COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the theological problem of modern pluralism as confronted by the church in North American culture. The course will address questions such as: “Is Jesus the Only Way?” “Do all religions lead to the same God?” “What About the Eternal Destiny of Those Who Have Never Heard?” These questions arise out of the Christian church engaging a pluralist American culture with the claim that the work of Jesus Christ is the unique and final avenue to salvation with God. It is an American culture where many religions live side by side. It is formed from within a political liberalism, which asks all citizens to be tolerant of and respect all religions. Often religion is a matter of personal faith for this culture and therefore religion is limited in what it can assert in the public realm. Anyone who wishes to carry out a program of evangelism in this culture or defend the Christian claim to uniqueness must engage these issues and assumptions of everyday North American life. This course will address both the origins and assumptions of pluralism, strategies for engaging these assumptions, as well as doctrinal and practical theological questions that the present culture of pluralism presents to a pastor and her/his church. This course will prepare the pastor for ministry in a pluralist context.

Through this course the student will critically interact with multiple theological points of view from a standpoint that seeks to be faithful to Evangelical commitments and the historical teachings of the Christian church. In the process the student should:

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Gain a theological foundation for answering the questions “Is there salvation outside of Christ?” and “What is the destiny of those who have never heard?” The student will gain a foundation in the epistemology that under girds the ways we think about these issues. The class will present the option represented by postmodern and/or post liberal thinkers. As part of answering these questions the student will explore soteriology and define further the answer to the question “what does it mean to be saved?”

- Develop practical skill in applying the theological resources of Scripture and the church to the problems of pluralism and relativism in church ministry. The student should come away better prepared to develop programs for evangelism in the current environment.

- Come away with a framework and deeper understanding for how to live as a Christian in a pluralist world. The student should come away better prepared to lead a congregation in character and ministry in one of the most crucial challenges facing every Christian and the church today.
After an historical introduction to the rise of pluralism in American culture, the class will then proceed to provide a basic structure for understanding religions, their inter-relationship, the forces and assumptions of pluralism and an approach for understanding the uniqueness and supreme claims of Christ in the pluralist culture we live. From here we analyze the classic Christian solutions to this problem in modern times for their adequacy in meeting the challenges of the cultural situation we find ourselves in. These are the three most prominent positions on Christianity and pluralism, exclusivism, inclusivism, and John Hick’s position of Christian pluralism. From this point the class will engage the most prominent pastoral questions as seek to engage in mission and evangelism in the pluralist culture. These are the question of Hell, What about those who Have Never Heard? A Motivation for Mission? The role and approach of dialogue with other religions?

**COURSE ORGANIZATION**

The class will be comprised of (A.) a first half lecture covering the material, (B.) a second half focused discussion based upon the readings, lecture and any additional research the students are engaged in. There will be a specific focus upon the application of the lectures and reading to concrete situations in the life of the church leader/pastor and the life of following Christ.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. The student is required to read approximately 900 pages as outlined in the class schedule.

2. In addition, the student is required to write one paper.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (for Purchase):


Buy one of these three for Paper Assignment of Class

Articles, chapters on reserve to be copied at student’s discretion.

**MASTERS STUDENTS CLASS ASSIGNMENTS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR**

1. **CLASS READINGS** as outlined for each day of class. At the end of the class, each student is required to hand in a signed statement of all the reading he or she has completed. The student is
required to read 800 pages for the course. The student may substitute readings from the Bibliography understanding that the required reading provides the foundations for the class work and the required papers.

2. **MID-TERM EXAM** A short 25 minute exam testing the comprehension of reading and material covered in class from the first five weeks.

3. **PAPER.** A 12-15 page critical review of either
   a. Jan Bonda, Miroslav Volf, or Paul Knitter.
   b. The student is asked to read carefully and critically review one of the above texts representing the exclusivist position. The student should seek to critique the author from the other points of view examined in class. In the critical review the student should answer the following questions:
      c. Describe the main tenet of the author in respect to Christianity and other religions.
      d. Describe the author according to the rubrics used in class.
      e. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation?
      f. How seriously does the author represent and engage the alternative views? Describe a glaring weakness if there is any.
      g. What aspects of the author’s work can you assimilate into your own approach to the questions posed by pluralism to the Christian faith? What aspects must you reject?


**COURSE EVALUATION**

The student grade will come from 75% final paper, 15% exam (unless flunked), 10% class participation. The student will get a 20% upgrade in grade for the extra credit 5 page review done reasonably well.

**CERTIFICATE STUDENTS CLASS ASSIGNMENTS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR**

In order for the student to receive certificate/diploma credit for this course, the student must:
1. Read the George Lindbeck text only as well as required articles.
2. Hand in a 5 page review of the Lindbeck text on the last day of class. This text is difficult, so the student will need to rely heavily on class period development of the ideas in this book. In the review paper the student must a.) choose one position in Lindbeck’s text that best articulates the
students own understanding of how the church is relate to culture. b.) articulate why the student chooses this position in terms of its strengths. C.) articulate any adjustments to the position the student feels are necessary in order to incorporate this approach in their own life, church and ministry.

3. Certificate students are excused from the midterm quiz.

4. 

COURSE EVALUATION

The student grade will come from 75% final paper, 25% class participation.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

I. The Issue of Pluralism. The Attack of Enlightenment Pluralism on Christianity
What is It? Where Did It Come from?
Required Reading
Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (on reserve)

II. Beyond Enlightenment Approaches to the Relationship Between Religions - George Lindbeck
Required Reading
Newbigin, ch. 3,4,5.

III. Post Modern Ways of Knowing and Truth - The Post Modern Response to Pluralism
Required Reading
Lindbeck, ch. 3,4,6

IV. Political Analysis - How Can We All Get Along? The Assumptions of Classical Political Liberalism, McIntyre, Derridian Democracy.
Required Reading
Extra Reading

V. Radical Democracy - The Response of Hauerwas, - Yoder to Pluralism
Required Reading:
VI. Is Jesus the Only Way? The Traditional Three Responses -
**Required**


**Christian Pluralism**
John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, ch.9-12

VII. The Question of Hell - What About Universalism?
Brian McLaren, *The Last Word and the Word After That*, ch. 17 ON RESERVE

**Extra Reading**
Rob Bell, *Love Wins*

VIII. What About Those Who Have Never Heard? What the Bible Does Say, What the Bible Does Not Say. The Nature of Salvation
Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, ch.1,2,5. ON RESERVE
Newbigin, ch. 13,14

IX. "Dialogue" between Christianity and Other Religions

**Extra Reading**

X. The Nature of Our Witness - Motivation For Mission
Student Paper Presentations.

**PAPER DUE**
Readings:
Newbigin, ch. 10,11,12

**Course Evaluation in Moodle**
SELECTED BIBIOGRAPHY:


POLICIES FOR ALL MASTERS CLASSES

NOTE: All communications from the seminary will go to your seminary email account. Contact ithelpdesk@seminary.edu if you need help forwarding your seminary email address to your personal email address.

As a seminary community we hold integrity/hospitality as core values. Individuals are able to do their best work and thinking when their peers are fully present and engaged. We expect each person to both participate in class and carefully listen to others with the belief that everyone’s contribution is equally important. Therefore, the following policies have been established in order to provide clarity in regard to attendance expectations and relationships in the classroom.

Diploma/Certificate Student Course Requirements
The amount of work required of Diploma/Certificate students will be at the discretion of the professor. Students will be responsible for contacting the professor about what assignments are required.

Class Attendance Policy
It is expected that students will attend and participate in all class sessions. Failure to attend at least 80% of class sessions is grounds for automatic failure. A professor may set other attendance expectations. Students are always expected to communicate with a professor in advance if they will be absent. Attendance expectations are higher for online and intensive courses (see syllabus for specific requirements).

Class Tardiness Policy
The third time a student is late to the start of class, it will be counted as a class absence. It is also expected that students will return from a break by the time specified by the professor.

Late Work Policy
If a student cannot complete the work for a course by the due date listed on the syllabus, they must submit a “Request for a Grade of Incomplete” form to the Registrar by 4:30 of the last day of the term. The form must be signed by the instructor and Dean of Students. The professor may set stipulations and grade
reductions. In the absence of a formal request form, the student will receive a grade based upon work completed by the last day of the term.

**Turabian Format**
All papers, including footnotes and bibliography, must be submitted in the correct format according to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed., 2013.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one’s own the words or ideas of someone else without providing proper acknowledgement or documentation. See the “Academic Honesty Policy” in the Seminary Catalog for more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

**Electronic Format**
Unless otherwise specified by the professor, all work submitted electronically must be in a Word document format (.doc, .docx).

**Technology Use in the Classroom**
Unless it is directly tied to note-taking or research for the class, students are expected to refrain from using cell phones, laptops, or other electronic devices during class.

**Course Evaluation in Moodle**
Students must complete an online course evaluation using the seminary Moodle system at [http://moodle.seminary.edu](http://moodle.seminary.edu). The evaluation will be open at the end of the course. If you need assistance connecting to Moodle or accessing the evaluation, please send an email to moodlehelp@seminary.edu.