



**RS 3400G:
Theology and Religious Pluralism
Winter 2022**

Course Information (MDiv/MTS)

Class Location: Huron University, W104

Scheduled Class Times: Thursdays, 8:30-11:00 am

Note: The revised Winter 2022 term now runs from January 10 – April 8

For the month of January 2022, this class will be offered on Zoom, although a mixture of formats will be used. To access Zoom, please login through the OWL portal (owl.uwo.ca).

For February-April, it is expected that this class will be offered in-person as well as online via Zoom for students who have been approved for distance learning.

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Throughout the course, the OWL portal is the place to go to easily access readings, read announcements from the professor, and submit assignments.

Note: If you are having technical problems with Zoom or OWL, please visit the Huron IT HelpDesk (JIRA) at <https://jira.uwo.ca/plugins/servlet/desk/portal/16>

Instructor: Dr. Brett Potter

Contact Information:

The best way to get in touch with me is via email at brett.potter@uwo.ca
I will do my best to respond to emails in a timely manner.

Office: A219 (in the Faculty of Theology building)

Office Hours:

I am available for course-related meetings by appointment on Zoom. Please send me an email if you would like to set up a time.

Course Description

A survey of religious pluralism from a theological perspective, with particular attention to major contemporary authors in theology of religions and comparative theology. Although special attention will be paid to Christian writers, sources from diverse religious traditions will be encountered.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe the methods and strategies involved in comparative theology and interreligious dialogue;
- Learn to interpret theological and philosophical texts from a range of religious traditions in a constructive, comparative mode;
- Practice competency in interfaith dialogue with the goal of constructive peacemaking;
- Analyze comparative theology from a self-reflective perspective that is also attentive to global dynamics of injustice, inequality, and postcoloniality.

Textbooks and Course Materials

John J. Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020.

Other assigned readings will be available as PDFs via the course page and/or via the library Course Readings application in OWL, as per the schedule below.

Methods of Evaluation

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments:

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Weekly Participation | 10% |
| Crossing 1: Object | 25% |
| Crossing 2: Text | 30% |
| Crossing 3: Action | 25% |
| Micro-Presentation | 10% |
| TOTAL | 100% |

1. Weekly Participation (15%)

Active participation and engagement with the course material, particularly during our class time, is essential to the learning experience. In order to get the most out of this course, it is important to complete weekly readings; come to class ready to engage the lecture material; and be open to listen and learn from the contributions of others.

Participation will subsequently be measured by i) attendance (whether in-person or by Zoom), which indicates that you are present and ready to learn; ii) actively contributing to discussions in class, which also includes allowing space to listen to others; and/or iii) actively contributing to our online forum on OWL. Here are some guidelines around each of these elements.

i) Attendance: Students should be present, whether in-person or over Zoom, for all class sessions. Please make sure you let me know via email if you will need to miss a class for a significant reason.

ii) Active contributions in class: There is no prescribed metric to measure active participation in class, but in general this would take the form of asking and responding to questions, contributing to discussions, modelling hospitality in engaging the ideas of others, and so on.

2. Crossing 1: Object (25%)

Due Saturday, Feb. 12 at 11:59 pm via OWL

In this assignment, you will find and write about an **image** or **object** embedded within a particular religious tradition. Examples might include Tibetan “prayer wheels”; a Sikh *kangha*; Hindu images of Vishnu or Ganesh; a particularly fragrant incense; a kind of food used for a particular ritual. Discuss the ways this aesthetic, sensory object “means” something to religious individuals.

You can begin by **describing** the object or image closely – what does it look like? Where would it be placed or used? How do the faithful relate to it?

From there, move to **analysis** – how does it reveal something about the “feel” of a particular religious tradition? Why would someone treasure this object or see it as foundational to their identity?

Finally, **reflect** on how you relate to this object and how it resonates (or is very alien to!) your own life and experience of faith.

Creativity is encouraged!

Length: 3-4 pages + images

3. Crossing 2: Text (30%)

Due Saturday, Mar. 19 at 11:59 pm via OWL

In this essay, you will do a “deep dive” into a text from a religious tradition other than your own. Try to pick a comparatively short text or passage (e.g. one of the shorter Upanishads; a short Buddhist text from the Tripitaka; an excerpt from the Sikh sacred scriptures such as the Japji Sahib) and read it several times to try to understand its meaning. You may also want to consult secondary sources to help explain the meaning of the text.

In your paper, first of all outline the meaning of the text. Where does it come from? What are its major themes and ideas? What stood out to you as particularly striking in the text?

Having crossed over a different religious tradition, you can “return” to your own reflections on the text. How does this text from a different religious tradition deepen or interrogate your own understanding of theology? What concepts were familiar, and which ones were unfamiliar? What lessons have you learned from “crossing” from your own religion or philosophical orientation to another way of thinking?

The paper should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, and it can (though it does not have to) be written in the first person. Secondary sources are not mandatory, but are encouraged.

4. Crossing 3: Action (25%)

Due: Saturday, Apr. 9 at 11:59 pm via OWL

In light of our readings on comparative theology and interreligious dialogue, particularly chapter 6 of *Circling the Elephant*, what are the horizons for religious pluralism when it comes to pursuing justice and the common good? What challenges remain?

In this paper, you will pick a contemporary social issue – such as nonviolent resistance for social change, racism, our ecological crisis, gender equality, xenophobia, colonization, or simply the difficulties of living together in a pluralistic society – and suggest how dialogue and “crossing over” between different religious traditions can offer a way forward.

Length: 3-4 pages, double-spaced, using at least two sources – both of which may be course readings.

4. Micro-Presentation (10%)

Each week, beginning after Reading Week, 1-2 students will be called upon to briefly present/share their reflections or research from one of the three “Crossing” projects (their choice). This informal presentation should include at least one powerpoint slide (but no more than 3 slides!) and will be approximately ten minutes long, with time for questions and engagement. You will simply talk about the object, text, or action that you would like to highlight, sharing the insights you gained through the process of engaging a religious tradition other than your own – in other words, “crossing” over to a different way of thinking and then returning back to your own way, having been changed in the process.

A schedule for these micro-presentations will be developed by week 4.

Tentative Class Schedule/Syllabus

Unless marked otherwise, all readings other than the textbook will be available as PDFs (or as library-accessible course readings) on the course website.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Week 1 (Jan. 13) – What is Pluralism?</p> | <p>D'Costa, Gavin. 1996. "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions." <i>Religious Studies</i> 32 (2): 223–32.</p> |
| <p>Week 2 (Jan. 20) – The Story We Find Ourselves In</p> | <p>Thatamanil, "Introduction."</p> <p>Kwok Pui-lan, "Beyond pluralism : toward a postcolonial theology of religious difference," ch. 8 of <i>Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology</i> (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).</p> |
| <p>Week 3 (Jan. 27) – Earth Religions</p> | <p>Thatamanil, ch. 1</p> <p>Vine Deloria, Jr. "Thinking in Time and Space," chapter 4 of <i>God is Red: A Native View of Religion</i>, 30th anniversary edition (Fulcrum, 2003).</p> |
| <p>Week 4 (Feb. 3) – Theocentric vs. Christocentric Approaches and the Problem of Supersessionism</p> | <p>Thatamanil, ch. 2</p> <p>Nostra Aetate – available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html</p> <p>Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians"</p> |
| <p>Week 5 (Feb. 10) – Case Study: Christian-Buddhist Dialogue</p> <p>Crossing 1: Object Due (Saturday, Feb. 12 at 11:59 pm)</p> | <p>Thatamanil, ch. 3</p> <p>Thich Nhat Hanh, <i>Living Buddha, Living Christ</i>, ch. 4</p> <p>Heart Sutra https://plumvillage.org/news/thich-nhat-hanh-new-heart-sutra-translation/</p> <p>Diamond Sutra https://plumvillage.org/sutra/the-diamond-that-cuts-through-illusion/</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | Amos Yong, <i>Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue</i> , chapters 1-2 |
| Week 6 (Feb. 17): The Trinity and Divine Incomprehensibility | Thatamanil, ch. 4 and 5 Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "Trinity and Religions," <i>Missiology</i> 33:2 (2005): 159-174. Japji Sahib (from the <i>Adi Granth</i>) [excerpt] Pseudo-Dionysius [excerpt] |
| NO CLASS – Reading Week Feb. 21-25 Week 7 (Mar. 3) – Interreligious Learning and Justice: From Gandhi to King to Thich Nhat Hanh | Thatamanil, ch. 6 |
| Week 8 (Mar. 10) - Case Study: Hindu-Christian Dialogue | Thatamanil, ch. 7 Francis X. Clooney, "Trinity and Hinduism," chapter 18 Raimon Pannikar, "The Methodic of Hindu-Christian Studies" |
| Week 9 (Mar. 17) – Case Study: Hindu-Christian Dialogue Crossing 2: Text Due (Saturday, Mar. 19 at 11:59 pm) | Thatamanil, ch. 8 Jeffrey Long, "One Life/Many Lives," <i>Religions</i> 9:104 (2018). Michelle Voss Roberts, "The Conscious Body," ch. 1 of <i>Body Parts: A Theological Anthropology</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017): 1-28. |
| Week 10 (Mar. 24) – Case Study: Jewish-Muslim-Christian Dialogue | Minding Scripture Podcast, episode 13: "Abraham" Episode 13: Abraham – Minding Scripture #1 - al-Fatihah ("The Opening") #2 - al-Baqarah ("The Cow") #19 - Maryam ("Mary") 24 – al-Nur ("The Light") |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>#67 - al-Mulk ("Sovereignty")</p> <p>Al-Quran (القرآن) — Online Quran Project — Translation and Tafsir</p> |
| <p>Week 11 (Mar. 31) – Case Study: Jewish-Muslim-Christian Dialogue</p> | <p>Joshua Ralston, “Neither Conciliation Nor Confrontation,” chapter 2 of <i>Law and the Rule of God: A Christian Engagement with Shari’a</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).</p> <p>(See also ch. 5)</p> |
| <p>Week 12 (Apr. 7) – Conclusions</p> <p>Crossing 3: Action Due (Saturday, Apr. 9 at 11:59 pm)</p> | <p>John B. Cobb, Jr. “Beyond ‘Pluralism’,” in <i>Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered</i>, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990).</p> |

Appendix to Course Outlines: Faculty of Theology Academic Policies & Regulations 2021–2022

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean and the Instructor to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work, and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at:

<https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. The appeals process is also outlined in this policy as well as more generally at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Turnitin.com

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Statement on the Recording of Class Activities

Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems ("Clickers")

Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work: Medical or Non-Medical Absences & Accommodation

MDiv and MTS students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester must consult with the Dean's Office. MDiv and MTS students are excluded from using the Self Reported Absence option as that is restricted to bachelor-level students. Students may request academic consideration on medical grounds by contacting the Dean of Theology office at srice@huron.uwo.ca. To protect student privacy, details of the medical accommodation need only be disclosed to the Dean, who will communicate to the instructor(s) the necessary accommodation. Instructors may not request medical or other documentation from students. The Dean may require medical or other documentation, and the student may be required to complete the Student Medical Certificate, available online at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf. Following a determination of accommodation, the Dean will contact the instructor(s) and the student who will then arrange a new deadline for missed work.

Students seeking academic consideration for a non-medical absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) may be required to provide appropriate documentation to the Dean's Office. All consideration requests must be directed to the Dean's Office with notice also given to the instructor.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf. Consult the Dean's Office for any further questions or information.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation (see above), students should contact Sandra Rice in the Dean's Office at srice@huron.uwo.ca.

Your Faculty Advisor is also able to answer questions about your program and to assist with any concerns about academic matters. Contact them for a conversation whenever you need.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult with the Dean. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with your course instructor and the Dean, who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect your full-time status and therefore have implications for OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

An outline of the range of services offered to Huron students is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>

Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>

Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1>

Learning Development and Success: <https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>

Accessible Education: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Mental Health & Wellness Support at Huron and Western

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. Please visit <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services: huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca

Community Safety Office: safety@huron.uwo.ca

Chaplaincy: gthorne@huron.uwo.ca

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.