

WR 150, Introduction to World Religions, Theological Consortium of Greater Columbus, Spring Semester 2008, Monday 6:30-9:15 pm, Pontifical College Josephinum, Room 3 (lower level library building).

Dr. Paul D. Numrich, emails pnumrich@mtso.edu (primary) or pnumric@luc.edu (secondary, less sensitive spam filter), phone 740-362-3443, Web page link at www.tcgcoho.org, office hours Mondays 3:15-5:15 pm and by appointment (office in lower level library building). Note: Given my responsibilities to three seminaries and my commitments in the larger community, it's best to email or call first to confirm my whereabouts during office hours.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: An overview of selected non-Christian religions, drawing upon academic disciplines and primary sources from within the religions. The course also considers various Christian perspectives on world religions and the phenomenon of Christians converting to these religions.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To consider non-Christian religions from multiple perspectives, particularly the "outsider" academic approach, the views of "insider" adherents, and various Christian theologies.
2. To begin to understand both "religion" and Christianity in comparative perspective.
3. To develop one's own perspective on non-Christian religions in preparation for faithful participation in inter-religious encounters and informed leadership among fellow Christians.
4. To enhance the scholarly enterprise of the Theological Consortium.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Michael D. Coogan, gen. ed., *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); available for purchase at Consortium bookstores.

Other readings listed on the assignment schedule and possible additions.

GENERAL POLICIES:

A grace period for late submission of written assignments or missed exams may be granted at the instructor's discretion. Students should contact the instructor in timely fashion about late or missed work; penalties may be assessed, up to and including the instructor's option not to accept the work. Since the Kingdom has not yet arrived in its fullness, incidents of academic or other misconduct will be handled per school policy. Please note that plagiarism includes self-plagiarism—that is, you may not submit work that you did for another course in this course. All work must

be original and appropriately documented. Incomplete and other such grades will be given only in extraordinary circumstances per school policy. Students with documented disabilities requiring course accommodations must contact the instructor at the beginning of the term for consideration of their circumstances. Audio or video recordings of class sessions are permitted but their use is strictly confined to students enrolled in the course and they must not be transferred electronically.

Written assignments are due by the start of class on the designated due date unless otherwise specified. Formal assignments must be typed, with 1-inch margins all around, 12-point Times New Roman or Garamond font, and double-spaced lines. They must conform to pertinent scholarly conventions for formal written work at the graduate level, including proper citation for all sources (both course and outside) and for any assertion about something that is not common knowledge (e.g., "Pope John Paul II wrote thus and so," "Martin Luther said this or that," or "John Wesley taught X, Y, or Z"). Do not assume that this syllabus or the course readings follow pertinent scholarly conventions. It is your responsibility to choose a conventional style (e.g., MLA or APA) and follow it consistently. Personal opinions and experiences are welcome in written work for this course as long as they are pertinent to the topic and assignment at hand, integrated into a scholarly context, and do not represent one's sole source of authority.

A student may propose a substitute for any written assignment in this course. The instructor is the final arbiter of the suitability of a proposed substitute assignment, including whether or not it promises to benefit the student more than the original assignment. At the instructor's discretion, a student may revise and resubmit certain written assignments for consideration of a higher grade, not to exceed one full grade increase. Unless otherwise indicated by the instructor, resubmission due dates are one week after the student receives the assignment back with instructor comments. Consortium writing specialists should be consulted when necessary.

Much as some may resist, we all need to join the digital age. We cannot be pre-digital dinosaurs and expect to relate effectively, professionally, and collegially with others. Accordingly, all written assignments are to be submitted electronically by email attachment or designated Internet-based procedures. All files must be in Microsoft Word or compatible format (no Word Perfect, please).

GRADING:

Components of final grade:

A. Overall class preparation, participation, and attendance considerations (15%). Since scholarship is a collegial enterprise enhanced by face-to-face dialogue among scholars, this portion of the final grade represents more than mere classroom presence. Consistently informed participation (verbal and otherwise) in classroom dynamics is expected. Absences and tardiness will affect this component of the final grade. Absenteeism totaling 20% or more of scheduled class contact time is

considered excessive. Absences up to a maximum of 20% of scheduled class contact time may be made up through instructor-approved alternative work. Students may submit optional email reflections on class readings prior to the sessions for which the readings are assigned. The number and quality of these email reflections will be considered at the end of the semester along with other aspects of class preparation, participation, and attendance.

B. Paper 1 (20%, due February 11, 5 full pages of text). Compare and contrast one or more of Judaism's "themes" as presented in *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions* with the analogous theme(s) of Christianity, drawing upon your own knowledge and understanding for the latter. Apply pertinent insights from Chapter 3 of Terry C. Muck's *How to Study Religion* and keep in mind the specifications for written assignments described above, such as conforming to scholarly conventions, citing all sources properly, and making assertions about something that is not common knowledge.

C. Paper 2 (45%, due April 21, 12 full pages of text). Describe one "theme" of one religion (choose from Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism) and give your theological evaluation of that theme. The descriptive portion of this paper must draw upon course readings and class discussions, and a minimum of three approved outside sources. The theological evaluation portion of this paper must draw upon a minimum of three authoritative sources from your denomination or tradition. Apply pertinent insights from Chapter 3 of Terry C. Muck's *How to Study Religion* and keep in mind the specifications for written assignments described above, such as conforming to scholarly conventions, citing all sources properly, and making assertions about something that is not common knowledge.

D. Final exam (20%, May 5). This in-class exam may include objective, short answer, and/or essay questions. It will be comprehensive of course readings and class discussions, so take good notes.

Components at a glance:	Overall class considerations
15%	
	Paper 1 (due February 11)
20%	
	Paper 2 (due April 21)
	45%
	Final exam (May 5)
	20%

Grading scale and evaluation criteria:

TLS students desiring a letter grade rather than a Pass-Marginal-Fail grade must make this request in writing to the instructor no later than the end of the second class session. Other students desiring a Pass-Fail grade must conform to the policies of their respective seminaries. Grades will be assigned according to the following standards for each course component and the final grade:

A range: Outstanding, excellent, superior work in all or most aspects.

B range: Good, solid work in all or most aspects, better than minimum standards but not yet superior.

C range: Fair work that meets minimum standards in all or most aspects (for TLS and Pass-Fail students, a Pass will be given for C or better work).

D: Substandard, poor work in all or most aspects, with enough redeeming value to rise above the failing level (for TLS students, a Marginal will be given for D work).

F: Failing work in all or most aspects, does not rise to the D or Marginal level (for TLS students, a Fail will be given for F work).

All written work (including pertinent emails) and oral work will be evaluated in the following three areas. Evaluation also includes consideration of the Gestalt of the work, that is, the quality of the whole over and above the sum of its parts:

1) Research: e.g., depth and breadth of exploration of pertinent sources, thoroughness, attention to detail, precision, adeptness in marshalling knowledge, facility with the canons of scholarly research. Note: These research standards hold for both course sources and outside sources.

2) Conceptualization: e.g., rigorous and critical thinking, depth of understanding and intellectual grasp, ability to draw out pertinent connections among ideas, creative insight into the implications of knowledge learned through research, originality, openness to new knowledge and approaches, constructive response to criticism and alternative views, attention to the conceptual parameters of the assignment.

3) Presentation: Standard English is expected in both written and oral work. For written work, the following areas are key:

a) Organization: e.g., effective introduction and conclusion, clear and concise thesis, paragraphs relate to thesis, appropriate paragraphing, adequate use of transitions.

b) Development: e.g., clarity and logical flow of ideas, thorough exploration of topic, complete development and support of argument, supported assertions, no irrelevancies or logical inconsistencies.

c) Composition: e.g., appropriate tone, proper use of person (first, second, third), consistent point of view, range of vocabulary, concise and straightforward prose, simple eloquence, no redundancy, minimal passive sentence construction, appropriate use of personal opinion.

d) Grammatical structure: e.g., complete and proper sentences, appropriate tense shifts, correct verb forms, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, correct use of modifiers, varied sentence lengths and patterns.

e) Mechanics: e.g., proper punctuation, capitalization, spelling, other typographical aspects (margins, fonts, spacing, etc.).

f) Documentation and citation: e.g., sources properly cited in both text and bibliography, proper lead-ins or framing devices for quotations (or paraphrases and summaries of quotations), correct and conventional style. For information on scholarly conventions for citations, consult your seminary's writing specialist or library staff.

For oral work (including classroom discussion), the following areas are key:

a) Organization and development: e.g., appropriate structure of presentation, clarity and logical flow of ideas, thorough exploration of topic, complete development and support of argument, supported assertions, pertinence, no irrelevancies or logical inconsistencies.

b) Delivery/embodiment: e.g., articulate expression, eye contact, engagement with audience, variety of vocal inflection and emphasis, appropriate pace and volume, clear enunciation, appropriate body language, consistency between content and affect, appropriate use of visuals and media, proper style and grammatical structure (see above under written work).

c) Attitude: e.g., sincerity and authenticity, appropriately expressed passion, civil discourse, respect and hospitableness, sensitivity to others, mature use of and response to criticism, professional collegiality, balanced behavior and decorum, active listening.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE (subject to adjustment):

Jan 28 P. Numrich, "My expectations about a theology of world religions"
[linked at www.tcgcoho.org]

Introduction, The Illustrated Guide to World Religions

Feb 4 Terry C. Muck, *How to Study Religion: A Beginning Guide to Method* (Wilmore, KY: Wood Hill Books, 2005), Chapter 3 (pp. 39-47), permission granted by author

Judaism chapter, The Illustrated Guide to World Religions

Feb 11 Paper 1 due by start of 2/11 class

Feb 18 Yusuf Islam, "How I Came to Islam," Institute of Islamic Information and Education brochure #17 [<http://www.iiie.net/node/32>]

Yusuf Islam, "Celebrating the Prophet"
[http://www.mountainoflight.co.uk/talks_celebrating.html]

Guest speaker

Feb 25 Islam chapter, The Illustrated Guide to World Religions

Mar 3 Hinduism chapter, The Illustrated Guide to World Religions

Mar 10 Christopher Isherwood, "Who Is Ramakrishna?"
[www.vedanta.org/reading/monthly/articles/2001/3.who_is_ramakrishna.html]

Christopher Isherwood, "What Vedanta Means to Me," in *The Ways of Religion*, ed. Roger Eastman (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 69-75, permission granted by publisher

Guest speaker

Mar 17 No class session

Mar 24 No class session

Mar 31 Buddhism chapter, The Illustrated Guide to World Religions

Apr 7 Lily de Silva, "Ministering to the Sick and the Terminally Ill," *Bodhi Leaves* No. 132 [http://www.bps.lk/bodhi_leaves_library/bl_132.html]

"The Happy Monk," interview with Ajahn Amaro
[<http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/article/169/>]

Apr 14 Jane Lampman, "American Buddhism on the rise," Christian Science Monitor, September 14, 2006 [www.csmonitor.com/2006/0914/p14s01-lire.html]

Rich Orloff, "Being a Monk: A Conversation with Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff '71)," Oberlin Alumni Magazine 99, 4 (Spring 2004) [http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/spring2004/feat_monk.html]

Guest speaker

>Apr 16 (FYI): Fourth Annual Lecture in World Religions and Inter-Religious Dialogue, "Multi-Religious Societies in the 21st Century: Lessons from Asia," Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, at Jessing Center, PCJ, 7:00 pm

Apr 17 (FYI): Annual Consortium Day, at TLS, time TBA

Apr 21 Paper 2 due by start of 4/21 class

Guest speaker

Apr 28 Paul D. Numrich, "Living among People of Other Faiths: Two Types of Inter-Religious Cooperation to Create a Better Neighborhood, Town, Nation, and World"

May 5 Final Exam, time and place TBA

"We explain the fact that the Milky Way is there by the doctrine of creation, but how do we explain the fact that the Bhagavad Gita is there?" (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Christian in a Religiously Plural World," 1963)

"Unless they [pastors] studiously avoid all topics that concern the wider world, they will have to say something—informed, one hopes—about the church's place in a world of diversity." (Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 2005)