

**T440INT-Multifaith Theologies, January 9 – 13, 2012, 1.0 credit, Instructor: Michael S. Hogue**

### **Course Overview**

This graduate-level course in theology is appropriate for both beginning and advanced theology students. It views our pluralizing, globalizing, interreligious world as the starting point and the context for doing theology. Several assumptions guide the form and content of this course: 1) All theology is contextual and has practical, moral, and political significance; 2) The contemporary context for theology is pluralistic and the global scope of many of our political and moral challenges require collaboration across religious differences ; 3) To be religious amidst these conditions is to be inter-religious and morally engaged; 4) The pluralistic, global, and inter-religious context of contemporary life problematizes the normativity of theological work precisely at the moment when public moral challenges demand normative theological interpretation and engagement.

These assumptions generate a public theological task: to struggle toward a mode of theology that is publicly relevant, morally and politically efficacious, and inter-religiously informed. This task produces a number of questions, some of which will be engaged in this course: Is there one religious truth or many or none? What do religious truths and their similarities or differences have to do with interreligious collaboration? Does each religion present the whole of some truth, in which case there are multiple religious truths? Or is each tradition an incomplete but meaningful part of some single truth? How do the different answers to these questions impinge on interreligious dialogue and action? Do religious experiences in different traditions have the same form and content, the same feel and substance? Or are religious experiences in different traditions incommensurable and incomparable? Is it possible to identify as a multifaith person or a religious hybrid—if so, what does this entail and what does it look like? What forms of life and moral engagements do multifaith identities make possible? How are the nature and tasks of doing theology from a multifaith or hybrid standpoint reconceived?

Though we may not explicitly address each of these questions, most of them will be engaged in some way. For a core thesis in this course is that these are the kind of questions that must be engaged in order to do theology in a pluralistic world. To put it another way, the development of a philosophy of religion and familiarity with more than one tradition are two of the most important pre-requisites for doing theology in our contemporary world.

### **Course Structure**

**By October 21, 2011**, post a one-page brief introduction of yourself and your learning goals for the course

This course is designed as an hourglass.

The first three sessions provide broad introductory material. Several different theoretic options for multifaith work will be interpreted against one another. In the first session, after introductions and some opening comments, we will talk about Eboo Patel's memoir. Patel's life and work will serve as an important touchstone for much of the rest of the course. In the second

session we will take up Stephen Prothero's argument that the religions have more differences than similarities and that life in pluralistic requires respect rather than repression of these differences. The third session will be based around some of the theories of Ramon Panikkar, a Hindu-Christian thinker and scholar of comparative religion.

The middle sessions narrow in on the multifaith experiences of three important religious thinkers. The fourth session will consider the reflective, spiritual writing of John S. Dunne. And the sixth and seventh sessions will engage two prominent thinkers whose religious lives and scholarly identities exemplify the possibilities and challenges of multifaith or hybrid religiosity. (The fifth session is devoted to student presentations).

And the final sessions broaden out again by taking up questions of strategy and action. The eighth session is based on a collection of writings from folks with lots of experience with multifaith work at the grassroots level. The ninth session will be devoted to student presentations, and in the final session we will wrap things up.

### **Course Expectations**

Each student in this intensive course is expected to complete all readings before arriving for class on July 19. In addition, each student is expected to offer a presentation on some thinker, movement, community or organization or institution that is doing multifaith work. The presentations should introduce the subject (person, movement, etc...) and attempt to surface the assumptions about religion and the contemporary world that underlie the subject's multifaith work. There will be two different classroom sessions devoted to these presentations, and you will each be given at least 15 minutes (possibly longer depending on the number of students in the class) to share your work. In addition to these presentations, each student will be expected to write a 10-15pp paper that 1) articulates a philosophy of religion; 2) describes at least three insights gained from the course; and 3) discusses how that philosophy of religion and those three insights will shape the student's continuing work in theological studies. Use the Chicago Manual of Style for proper research and citation methods. Student grades will be based on in-class participation, presentations, and final papers, each of which will carry equal weight. By "in-class participation" I mean that I will be looking for such things as preparedness, engagement, civility and inquisitiveness.

### **Bibliography**

John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*

Diane Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banares*

Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* and "The Vocation of an Interreligious Theologian"

Rebecca Kratz Mays, ed., *The Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*

Ramon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*

Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith*

Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One*

## Course Calendar

**Session I:** January 9, Monday, 9am-12pm: Introduction and Opening Discussion about multifaith action; Read Eboo Patel's *Acts of Faith*

**Session II:** January 9, Monday, 130pm-430pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One*

**Session III:** January 10, Tuesday, 9am-12pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read Raimon Panikkar's *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*

**Session IV:** January 10, Tuesday, 130-430pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read John S. Dunne's *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*

**Session V:** January 11, Wednesday, 9am-12pm: Student Presentations

**Session VI:** January 11, Wednesday, 130pm-430pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read Diana Eck's *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banares*

**Session VII:** January 12, Thursday, 9am-12pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read Paul Knitter's *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* and "The Vocation of an Interreligious Theologian" ([http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:fs\\_Cq-DXyVsJ:www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_45950\\_en.rtf+interreligious+theology&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us](http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:fs_Cq-DXyVsJ:www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_45950_en.rtf+interreligious+theology&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us))

**Session VIII:** January 12, Thursday, 130pm-430pm: Lecture and Discussion; Read *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays

**Session IX:** January 13, Friday, 9am-12pm: Student Presentations

**Session X:** January 13, Friday, 130pm-430pm: Wrapping Up

## Statement Regarding Adaptation or Accommodation

Students experience learning challenges for a variety of reasons. If you have learning challenges and need course adaptations or accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Likewise, see me if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel that you could be performing at a higher level, or have a learning style issue that provides a challenge. As an instructor, my obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and accessible. Unless you come to see me about these or other related issues, I will assume your learning needs are being met.