

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Theology of Religions THEO9415
Thursday 2:30-5:00 p.m.
Dr. Robert B. Stewart
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Seminary Mission Statement

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Core Values Addressed

The seminar will address the core values of *Doctrinal Integrity* and *Mission Focus* directly and *Spiritual Vitality* indirectly. Reflection on theological and philosophical issues is intimately related to reflection on the nature of God, Scripture, Christian faith, evangelism, and the doctrine of Creation. Reflection on other religions is essential to the task of missions.

Core Value Focus

The core value focus for this academic year is Mission Focus. This seminar will directly address that by highlighting questions related to the destiny of the unevangelized and the relationship between Christianity and other religions.

Course Description

The seminar constitutes an intensive study of key issues in how Christianity relates to other religions, focusing particularly upon the doctrine of salvation. Attention is given to pertinent biblical testimony, historical developments, and contemporary perspectives on these issues with a mind to critiquing various perspectives and constructing a suitable Christian theology of religions.

Objectives

1. The student will demonstrate familiarity with issues related to the construction of a theology of religions as it relates to soteriology by: (1) reading broadly on pertinent issues and (2) writing reports on assigned readings in the field.
2. The student will demonstrate familiarity with the theological methods employed by various theologians by including a methodological critique in his/her reports on assigned readings of relevant sources and methods.
3. The student will demonstrate familiarity with issues related to theology of religions by participating in seminar discussions of relevant issues arising from the assigned readings.
4. The student will demonstrate familiarity with significant personalities advocating or opposing representative positions such as pluralism, inclusivism, particularism, universalism,

and/or postmortem salvation by: (1) writing a research paper summarizing and critiquing the position advocated by a contemporary scholar; and (2) writing formal responses to a paper by another student in the seminar.

5. The student will provide the seminar with an annotated bibliography related on or before the day that the paper is presented.

Methodology

The primary methodology will be individual research and writing, guided by the professor.

Grading

Grades will be assigned according to the NOBTS grading scale.

Evaluation

Research Paper	45%
Formal Response to Paper	20%
Reading Report #1	10%
Reading Report #2	15%
Personal Perspective	10%
	100%

Seminar Requirements

1. Research Paper

Each student will write a research paper of not more than 7,000 words (not counting bibliography) according to Turabian format on one of the following topics. Research papers are to be in 12 Times New Roman font and double-spaced with footnotes. If a student wishes to write a paper on a topic not listed below, he or she must have prior permission from the professor.

1. "Jonathan Edwards' understanding of the fate of the unevangelized"
2. "Gabriel Fackre's argument for a post-mortem encounter for the unevangelized"
3. "The theology of religions of certain early apologists" (i.e. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Gregory of Nissa, etc.)
4. "Official Roman Catholic positions concerning theology of religions since Vatican II"
5. "Implications of the Noachic Covenant for a theology of religions"
6. "Implications of the 'holy pagan' in the Pentateuch for a theology of religions"
7. "The mission of Israel to the nations as presented in certain major and minor prophets" (i.e. Isaiah, Jonah, etc.)
8. "The theology of religions in Luke-Acts"
9. "Paul's theology of religions as presented in Romans 1-3"
10. "Selected Approach(es) to reconciling Exclusivism with belief in the universal salvific will of God"

11. “Evidences of private revelation among un-reached and/or non-Christian people groups”
12. “The epistemological threshold for salvation according to select evangelical theologians”
13. “The theological debates surrounding the methods of Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili”

Students may write concerning the theology of religions as it relates to soteriology of the following theologians or missiologists:

14. Don Richardson
15. Paul Knitter
16. John Hick
17. Karl Rahner
18. Lesslie Newbigin
19. Karl Barth
20. Wilfred Cantwell Smith
21. Raimundo Pannikar
22. Hendrik Kramer
23. S. Mark Heim
24. William Lane Craig
25. Millard Erickson
26. John Sanders
27. Amos Yong
28. Terrance Tiessen
29. Rob Bell

2. Annotated Bibliography

The annotated bibliography should be submitted as part of the Research Paper. The annotations give the reader a summary and an evaluation of the sources. An annotation should provide the central idea(s) of the source and give the reader a general idea of the content. The complete bibliographic information for the source should be included at the beginning of the annotation. The annotation should provide some or all of the following: an explanation about the qualification and/or authority of the author to write the work; the scope or main purpose of the work; any detectable bias found therein; who the intended audience seems to be; and the reading level of the work. A summary comment should also be included. Each annotation should be 75-200 words in length.

3. Formal Response

A Formal Response to a research paper should be single-spaced and 4-6 double-spaced pages in length. The response should contain a summary and critique of the research paper. The format of the Formal Response should include the content summary, an evaluation of the content and an evaluation of the form and style of the research paper. It should also include 3-5 questions concerning the paper topic. It should also include a conclusion and an Errata Sheet. The Errata Sheet numbering scheme is as follows: 1st number is the page number, 2nd number is the

paragraph number, and 3rd number is the line number. Footnotes are indicated by the abbreviation fn.

4. Reading Reports

Each student will write two reading reports (3-5 pages, single-spaced), including (3 or 4) discussion questions, on assigned readings and present them to the seminar and lead in discussing the assigned reading.

5. Personal Perspective

Each student will write a 3-5 single-spaced personal perspective on the relationship of Christianity to other religions and particularly the destiny of the unevangelized. It is to be a *personal perspective*, not an evaluation of the seminar. It is an exercise to help the student begin to put all the pieces together in relation to the complex of questions that must be answered as part of a theology of religions.

Evangelical Ministries to New Religions Conference. The 2018 meeting of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions will be held on the NOBTS campus on April 27-28, 2018. Students are **strongly encouraged** to register and attend this meeting as it is related to the subject of this seminar. Students may submit paper/presentation proposals to EMNR. Extra credit will be given to those who do register and attend. For more on the EMNR conference go to www.emnr.org.

Required Texts

Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. London: MacMillan, 1989.

Knitter, Paul. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985.

Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2008.

Netland, Harold. *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

———. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001.

Pinnock, Clark. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Sanders, John. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Stewart, Robert B. *Can Only One Religion Be True?: Paul Knitter and Harold Netland in Dialogue*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

Talbott, Thomas. *The Inescapable Love of God*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014.

Yong, Amos. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.

Recommended Texts

Chung, Sung Wook. *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.

D'Costa, Gavin. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

Gulley, Philip and James Mulholland, *If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010.

Knitter, Paul. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

MacDonald, Gregory, ed. *All Shall Be Well: Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011.

MacDonald, Gregory, *The Evangelical Universalist: The Biblical Hope That God's Love Will Save Us All*. London: SPCK, 2008.

Miles, Todd L. *A God of Many Understandings?* Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010.

Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, *Universal Salvation?: The Current Debate*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Quinn, Philip L. and Kevin Meeker, eds. *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Tennent, Timothy C. *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Tiessen, Terrance L. *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.

Seminar Schedule

1/25	Introduction to Course		
2/1	Knitter, <i>No Other Name</i> , 1-144		Doughty
	Knitter, <i>No Other Name</i> , 145-231		Olson
2/8	Sanders, <i>No Other Name</i> , 1-79		Simmons
	Sanders, <i>No Other Name</i> , 81-149		Bailey
2/15	Sanders, <i>No Other Name</i> , 151-214		Dean
	Sanders, <i>No Other Name</i> , 215-305		Baker
2/22	Reading Report	Pinnock, <i>A Wideness in God's Mercy</i>	Bailey
	Reading Report	Netland, <i>Dissonant Voices</i>	Simmons

3/1	Reading Report	Talbott, <i>The Inescapable Love of God</i>	Dean
	Reading Report	Yong, <i>Beyond the Impasse</i>	Doughty
3/8	Reading Report	Knitter, <i>Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian</i>	Baker
	Reading Report	Hick, <i>An Interpretation of Religion</i>	Olson
3/15	Class Discussion	Stewart, <i>Can Only One Religion Be True?</i>	
	Miscellaneous		
3/22	SPRING BREAK		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
3/29	Research Paper #1:		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
4/5	Research Paper #2:		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
4/12	Research Paper #3:		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
4/19	Thanksgiving Break		
4/26	Research Paper #4:		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
4/27-28	Evangelical Ministries to New Religions Conference at NOBTS		
5/3	Research Paper #5		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
5/10	Research Paper #6:		
	Formal Response, Discussion		
	Personal Perspectives Due		

Elements of a Book Review

The book reviews should be styled after the reviews found in scholarly journals. Each review should contain the following elements. Page numbers refer to double-spaced typed pages. The total length of a review should be 5-7 pages.

- (1) *Bibliographic entry.* At the beginning of the review, you should specifically identify the book being reviewed. The most efficient way to do this is by including a bibliographic entry for the book.
- (2) *Biographical sketch.* You should include a brief, not more than 1/2 page (preferably one-paragraph) professional biographical sketch of the author. The purpose of this is to

demonstrate the author's competence or incompetence for writing the book. You should include information about where he was educated, where he teaches, what other books he has written, and anything else about him, which is relevant to a critical judgment of the book. Sometimes church affiliation is relevant because it can be an indicator of possible bias on the part of an author. Our library has a number of sources of biographical information about authors. Biographical information is just like any other kind of information. If you get it from a source, including the book jacket, you must identify it by a parenthetical notation.

- (3) *Summary.* This section should be relatively brief (2 or 3) pages and should concentrate on describing the contents of the book. A frequent problem with book reviews is that students make the summary much too long, making the review seem like a friend's account of a movie he went to the night before. Do not try to include all the details. Concentrate on giving a clear indication of the principal concerns of the book and the major conclusions of the author. Use specific details only to illustrate your general comments. **Caution:** *What I am asking for is a summary of the book and the author's conclusions, not a précis of the subject matter the book contains.* For example, if you review Lightner's *The Death Christ Died*, you are not just reviewing a certain theology of the atonement, but a book about that particular viewpoint. The focus of the summary should be the book itself and the author's conclusions. It is not necessary to write "Wells says," or "Erickson argues," or some similar phrase in every sentence, but your summary should indicate throughout that what you are reviewing is a book and an author's conclusions. **Beware of the trap of treating an author's arguments as facts.** One of the reasons for doing book reviews is to sharpen critical skills.
- (4) *Critical Evaluation.* The critique is by far the most important part of the review. It should make up at least 1/3 to 1/2 of the entire review. Just as students often make the summary too long, they make the evaluation too short. Sometimes they are not only too short, but also too shallow: "This is a good book. It was easy to read . . ." Your evaluation should reflect some *serious* thought about the strengths and weaknesses of the book, what the book did or didn't do for you, and whether or not what it did was what it intended to do. Students often complain that they cannot evaluate a book because they do not know as much about the subject as the author. You do not need to know all that the author knows but you should know enough on the subject to critique the author in a responsible fashion. This may mean that you have to do further research on the general subject. And all students can describe their reactions to a book, and can assess its value for them. The contents of the evaluation will, of course, vary with the book being reviewed, but often some or all of the following areas should be treated:
- (a) **Purpose.** Attempt to assess the degree to which the author fulfilled his purpose. Sometimes this assessment may also involve describing some apparent purpose that is different from the stated purpose.
 - (b) **Value.** Saying a book is "good," or "bad," is very vague. Try to be specific about what the book's value is. Not all good books are good for the same reasons, or for the same purpose. Precision about its value will help potential readers of the book make an intelligent decision about whether it would be worth their time to read it.

- (c) **Strengths and weaknesses.** Strengths and weaknesses are, of course, relevant factors in assessing value. Sometimes, however, there are particular elements, which should be highlighted.
 - (d) **Bias.** Every book is written from a particular perspective. That perspective is the author's "bias." When that bias leads to a distortion of facts, a slanted approach to an issue, or an unwillingness to deal with some relevant aspects, the book is said to be "biased." When reading a book always be aware of the powerful influence of perspective, and make some assessment of the author's bias. (**Note:** *Remember that readers also have a bias and can be misled by that perspective into making biased judgments of a book.*)
 - (e) **Audience.** Not all books are intended for the same audience. Some are more popular than others; some are intended only for serious scholars. Delineating the audience that might profit from reading the book is a valuable service a reviewer can perform.
 - (f) **Extrapolations.** Often a book will stimulate new ideas or cause a reader to make connections that he had not thought of before. A discussion of such connections and ideas, even though they may be somewhat tangential, is in order in a critical evaluation. Be careful though, and do not go too far afield. The fact that a book is bound in a red cover does not warrant a discussion of the dangers of totalitarian communism or the virtues of Anselm's views of the atonement.
 - (g) **Miscellaneous.** Do not be limited by this brief list in deciding what to include in your evaluation. There are other items that might be included. Use your imagination and creativity.
- (5) *General Remarks:*
- (a) **Other Reviews.** It is permissible, sometimes even advisable, to consult other reviews of a book. Our library has several periodicals that contain reviews of books in theology. Feel free to consult them. If you get an idea from them that you use in your evaluation, *be sure to credit the source*. More than likely your professor has read that review, also, and will detect plagiarism! This should be done in a parenthetical note. Too much dependence on other reviews is not good; it robs you of the opportunity of evaluating the book using your own resources.
 - (b) **Examples.** If you need to see what a good book review looks like, read some of the ones in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* or the *Evangelical Quarterly*. Remember, however, that often these reviews are much shorter than yours will be. Also, not all of them are equally good.
 - (c) **Style.** Reviews should be written in clear, grammatical English prose. I would rather read a well-written five-page review than a verbose and obtuse seven-page review.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Anderson, Norman. *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.
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