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


Recommended Texts


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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Questions</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pluralism Editorial</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theological Paper</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Course Schedule**

**February 13**

*Religious Pluralism as a Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*


**February 20**

*Historical Perspectives on Religious Diversity*


**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


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


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

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

**John Hick’s Pluralistic Hypothesis**

March 12

**Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth**

March 19

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

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**
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)

April 16

**Jacques Dupuis’ Christian theology of Religious Pluralism**
Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 195-217 (online)
“Declaration Dominius 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

April 30

Islamic Approaches to Religious Pluralism
Muhammad Legenhausen, Islam and Religious Pluralism (London : Al-Hoda, 1999), pp tbd (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

May 18

Theological paper due
## Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical,</td>
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<tr>
<td>theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<td>frameworks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of</td>
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<td>modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and</td>
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<tr>
<td>integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Students will be</td>
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<td>Standards.</td>
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<td>encouraged to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will be encouraged to consider the implications of Reformed theology for an</td>
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<td>consider the</td>
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<td>evangelical theology of religions.</td>
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<td>implications of</td>
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<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Will occasionally</td>
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<td>Students will be motivated to think about the implications of a Christian worldview for the</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>occasionally sing</td>
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<td>phenomenon of religious diversity.</td>
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<td>in class in order</td>
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<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.</td>
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<td>to reminder students</td>
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<td>Students will be exposed to a variety of Christian perspectives on the issue of religious</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<td>Winsomely Reformed: Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical</td>
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<td>spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a</td>
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<td>God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)</td>
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<td>Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>enthusiasm.</td>
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<td>Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>skill to lead a worship service.</td>
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<td>Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both</td>
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*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.

Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.
| 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. |