christian faith and mission.
2. Consider how Christians should view the teachings, practices, and presence of non-Christian religions on the basis of God's self-revelation in Scripture.
3. Discover how theologians throughout the history of the church viewed non-Christian religions.
4. Examine several recent proposals in the "Christian theology of religions" (which emerged as a distinct theological discipline following Vatican II).
5. Explore the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for a Christian theology of religions.
6. Examine several recent Islamic interpretations of religious diversity.
7. Become better prepared, in a pluralistic context, to proclaim Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life in a gracious and compelling way.

Required Texts

- Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).
Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011).
Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

Recommended Texts

- Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).
D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).
Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001).
Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).
Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

Course Requirements

1. **Class Participation:** Class participation includes the following:
 - a. Attendance of all class sessions. (If you must miss a class session, please send me an email prior to class letting me know you will be absent.)
 - b. Active participation in course discussion.
2. **Readings:** Accomplishment of scheduled readings *before* their treatment in class. All readings not found in the required texts will be available electronically. Students will complete a reading report to be turned in the last day of class.
3. **Weekly Response Questions:** To aid engagement with course readings, students will compose a response not exceeding 100 words to a question about the reading for that week to be turned in during class. These questions will be posted one week in advance on the course website.
4. **Pluralism Editorial:** Several years ago an editorial appeared in the Orlando Sentinel arguing that the only way to achieve peace in the world is for Christians, Muslims, Jews and others to affirm the truth of all religions. Students will compose a letter-to-the-editor (not exceeding 500 words) in response offering a Christian perspective in a way that addresses the legitimate concerns expressed in the article. **DUE: April 2, beginning of class.**

5. **Theological Paper:** Students will compose a 12 page essay (double-spaced, 12 pt font, 1” margins) on a topic related to religious pluralism to be determined in conversation with the instructor. The paper should (1) present a clear thesis, (2) reflect thoughtful and sympathetic engagement with the course texts, (3) offer critical analysis (and not merely summary) of the positions and views you engage and (4) consider the implications and significance of your investigation for the life and mission of the church in a pluralistic world. **DUE: Friday, May 18 by noon.**

Course Grade

Reading	20%
Response Questions	10%
Pluralism Editorial	10%
Theological Paper	<u>60%</u>
	100%

Course Schedule

February 13

Religious Pluralism as a Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission

Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 23-91.

Keith E. Johnson, “Theology of Religions,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2d ed., ed. Nicholas Lossky *et al.*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 1126-1128. (online)

February 20

Historical Perspectives on Religious Diversity

Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 92-157.

February 27

The Watershed of Vatican II and Karl Rahner

Selected portions from the following documents of the Second Vatican Council:

Nostra Aetate, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” (October 28, 1965), all

Lumen Gentium, “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church,” (November 26, 1964), chapter 2

Dignitatis Humanae, “Declaration on Religious Liberty,” (December 7, 1965), all

Ad Gentes Divinitus, “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” (December 7, 1965), chapter 1.

Karl Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 5, 115-134. (online)

Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 12, 161-178. (online)

March 5 (Instructor out of town; extra reading given in lieu of class meeting)

John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis

John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 11-30 (online)

John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 299-314, 343-376. (online)

D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 19-47.

March 12

Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth

D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 53-92.

Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 212-246.

March 19

***The Turn to the Trinity in the Theology of Religions /
Raimundo Panikkar's Trinitarian Account of Spirituality***

Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 17-50, 141-183.

March 26

Spring Break – No Class

April 2

Gavin D'Costa's Roman Catholic Trinitarian Approach

D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 99-166.

Pluralism Editorial Due

April 9

Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions

Paul F. Knitter, "A New Pentecost? A Pneumatological Theology of Religions," *Current Dialogue* 19 (1991): 32-41. (online)

Amos Yong, "Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World Religions: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions" in *No Other Gods before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 37-61. (online)

Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 235-266. (online)

Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 93-98, 101-126.

April 16

Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of Religious Pluralism

Jacques Dupuis, "Trinitarian Christology as a Model for a Theology of Religious Pluralism." In *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology* (Leuven: University Press; 2000), 83-97. (online)

Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 195-217 (online)

Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 98-101, 126-140.

"Declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church," (August 6, 2000) (online)

April 23

Mark Heim's Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends

S. Mark Heim, "God's Diversity: A Trinitarian View of Religious Pluralism," *Christian Century* 118 (2001): 14-18. (online)

Heim, S. Mark. "The Depth of the Riches: Trinity and Religious Ends." *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 21-55. (online)

Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 65-92.

April 30

Islamic Approaches to Religious Pluralism

Mahmut S. Aydin, "Is there Only One Way to God? A Muslim View," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 10 (2000): 148-159. (online)

Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (London : Al-Hoda, 1999), pp tbd (online)

Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'an and other Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 291-309. (online)

May 7

Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions

Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 308-348

Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism*, 185-219

May 14

Responding to Religious Pluralism

Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 247-283.

D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 491-514. (online)

Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 3-21. (online)

Keith E. Johnson, "Do All Paths Lead to the Same Destination?" in *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Religion*, ed. Daniel K. Judd (Guilford: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 76-84. (online)

May 18

Theological paper due

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Engaging Religious Pluralism: An Introduction to the Christian Theology of Religions
 Professor: Keith Johnson
 Campus: Orlando
 Date: October 19, 2011

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students write research paper on issue related to religious pluralism. 2. Students answer response questions on reading each week 3. Readings will be discussed in class.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Moderate	Through class discussions and their research paper, students will critically evaluate attempts to articulate a Christian theology of religions from Scriptural and confessional perspectives.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Minimal	Students will be encouraged to consider the implications of Reformed theology for an evangelical theology of religions.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Will occasionally sing in class in order to remind students that theology ultimately serves a doxological purpose
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Students will be motivated to think about the implications of a Christian worldview for the phenomenon of religious diversity.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be exposed to a variety of Christian perspectives on the issue of religious pluralism—especially from Catholics (post Vatican II). 2. Simply knowing that Jesus is the only way is not adequate. We must also think about how to communicate this in a winsome way. Students will be required to write a letter to the editor in response to an editorial affirming the equality of all religions.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	None	
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	None	
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both	None	

	in America and worldwide.		
Church/World	Ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	The reality of religious pluralism constitutes a major issue for the contemporary church. Through lecture, discussion, and projects, this class will equip students to address issues related to living and ministering in a pluralistic world.