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: How should we view non-Christian religions? Does our commitment to Christ as the way, the truth and the life require that we dismiss the teachings and practices of other religions? Is it possible for adherents of non-Christian religions to experience salvation apart from hearing the gospel and responding in faith? How do we account for exemplary behavior among Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims? Is it appropriate to adopt sayings, proverbs, categories, institutions or practices found among non-Christian religions as we contextualize the gospel? Finally, how, in a pluralistic environment, 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, ecclesiology and ethics. The purpose of this course is to explore how Christian theologians have attempted to answer these questions. We will approach these issues from historical, theological, and missiological perspectives. Special attention will be given to recent attempts to bring the doctrine of the Trinity into conversation with religious diversity. We will also explore 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 in light 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.”
5. Explore the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for a Christian theology of religions.
6. Discover how contemporary Muslim scholars view religious diversity.
7. Explore how Christians have contextualized the gospel when presenting it cross-culturally to adherents of non-Christian religions.
8. 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

Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

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:** Some readings must be completed prior to the beginning of the first class session on Monday, January 4. All readings not found in the required texts will be available online in Canvas. Your final reading report is due Monday, February 1 by 5:00 pm. You will submit your reading report in Canvas.

3. **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 short 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: Monday, January 25 at 5:00p.m.
4. **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: Monday, February 1 at 5:00 p.m.**

5. **Preparing for the First Class Session:** Due to the compressed nature of this course, there is some work you need complete in preparation for the first session. Please carefully read the section entitled “Preparing for the First Class Session” below.

**Course Grade**

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**Course Outline**

I. Introduction
   a. The profound challenge of religious pluralism to Christian faith and mission
   b. What is a “theology of religions”?

II. Historical overview of Christian perspectives on religious diversity

III. Contemporary proposals in the theology of religions
   a. Karl Rahner and Vatican 2
   b. John Hick
   c. Five “trinitarian” proposals (Panikkar, D’Costa, Yong, Dupuis, Heim)

IV. Synthesis: Toward an evangelical and reformed theology of religions

V. Islam: Islamic approaches to religious pluralism / Christian theology of Islam

VI. Christian mission in a world of religious diversity (special focus on contextualization)
Course Schedule
NOTE: Reading with triple asterisk (*** should be completed prior the first class session on January 4. Readings with a single asterisk (*) will be discussed in class on day they are listed and should be completed the night before (if not sooner). The remaining (unmarked) readings can be completed after the lecture portion of the course has been completed.

Monday, January 4

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

**Topic: What is a “Theology of Religions?”**

**Topic: Historical Perspectives on Religious Diversity**

**Topic: Karl Rahner’s Theology of Religions**
Karl Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 5, 115-134. (online)***

Tuesday, January 5

**Topic: The Watershed of Vatican 2**
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.*
*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” (December 7, 1965), chapter 1.*

**Topic: John Hick’s Pluralistic Hypothesis**

**Topic: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth**
Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 53-92. (online)***
Tuesday, January 5 (continued)

Topic: The Turn to the Trinity in the Theology of Religions
Johnson, Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 17-50.***

Topic: Raimundo Panikkar’s Trinitarian Account of Spirituality
Johnson, Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 141-183.*

Wednesday, January 6

Topic: Gavin D’Costa’s Roman Catholic Trinitarian Approach

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

Topic: Jacques Dupuis’ Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism
Johnson, Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 98-101.*

Thursday, January 7

Topic: Jacques Dupuis’ Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (continued)
Johnson, Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 126-140.

Topic: Mark Heim’s Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends

Topic: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions
Netland, Encountering Religious Pluralism, 308-348
Johnson, Rethinking the Trinity and Religious Pluralism, 185-219
Thursday, January 7 (continued)

**Topic: Islamic Approaches to Religious Pluralism**
Paul Griffiths, *Christianity through non-Christian Eyes* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 67-71 and 102-34. (online) [This reading contains three essays by Muslim scholars describing how they view the Christian faith in relation to Islam.]*

Friday, January 8

**Topic: A Christian Theology of Islam**

**Topic: Christian Mission in a World of Religious Pluralism**
Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 53-76,*** 105-134,* 135-162.

**Topic: Responding to Religious Pluralism in Ministry**

Preparing for the First Class Session (January 4)

Students are required to complete the readings listed below (around 300pp) prior to the first meeting of the first class on January 4. These are the same readings listed above with the triple asterisk(****). You will also find “response” questions listed below. Limit your responses to no more than 100 words. You are not writing an essay on which you will be graded—just providing a short answer to a question that will help you engage the reading. Put all your responses in a single document.


According to Harold Netland, what challenges does increased awareness of religious diversity present to the contemporary church?

Karl Rahner, “Christianity and Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol 5, 115-134. (online)
One of Rahner’s key concepts is his notion of the “anonymous Christian.” What is an “anonymous Christian” and what theological justification/rationale does he offer for this notion?
Nostra Aetate, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” (October 28, 1965), all.
According to these conciliar documents, can someone come to faith apart from the missionary proclamation of the church? Why or why not?

How would you summarize John Hick’s “pluralistic hypothesis”?

According to Gavin D’Costa, “inclusivists” and “pluralists” are really “exclusivists.” In what sense is this true? How does he illustrate this point with regard to Buddhism and Hinduism?


According to Paul Knitter, how does recognizing a “distinct economy” of the Holy Spirit enable one to affirm the validity of non-Christian religions?

How would you summarize Muhammad Legenhausen’s theology of religions?

Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 53-74
According to Tennent, is it appropriate for Christians to make use of sacred material in non-Christian religious texts? Why or why not?

Prior to the first day of class you will submit your answers to these questions in Canvas.