Christian Encounters with Other Cultures: Engaging the Great World Religions
CH4363
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Spring 2015

Professor: Daniel Napier
Office: 209
Conference: by appointment
Email: napier@austingrad.edu
Class Time: Monday 7-9:40pm
Phone: 512-476-2772, ext. 209

Course Description:
This course is something of a centaur. The thought and emotion of a biblical theology self-consciously melds with an interpersonal exploration of four, primary world religions. The head and torso, on the one hand, belong to a Christian theology of culture and religion. This part provides direction through a biblical consideration of the nature and role of cultures and religions in our world. Among the questions we consider are: What, in God’s providence, are people groups? What is God’s relation to their cultures and their religions? What are religions for? How, then, are we as followers of Jesus to respond to them?

The massive body and legs, on the other hand, belong to an introduction to four major religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. We will begin by considering the method and theory of the academic study of religion. After surveying the historical roots, basic beliefs, and practices of a religion, we arrange either to host or be hosted by practitioners of that religion. Thus we learn how to engage in interreligious dialogue as apprentices of Jesus.

Learning Objectives:
- The student will build a basic vocabulary of key terms indigenous to the various religions of the world.
- The student will be capable of describing very basic tenants and practices of the larger world religions in a manner that an informed, devout adherent could recognize as accurate.
- The student will learn how to interact with adherents of other religions in a spirit of charity and clarity. This involves learning to play well the role of either host or guest within an interreligious exchange.
- The student will develop an appreciation for the distinctness and core concerns of each religion.
- The student will develop the rudiments of a thoughtful theology of culture and religion.

Required Texts:
• Additional primary source materials will be handed out in class or made available on reserve in the library

Course Requirements and Means of Evaluation:
• Full preparation, attendance and participation in class sessions are mandatory. More than one absence or excessive tardiness may result in a deduction of up to 15% from your final grade.
  o Note on Absences and Preparedness: Lecture periods offer new information as well as additional clarity to the textbook materials. Please note this well: Students are entirely responsible for instructions, notes, announcements of changes in the syllabus, etc… for the reception of which they are absent. If you are absent, you are responsible to check with other students to obtain whatever you missed.
• Two Tests, each comprising 25% of your final grade, will be spaced throughout the semester. Tests will cover the content of the lectures and the assigned readings. The second test, offered during finals week, will not be comprehensive, but cover only the material since the first test. Together, the tests constitute 50% of your grade.
• Each student will read and critically review an approved book before the beginning of class on 4 May 2015. The book review will comprise 50% of your final grade. The written review should not exceed 10 pages.
  o The book reviewed must deal, in sufficient academic depth and detail, with a great world religion, Christian interactions with another religion, or the Christian theology of religions.
  o A bibliography of pre-approved books is attached. The instructor must approve review of any books not on the bibliography.

Course Topic Schematic:
• Introduction: Culture, Religion and the Academic Study of Religions
  o Readings: Ludwig, chapter 1
• Introduction: Definitions and Categories for the Study of Religions
• Hinduism
  o Readings: Ludwig, chapters 5-6
• Buddhism
  o Readings: Ludwig, chapters 7-9
• Judaism
  o Readings: Ludwig, chapters 20-22
• Islam
  o Readings: Ludwig, chapters 26-28
• Theology of Culture
• Theology of Religions
Pre-Approved List of Books for Review

Bibliography


