INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
INAf 477
SPRING 2011

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Office Hours:
Class Time: Monday, 9.30-12.00
Class Room: ICC 270

COURSE DESCRIPTION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

Interfaith dialogue is one of the most impressive intellectual discourses of the twentieth century. It became the topic of the day, from the formal fora of academia to popular discussion in the cafes. Like any other phenomenon, it does not stand by itself. It emerged at a result of many factors. One of them, if not the most important, is what Gilles Kepel called the “crisis of modernity”.¹

With the exception of those who a priori reject such discussion, a lot of people assume that the intensity and quality of the dialogue will increase in the future. Today, even, there is no more discussion about the importance of the dialogue, but rather about ‘what is the most appropriate approach/method for the dialogue, and how the dialogue can yield praxis consciousness at the grass root level and not only at the academic or intellectual levels.

Plurality is a fact of our contemporary world, both on a global scale and often on the level of specific societies. Throughout most of recorded history, humanity has experienced a rich plurality of religions. This is due to the manifoldness of the divine revelation and of its human pursuit in different cultures. “Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women throughout the ages to enter into relationship with the Absolute Being.”¹

Plurality is also the very texture of Southeast Asia. Despite its religious diversity, Southeast Asia has until recently been generally known as countries where a number of great world religions meet and develop in peaceful co-existence. The region is also known as one of the least Arabicized areas throughout the Muslim world.


¹Pope John Paul II in Asisi, 27 Oct 1986
Many, however, are quick to point out that the contemporary globalizing context of religious pluralism is unlike any of its precursors in that never before have so many different religious communities and individuals existed in such close proximity to—and even interdependence on—one another. In fact, I would argue that the very existence of the fairly recent interreligious (and intercultural) movement is an indication that today the world’s religions are interacting on an unprecedented scale.

This course is an invitation to engage in the practice of dialogue in a structured setting and thereby to develop the appreciative capacities that, among other things, will enable student to take maximum advantage of the diversity of students they will have in classes throughout our school experience. Course outcomes focus on what is learned in the process. The student will have a sense of collegiality and community across cultural, and gender lines; an experientially grounded understanding of the principles of interfaith dialogue; the ability to participate meaningfully and constructively in multi-cultural and interfaith conversations and learning; and the critical, intellectual capacity to address substantive issues from a dialogically appreciate perspective.

Whether one is religious or not, interfaith dialogue, which is an understanding of religions is a key to understanding other cultures. Religions have been powerful forces throughout history in any country, some times working for good and sometimes working to destroy. They have inspired some of the greatest and noblest of acts; equally they have inspired some of the most ruthless brutality. They are central to much social and political history.

Racial and religious prejudices are major issues in the contemporary world. One major motive in understanding of religions is to encourage knowledge and understanding between religions and cultures, based on assumption that prejudice will be overcome if each knows more about the other. It is hoped that the knowledge of others will result in understanding, and there by better relations between peoples. Above all understanding of other religion is to enable us to ‘see through the spectacles’ of another culture. If some one can develop an empathetic understanding of one other culture, the result will be that they are more ready to empathize with other cultures as well.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS:

- Complete assigned reading in preparation for the class session for which it is assigned
- Participate fully in class discussions and activities.
- The nature and quality of classroom discussion is critical and include the expectations of
  - Sharing openly and respectfully
  - Empathetic listening (listening with an intention of hearing and understanding the others’ perspectives)
- Creating and sustaining a safe space for open and beneficial conversations, including respecting the confidentiality of what is said in class and posted on the online discussion board!
- Attend and observe worship services, a worship in a faith tradition other than student's own.
- Timely and regular posting of the journaling assignments

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT**

1) **WEEKLY JOURNAL**: Each student will write, and post to the online course discussion board weekly journal entries based on the week’s reading and class session, not to exceed 2, typed, double-spaced pages. Each student’s journal will be shared, and to be responded by other students. These responses will offer careful reading, comments, ideas, and reactions to the journal postings.

Each weekly journal should include:
- Session date, topic and reading assignment.
- Major points:
  - Which confirmed/reinforced your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
  - Which challenged/contradicted your pre-existing perceptions/perspectives.
  - Entirely new insights and perspectives.
- Personal reactions to the readings: questions, affirmations, feelings and connections to one’s life.

2) **REFLECTION PAPER ON WORSHIP OBSERVATION**: A five-to-seven page, comparative reflection on student’s worship visits. The student will receive a worship observation guide and briefing during the upcoming class session, and will receive an outline for student’s comparative reflection paper. The reflection paper is due at the last class session, at which we will debrief your worship experience.

3) **FINAL PAPER**: a 15-20 pages final paper on your own topic. The final paper is due three weeks after the last class.

**Text Required and Optional**

1) **Author**: Paul F. Knitter  
   **Title**: Introducing Theologies of Religions  
   **ISBN-10**: 1570754195  
   **ISBN – 13**: 978-1570754197  
   **Publisher**: Orbish Books (May 2002)  
   **Edition**: Paperback 256 pages  
   **Required or Optional**: Required

2) **Author**: S. Wesley Ariarajah  
   **Title**: Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations  
   **ISBN-10**: 2825413089
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<td>Publisher</td>
<td>World Council of Churches (August 1999)</td>
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<td>Paperback 130 pages</td>
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<td>3) Author</td>
<td>Reza Shah-Kazemi</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'an and Interfaith Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publisher</td>
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<td>4) Author</td>
<td>Syafaatun Almirzanah</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>When Mystic Masters Meet: Towards a New Matrix for Christian-Muslim Dialogue</td>
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<td>5) Author</td>
<td>Peter C. Phan</td>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue</td>
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<td>6) Author</td>
<td>Hans Kung</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic</td>
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<td>7) Author</td>
<td>Paul F. Knitter</td>
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Session Outline

Session One: Why Dialogue?

Reading:
Martin Forward, A Short Introduction, Inter-Religious Dialogue: pp. 7-63

Session Two: Models and Practices of Dialogue

Reading:
Syafaatun Almirzanah, When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue
The Other in the Light of the One, Kazemi
Theoria -> Praxis, Swidler, Leonard
Introducing Theologies of Religions

Session Three: Sharing Religious Experiences
**Reading:**
On Sharing Religious Experience, Jerald Gort, Hendrik M. Vroom. (eds.)
The Other in the Light of the One, Kazemi
Syafaatun Almirzanah, When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue

**Session Four:** Issues in interfaith encounter

**Readings:**
Syafaatun Almirzanah, When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue
Not Without My Neighbor,

**Session Five:** History of (Dialogue or?) Christian-Muslim Relations

**Reading:**
Christian Muslim Relation, Haddad

**Session Six:** History of (Dialogue or?) Christian-Muslim Relations in Southeast Asia

**Reading:**
TBA

**Session Seven:** Scripture and Dialogue (1)

**Reading:**
Texts on Dialogue

**Session Eight:** Scripture and Dialogue (2)

**Reading:**
Texts on Dialogue

**Session Nine:** Field Trip

**Session Ten:** Comparative Theological Concepts

**Reading:**
Introducing Theologies of Religions, Knitter
Syafaatun Almirzanah, When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue
**Session Eleven:** Pluralism

**Reading:**
Diana Eck, Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion

**Session Twelve:** New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue

**Reading:**
Syafaatun Almirzanah, When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian Muslim Dialogue

**Session Thirteen:** Do we Worship the Same God?

**Readings:**
Theoria -> Praxis, Swidler, Leonard
Islam and Pluralism, Ashgar Ali Engineer
Not Without My Neighbor, Chapter 1

**Session Fourteen:** Individual reflection on worship

Georgetown, Sept 14, 2011