

3 World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the Context of The Overall Program of Theological Education At Perkins School of Theology

Robert Hunt

Editor's Introduction

“**Theological Education for Interfaith Engagement**” is one of six cases studies from ***Pedagogies for Interfaith Dialogue***,¹ Volume II in the Hartford Seminary Series on Innovation in Theological Education.

The book, as its name and the series name suggests, is about teaching, interfaith dialogue and theological education. The core of the book: six critical case studies of seminary taught, degree courses in interfaith dialogue. The cases give expression to a broad range of dialogical pedagogies and course formats, and they include the courses’ syllabi and bibliographies. Each case course includes an experience of dialogue as part of the course. This is definitive of the project, for reasons elaborated below.

By critical case we mean one that describes not only the context, content, methods and related goals and rationale of the course, but also presents an evaluation of the course and discussion of the implications of the evaluation for teaching interfaith dialogue in theological institutions. Our hope for the book: To create a practical literature and related conversation among theological educators on the role of interfaith dialogue in a seminary curriculum, and on the substantive and structural issues related to it.

The cases are first hand accounts, written by the teachers themselves -- all veteran theological educators. With the support of a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology

and Religion to Hartford Seminary, the group gathered several times between February 2007 and September 2008. The initial times together were spent getting to know each other, discussing our experiences, our approaches to and philosophies about interfaith dialogue and the pedagogical resources that we use in teaching it, and developing a common sense of the kind of critical case the project desired. Beginning in September 2007, each person presented a first draft of their case based on a course they taught during the time of the project. Case presentations extended over several sessions of discussion, critique and deepening reflection on the nature and location of dialogue in theological education. Christy Lohr, whose integrative essay joins the cases in this volume, joined the case writer group during the case review period of the project.

With revised, final drafts in hand, the case writer group convened two meetings to discuss the cases with seminary faculty more broadly. The meetings took place in Berkeley and Chicago. Invitations were extended to all seminary faculty in the respective areas to engage two or three of the project cases, share the work they themselves were doing and engage each other in substantive conversation. The meetings intended and accomplished several purposes. Foremost was to begin to disseminate the results of the project in a way that both advocated a central role for interfaith dialogue within the theological curriculum and laid a foundation for ongoing critical engagement among seminary faculty of the theory, theology and the practice; and to do so in a dialogical way.

Our thanks to the sixty or so faculty who shared in our journey at the regional meetings. Thanks also to the Hartford Seminary faculty who indulged our interim reflections at several of their regular Wednesday Collegial Sharing luncheons along the way; and to Sheryl Wiggins and David Barrett for their general assistance. Most importantly, our deepest felt thanks to the case writers for their willingness to dialogue with us and with each other about a personal passion, and for their willingness to ultimately present their passion in published form to their peers; to the Wabash Center for their continuing support through the several interesting twists in the project’s unfolding; to Alexa Lindauer who copy-edited the entire manuscript; and to the many, many students in the case courses. Dialogue is about mutuality. Thank you students for your gift to us.

¹ David A. Roozen and Heidi Hadsell, eds. (Hartford Seminary, 2009).

Why this Book at this Time

September 11, 2001 got America's attention. Tragic – in so many ways. Earth shattering – in so many ways. World changing – in so many ways. Among the latter, as one of us shared at the annual meeting of the Religion News Writers Association less than two weeks later, the shift from an *Ecumenical to Interfaith Consciousness about America's Religious Diversity*.

Critical to the point is that this shift is about awareness and acknowledgement, not a sudden change in presence or numbers. Muslims have been in North America since the beginning of our history with slavery, and adherents of Islam and a variety of Asian religions have been increasing steadily since changes to immigration laws nearly 50 years ago. The relative lack of acknowledgement of the multi-faith reality in the United States prior to September 11 is suggested, for example, by the fact that a major survey of congregations in the U.S. conducted in 2000 found that while 45% of congregations were involvement in ecumenical Christian worship in the year prior to the survey, only 7% indicated involvement in interfaith worship (and much of this was Christian/Jewish).

The multi-faith character of American society would be, of course, no surprise to theological educators. Indeed, in an essay on “Globalization, World Religions and Theological Education” in the “Looking Toward the Future” section of the 1999 volume of *Theological Education* celebrating the conclusion of Association of Theological Education's decade of globalization (Vol 35, No 2, pp 143-153), M. Thangaraj explicitly recognizes that, “Dialogue across religious boundaries has become a daily activity in many people's lives.” His conclusion and plead: an increased engagement with world religions is critical for Christian theological education for three reasons. A Christian minister cannot have an adequate theological grounding for his or her faith without a meaningful understanding of how it relates to other faith traditions. A minister cannot adequately address the everyday interfaith experience and practice of his or her laity. Public ministry in today's world is increasingly interfaith.

World and national events since September 2001 have only intensified awareness of Muslims and Islam in particular and multi-faith diversity more broadly in the United States. Public opinion polls suggest both encouraging and discouraging developments. American attitudes toward American Muslims are a bit more positive today than

nine years ago and American congregations' involvement in interfaith worship has more than doubled since the 2000. In contrast, American attitudes toward Islam as a religion are less positive today and the dominant approaches of congregations to interfaith issues appear to remain indifference and avoidance.

Against this background of increasing awareness, increased necessity (assuming tolerance across diversity is a good thing), and increased lay and congregational involvement in interfaith engagement, one might think that a subject like Interfaith Dialogue (as a vehicle for tolerance through enhanced understanding and connection) would be a hot-bed of interest in theological education, or at least a begrudging capitulation to reality. The evidence is, unfortunately, less compelling. For example, one will not find a single article in *Theological Education* about interfaith dialogue between September 2001 and January 2007, when the case authors in this volume first met; indeed, not since the conclusion of the ATS decade of globalization in 1999; and in fact, not since the journal's inception in 1964! Nor have there been any to date (through Vol 44, No 2, 2009). This is all the more ironic given the centrality of “diversity” to ATS priorities and, relatedly, to issues of *Theological Education*. Tellingly, the one article in *Theological Education* that contains “Dialogue” in its title is about black and latino theologies (Vol 38, No 2, 2002, p 87-109).

A survey of seminary deans and an online search of seminary catalogues done in fall, 2006 to help identify possible seminary courses for this book was only a little more dialogically-friendly than *Theological Education*. The good news is that we were able to find several courses that fit our criteria. The bad news was that there were only a few more than the five seminaries represented in the book that offered degree courses taught by regular faculty that included an experience of interfaith dialogue.

This certainly fit our impressions. As we looked out across theological education in the United States we found that although there seemed to be a lot of talk about and enthusiasm for interfaith dialogue, there was a paucity of courses related to interfaith dialogue in even the broadest sense, and very few places in which interfaith dialogue was actually happening. There was, from our vantage point, a curricular and pedagogical vacuum that badly needed to be filled.

More encouraging, at first glance, was our discovery of an entire section of syllabi listed under Interreligious Dialogue on the

Wabash Center Guide to Internet Resources For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Unfortunately, a quick perusal in June 2007 indicated that an actual conversation or encounter with a person of another faith tradition was not a goal of a single course listed; and that learning about the practice of putting persons from different faith traditions into conversation or dialogue with each other was a goal of, at most, one of the courses. Among other things this means that from among the half dozen or so different types of interreligious dialogue typical of the emerging literature on the subject, the cutting edge of university and seminary courses on dialogue listed on the Wabash site all narrowly focused on a single, and typically the most rudimentary, purpose. In terms of the following list of types of dialogue, for example, the Wabash site syllabi all fall into "Informational," although several move beyond basic comparative religions to also include the history of relations between two or more faith tradition.

- 1) Informational: Acquiring of knowledge of the faith partner's religious history, founding, basic beliefs, scriptures, etc.
- 2) Confessional: Allowing the faith partners to speak for and define themselves in terms of what it means to live as an adherent.
- 3) Experiential: Dialogue with faith partners from within the partner's tradition, worship and ritual - entering into the feelings of one's partner and permitting that person's symbols and stories to guide.
- 4) Relational: Develop friendships with individual persons beyond the "business" of dialogue.
- 5) Practical: Collaborate to promote peace and justice.
[http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/guidelines_interfaith.php#goals]

Such narrow and elementary approaches, we believe, cannot adequately address the three reasons set forth by Thangaraj almost a decade ago for why the increased engagement of interfaith issues is critical for theological education. Rather, we believe, theological education can only meet these challenges for its ministry students and related congregations and denominations by exposing students to the full range of dialogical purposes. Hence, our desire for the book to create a practical literature and related conversation among theological

educators on the role of the practice of interfaith dialogue in a seminary curriculum is driven by the related desire to be a constructive advocate for courses in Interfaith Dialogue using pedagogies that optimize the full range of dialogical purposes and practices. To use ATS outcome language: we want to enhance the capacity of seminaries to equip their students to engage the multi-faith reality of the American (and global) context in ways that advance mutual understanding and appreciative relationships across faith traditions.

The Cases

The desire to maximize the diversity of dialogical pedagogies, course formats, Christian traditions represented within the Association of Theological Schools, and regions of the country in a limited number of case courses at first struck us as rather daunting. One of the few positives of discovering that we really had a very limited number of courses from which to draw was that it made the selection process considerably easier. Eventually we gathered an experienced group of theological educators from three regions of the country that included professors from Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and ecumenical schools, as well as from three religious traditions – Christian, Jewish and Muslim.

The six case studies, along with a very brief summary of each, are listed below in the order they appear in the book. The cases are preceded in the book by an integrative essay that further comments on each case's distinctiveness and connects the cases to a broader examination of the issues and potential location of interfaith dialogue in North American theological education: ***Navigating the New Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in Theological Education***, Christy Lohr, Intersections Institute, Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries.

'Interreligious Dialogue' at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, James Redington, St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia

The *'Interreligious Dialogue'* course at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, combines a substantive course on the history of and current approaches to dialogue with in-class exercises in meditation and a required experience of

dialogue. It includes sections on Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, emphasizing the latter two in the dialogue requirement. It appears first because it includes a succinct overview of the history of and current approaches to dialogue; it alerts the reader to the importance of spiritual practices for the experiential/relational practice of dialogue (a common thread across the courses), and uses, arguably, the simplest approach for students to be in dialogue – go find your own experience and then run it by the professor.

***World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the Context of the Overall Program of Theological Education at Perkins School of Theology*, Robert Hunt.**

The *World Religions and Christianity* case presents what we believe is the most typical current approach among seminaries for dealing with the challenge of interfaith dialogue – specifically grafting dialogue onto an existing course in world religions. Interfaith Dialogue’s tension with evangelical Christianity is a visible dynamic in the case. For the course’s required experience of dialogue, students are assigned to external Hindu, Jewish and Muslim organizations pre-arranged by the Professor. In addition to the course dynamic the case includes an insightful overview of the interfaith practice of a wide spectrum of religious organization in the Dallas area.

***Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary*, Yehezkel Landau**

The *Building Abrahamic Partnerships* case documents a very different kind of course than either of the first two. It is an eight-day intensive for which an equal number of degree and non-degree Christians, Jews and Muslims from around the US are recruited, with priority to Hartford Seminary students. The eight days are a continual experience of dialogue aimed at developing basic concepts and skills for leadership in building Abrahamic partnerships. The course and case are especially strong in the breadth of dialogical methods used and on the relational skills required of the course leadership.

***The Challenge of World Religions to Christian Faith and Practice at Drew University School of Theology*, S. Wesley Ariarajah**

The *Challenge of World Religions* case is more broadly about Drew’s three course curriculum addressing interfaith issues. The three courses include a heavily experiential world religions course with personal engagements with Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism; a relatively straight forward theology of religions course; and an international, cross-cultural immersion focused on interfaith encounter. Although the world religions course is highlighted in the case, the author’s reflection on the systemic inter-relationships among and distinctive contributions of each of the three courses is a unique contribution of the case. Another unique contribution is the treatment given to the international immersion course and how this popular course format can be adapted to addressing interfaith issues. Still another distinctive of the case is the extensive attention given to student reflections of their experiences.

***Theological Education for Interfaith Engagement: The Philadelphia Story*, J. Paul Rajashekar, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.**

The *Philadelphia Story* (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia), like the Drew case, strongly situates interfaith concerns within the overall curriculum. A distinctive feature of the case is the strong argument the author, who was dean during a recent curriculum revision and who is a systematic theologian, makes for the necessity of Christian theology to move from a “self-referential” to a “cross-referential” posture in its method, hermeneutic and articulation. The case then moves to its focal course concern with the required, Theory and Practice of Interfaith Dialogue. A distinctive strength of the case’s treatment of the course is its critical struggle with the pros and cons of having students “find and direct their own” dialogue experience.

***Dialogue in a World of Difference: Turning Necessity into Opportunity in Hartford Seminary’s Master of Arts Program*, Suendam Birinci, Heidi Hadsell, and David Roozen.**

The *Dialogue in a World of Difference* case is the only one about a course that is not a part of an MDiv curriculum. Rather, the course is

an attempt to use a semester long experience of interfaith dialogue taken during a student's first semester to socialize students into the relational and appreciative skills, capacities and preferences that will help them maximize learning in the seminary's religiously and culturally diverse MA student body. Three distinctive features of the course/case are the near equal mix of international and US students in the class, the near equal mix of Christian and non-Christian students in the course; and the near equal mix of religious professionals and laity. The case also reports on a less than successful experiment with online dialogue.

About the Editors

Heidi Hadsell is President of Hartford Seminary and Professor of Social Ethics. She is former Director, The Ecumenical Institute of The World Council of Churches Bossey, Switzerland and former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary. She has served as a consultant to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – Roman Catholic Dialogue; consultant for institutional change towards the globalization of theological education, Pilot Immersion Project for the Globalization of Theological Education, and consultant for curriculum design and organizational structure, Pilot Master's degree program for Public Administrators, Institute for Technical and Economic Planning, Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil.

David Roozen is Director of the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research and Professor of Religion and Society. More widely recognized for his work in congregational studies and religious trends, Roozen also has an extensive record of research and publication on theological education, including, for example: *Changing The Way Seminaries Teach*. David A. Roozen, Alice Frazer Evans and Robert A. Evans (Plowshares Institute, 1996); *Interfaith FACT's: An Invitation to Dialogue*. Martin Bailey and David A. Roozen (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2003); "Patterns of Globalization: Six Case Studies," guest editor, *Theological Education* (Spring, 1991); and, *The Globalization of Theological Education*. Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans and David A. Roozen (eds) (Orbis Books, 1993).

3 World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the Context of The Overall Program of Theological Education at Perkins School of Theology

Robert Hunt

Introduction

For over the past half century, the necessity of interfaith dialogue has become obvious to a growing number of Christians, regardless of their theological convictions in relation to the purpose of engaging with non-Christian religions. Even as this case study was being written, a meeting involving major evangelical and ecumenical groups in Nairobi was preparing a statement of agreement on the need to engage in a wider ecumenism, respect the integrity of both Christian and non-Christian religious communities, and foster dialogue (Global Christian Forum, November 2007). There are several reasons for this growing consensus around dialogue. They range from a realization that effective evangelism begins by listening to and understanding the non-Christian other to a conviction that world peace is possible only through a dialogue aimed at both mutual understanding and appreciation. The course *World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective* that is discussed in this case study does not presume a single normative basis for Christian participation in dialogue, but does assume that dialogue is a critical part of Christian engagement with non-Christians, and is thus an essential pastoral skill. It is equally important that students develop a theological framework for understanding interfaith dialogue as a legitimate part of the ministry of the church. Unless students can articulate for themselves and their future congregations the Christian necessity of interfaith dialogue, it will ultimately be pushed to the periphery of their concerns and activities. This case study describes the setting within which the course *World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective* is taught, specifically discusses how inter-religious dialogue is taught within the course, and offers an evaluation of the

course intended to guide its further development and more generally indicate both the possibilities and difficulties of engaging seminary students in inter-religious dialogue.

The Cultural and Religious Demographics of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

The Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex has grown over several decades through migration from both within the United States and immigration from abroad. The result has been increasing cultural and religious diversity alongside growing fears by previously dominant cultural groups that their identity is threatened by that diversity. The locus of both growing religious diversity and inter-cultural tension has been primarily in the suburban areas. In those areas reside both families of European descent that left the city of Dallas proper to escape the growing presence of Latino/as and African-Americans, and large numbers of middle class immigrants from Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist backgrounds attracted to the professional opportunities of the growing technology sector as well as both public schools and readily available tertiary education. The result has been significant numbers of mosques, temples, mandars, garanth, and churches as well as both fear of and resistance to their development. The City of Richardson is perhaps the most notable example of this diversity. In addition to a decades old Jewish community, it has the largest mosque in the region (with over 2000 worshippers for Friday prayers) as well as two Buddhist temples, a Sikh garanth, and two Hindu mandars. Other suburbs of Dallas (Irving, Farmers Branch, Carrollton, Plano, Frisco, Garland, and Mesquite) have equally diverse, if not so large, non-Christian populations and institutions. The same diversity of religions is found in Dallas itself.

Interfaith Dialogue in Dallas

Interfaith Dialogue in the Dallas Metroplex is being organized and carried out by several different organizations.

1. Thanksgiving Square: This is a well-endowed institution with an interfaith chapel, park and offices in downtown Dallas. It describes its activities as:

Cooperating with religious, cultural and educational organizations in educational and cultural programming, developing and operating the Multi-Faith Exploration and Exchange Program, bringing together Dallas-area members of more than ten world religions to discuss

religious and cultural diversity and issues that affect urban life, and developing gratitude-education materials for use from preschool to university level.

Thanksgiving Square tends to promote understandings of religion that are irenic, pluralist, and non-confrontational. Its public events are presentational rather than dialogical. Its focus on interfaith *thanksgiving* limits the scope of dialogue in which it engages.

2. Post 9/11 Interfaith organizations: It was citizens of Dallas' suburbs who first responded to the attacks of 9/11 by forming organizations to carry out interfaith dialogue and encourage public education. Frisco Multi-faith, for example, has a continuous program of open houses in religious institutions, a creative education program for high school level youth that is used by local school districts, and an annual prayer service. Other ad hoc activities have been organized by local religious leaders in Irving and Carrollton. Since 9/11, suburban mosques have held annual open houses and multi-faith Iftar dinners during Ramadan. Both mosques and churches have taken the initiative to offer educational programs and dialogue sessions that are open to the public. The author of this report participates in 15 to 20 of these 2 to 4 session courses annually in collaboration with different Muslim leaders. Given a participation of from 50 to 200 persons in each event it is clear that there is a strong interest in Christian-Muslim relations.

The weakness of these new efforts is two-fold. Most concentrate on Christian-Muslim dialogue so that increasingly, the Jewish community in particular seems to be marginalized in the process of inter-religious relationship building. Secondly these organizations have given little thought to the complexities of purposeful dialogue. The educational program of Frisco Multi-faith, for example, reflects the primarily intellectual orientation of its participants and its materials make little reference to the ritual and legal aspects of the different religions even when, as in Judaism and Islam, they are key aspects of religious identity.

3. The Institute for Interfaith Dialogue: The Institute for Interfaith Dialogue is a well-funded organization associated with the Gülen movement. Its participants are almost all Turkish Muslims and it has focused on organizing interfaith dinners and educational events both on area campuses and for the public. The focus has been on Christian, Muslim, and Jewish dialogue and its theory is driven by the teachings of Fethullah Gülen. These events tend to stress mutual

understanding and respect among “people of the book” and to eschew discussion of problems of communal relations in the Middle East and Turkey. Their program in Dallas is weakened by a lack of participation by non-Turkish Muslims.

4. The Texas Conference of Churches: The TCC has officially launched programs of Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim dialogue. In the Dallas area, the development of these programs has been forestalled by the lack of any Dallas area ecumenical organizations to initiate or coordinate Christian participation in inter-religious dialogue.

Summary: There are multiple initiatives of interfaith dialogue in the Dallas area. They are weakened by a lack of cooperation with each other, the fact that most operate on the hope for goodwill rather than out of any clear conceptual framework of what dialogue might accomplish in a community, and the near total lack of participation by the great majority of Dallas area Christians, who belong to independent evangelical, fundamentalist, or Pentecostal Christian churches.

Perkins School of Theology.

Perkins School of Theology is a graduate school at the Southern Methodist University. The purpose of the school, as stated in its catalogue is as follows:

“Well-trained clergy and lay leadership are essential to the life of the church. Our primary mission, as a community devoted to theological study and teaching in the service of the church of Jesus Christ, is to prepare women and men for faithful leadership in Christian ministry.”

The majority of students at the Perkins School of Theology are preparing for ordained ministry through the Master of Divinity degree program. Almost all come from mainline denominations, with the large majority being United Methodist. The student population is evenly divided among women and men, and ranges in age from 22 years to over 60, with the average age being in the mid 30’s. It is a theologically diverse student body, with many coming from theologically conservative churches. Most have never participated in inter-religious dialogue and many have never met a person of another faith.

Teaching Inter-Religious Dialogue at Perkins School of Theology

In addition to courses offered by Perkins in interreligious dialogue (below), the Seminary is involved in interfaith dialogue through the student-led Interfaith Dialogue Group (of which this author is faculty sponsor) and participation in the university-wide Interfaith Dialogue Student Association. Events sponsored by these groups typically take place once a semester and feature not so much dialogue as informative talks on aspects of various religions by their followers.

Perkins School of Theology offers the following courses related to interreligious dialogue:

- World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective.
- National Council of Churches and Jewish Seminarians Interacting: This is an intensive three day retreat focusing on dialogue that is both ecumenical and inter-religious. It centers on a topic of relevance to ministry in a Christian or Jewish congregation.
- The Christian-Buddhist Dialogue.
- The Christian-Hindu Dialogue.
- Contemporary Christian-Muslim Dialogue.
- Eastern Spiritualities and Christian Mysticism.

Of these courses, the most important is *World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective* because it is required of all students, and therefore comprises the most important means of promoting interfaith dialogue, as well as offering the practical tools to initiate and lead such dialogue at a congregational level.

World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the context of the overall program of theological education at Perkins School of Theology.

Within the Perkins curriculum, the course *World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective* is intended to engage students training for pastor ministry in theological reflection on the inter-related

realities of religious pluralism, globalization, and Christian mission. It has traditionally been a classroom oriented course focusing on, primarily, theological reflection on inter-religious engagement. *For this case study, the course was significantly reworked to include a focus on practical skills and experience of inter-religious dialogue and engagement.* Thus expanded, it complements the skills in fostering dialogue and managing group dynamics taught in courses related to the practice of ministry.

In conjunction with the syllabus revision, experienced student facilitators/evaluators met with each inter-religious dialogue group to guide the dialogue and evaluate its progress over the period of the course. Their final evaluations and recommendations will be included in this case study.

World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective and Interfaith Dialogue

A. Key aspects of this course related to dialogue are:

- An understanding that the major form of engagement between churches and non-Christian religious groups will be through interfaith dialogue, and that this does not preclude other forms of engagement.
- An understanding that pastors will play a major role in inaugurating and leading this dialogue along with their non-Christian counterparts, and that they must therefore have a fundamental grasp of the theoretical and practical issues in interfaith dialogue.

B. Specific learning goals related to engaging in dialogue are:

- Understanding of the basic issues of developing a Christian theology of religions.
- Understanding the relationship between globalization and religious pluralism.
- Understanding the post-colonial context of interfaith relations, including differences in worldview between the modern and postmodern west and persons from other cultural environments.

- Understanding the basic beliefs, practices, and values of each different religious tradition and developing a framework for understanding religion as a human phenomenon that allows constructive future learning; basic religious literacy.
- Understanding the basic theories and methodologies of dialogue, and the ways that they have developed over the last 50 years, particularly through the work of the Interreligious Relations and Dialogue sub-Unit of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.
- As in all Perkins courses, there is a concern to bring to consciousness both methodological and practical issues related to gender, race, and class. In this course in particular this includes the different ways that human identity and human relationships are construed in different religious traditions.

C. Specific pedagogical methodologies (in addition to lectures and readings) related to teaching dialogue are:

- Class sessions led by persons from each different religious tradition – learning from practitioners.
- A class session or sessions on dialogue as understood from a non-Christian perspective, led by a non-Christian leader in interfaith dialogue. The focus is finding an agreed basis for participating in dialogue.
- Student participation in a series of dialogue meetings with non-Christians from the Dallas community led by trained facilitators.
- Participation in on-campus and other dialogue events during the period that the course is taught.
- Student visits to non-Christian religious centers and individual in-depth interviews with persons of different non-Christian religions.

D. Specific forms of evaluation of the effectiveness of the course are:

- Student self-evaluation regarding their preparation to engage in and lead interfaith dialogue.

- Standard content oriented tests and exams.
- Evaluations of the course design and the effectiveness of the dialogue sessions by the non-Christian participants, as well as their suggestions for improvement.

Case Study

Course Preparation

The major preparation for the course consisted of arranging for students to meet in dialogue groups, training facilitators for those groups, and re-working of final 6 lectures to focus specifically on inter-religious dialogue in relation to spirituality, community building, peace-making, mission, and the development of a Christian theology of non-Christian religions.

As lecturer, I began making contact with leaders of different religious communities in Dallas in early August of 2007. Most were anxious to facilitate dialogue with Perkins students. Groups were formed by a representative of the Hindu community, a local rabbi, two leaders of the Muslim women's community, and a member of the Ismaili community. In addition to these organizers of dialogue groups, I contacted about 20 individuals who would be willing to have one-on-one interviews with students and accompany the students to their religious center.

Several issues also arose immediately as we began to discuss the details of the dialogue meetings. The first regarded logistics in relation to dialogue with Muslim groups. I anticipated the dialogue sessions beginning in mid-September in order to be completed by the end of October. In 2007 much of this period fell during Ramadan and the Eid celebrations that follow. While all Muslim groups that were contacted wished to invite students to Iftar celebrations during Ramadan, few had time to meet for extended discussions. Ultimately this issue was resolved by initiating Christian-Muslim meetings at Iftar celebrations and scheduling Christian-Muslim dialogue groups after Ramadan. Four dialogue groups met on weekday evenings, and Saturday morning at various venues. Each group had between 4 and 6 members of the Muslim community and 4 to 8 students. Equally problematic from a logistical standpoint was the fact that the Jewish high holy days fell in mid-semester, and occupied much of the rabbi's time, as well as that of her community.

The second issue regarded the expectations of how the dialogue groups would proceed. In both phone conversations with non-Christian leaders and in emails, I described the dialogue groups as an opportunity for Christian students to both learn about non-Christian religions and also learn to talk about their own religion in ways that promoted better mutual understanding. I also described the session topics found in the NCCJ Guidelines on Dialogue as the topics we hoped to cover. (These guidelines were developed by the National Conference of Christians and Jews prior to its transformation into the National Conference on Community and Justice, and are no longer in print.) It emerged that despite these efforts to clarify the purpose of the dialogue groups two religious leaders remained committed to almost exclusively educating the students about their respective religions. This in itself gave the students an opportunity to learn about the challenges involved in initiating dialogue and was a reminder that even course learning goals were a matter of constant negotiation with non-Christian partners.

A third issue related to the timing of the dialogue groups, and arose primarily from the nature of the Perkins' student body. Virtually all of the students enrolled in the course held full or part time jobs and often significant church responsibilities as well. About half were supporting families. Thus simply finding times in which they could meet was a challenge. Absences because of sickness, work obligations, family obligations, and church obligations made it difficult for several of the students to be fully engaged in the dialogue sessions on an ongoing basis.

Finding facilitators for the groups proved equally challenging for the same reasons, but in the end two former students of my courses with experience in interfaith dialogue, as well as a member of our faculty with long experience in interfaith dialogue, agreed to moderate the groups. Together we reviewed in some detail the NCCJ dialogue guidelines, expectations of facilitators, and goals. Each facilitator brought his or her own experience and expertise to this meeting, and each agreed to provide an evaluation of the outcome of the dialogue groups.

The Dialogue Groups

The most productive dialogue groups were the two Muslim-Christian dialogue groups arranged by a Muslim woman with long experience in interfaith dialogue, the Muslim-Christian group

organized by a leader of the Ismailia community, and the Jewish-Christian dialogue group arranged by a local rabbi. These groups were able to follow the NCCJ suggestions for dialogue topics and all members reported being satisfied that they were able to openly share their perspectives and experiences as well as listen to and understand those of other participants.

Other groups were confused by the expectations about the nature of dialogue, despite efforts to clarify the purpose of the groups, and the course, in advance. The representative of the Hindu community found it difficult to break with the model of “dialogue” associated with Thanksgiving Square, seeing dialogue sessions as an opportunity for members of the Hindu community to teach our students about Hinduism, with no expectation of an open discussion of Christianity or how Hindus and Christians could fruitfully relate. Indeed it was the assumption in the first meeting that the Hindu participants already fully understood Christianity. This was not in fact the case, and Hindu efforts to draw similarities between Christianity and Hinduism were often wildly off the mark. Thus certain Hindu rituals were referred to as “sacraments” and compared with Christian sacraments, as it was assumed that terms like “salvation,” “God,” and “worship” had similar meanings for Christians and Hindus. That this should happen is not surprising since the so-called inter-religious dialogue in Dallas has usually consisted of one-way presentations with almost no questions asked and no statements challenged. The underlying ideology of Thanksgiving Square -- in particular, that all religions possess essentially the same underlying human impulse toward thanksgiving to God -- also mitigates against dialogue that exposes essential differences.

Eventually this situation resolved itself as the Christian moderator of the group, a former student with long connections with the Hindu community, invited the group to interact around the comparisons of Hinduism with Christianity. This allowed the Christian students to move from asking questions about Hinduism to pointing out that some of the comparisons being made didn't relate to their understanding of their own faith. As they made it clear to the Hindu participants that the comparisons were actually confusing them with regard to the nature of Hinduism a deeper discussion of just what Christians believed and practiced emerged. This led to a more fruitful encounter in which Hindu participants, who genuinely wanted to clearly communicate their faith to Christians, began to engage in a more mutual exchange.

Ultimately both Hindu and Christian participants judged the dialogue a success, but only after the third session in which there was more personal interaction and sharing, and in which all parties felt as if they fully understood what the others expected. Based on a desire to further extend these relationships several students met additional times with individual Hindu participants.

A similar confusion of goals for the dialogue groups emerged with the groups organized by one of the Muslim leaders who approached me and offered to organize a dialogue group. At the first meeting, however, it was clear that only she and the imam of a local mosque would meet with the group prior to an Iftar meal. During the meal she discouraged Perkins students from talking with other members of the Muslim community and explicitly told the students that they shouldn't trust any information on Islam from other members of the mosque, whom she characterized as ignorant of their own religion. Her fear can be understood by any religious leader; nonetheless it was inimical to real dialogue. After I reiterated our desire to have a conversation with other members of the Muslim community and focus on some of the topics in the NCCJ guidelines, a second session was arranged. In this case, however, it turned out to be attendance at a lecture on basic Islam intended for new Muslims and non-Muslims. The speaker was a senior member of the Muslim community whose representation of Christianity was both inaccurate and offensive. The event was clearly a *dakwa* event intended to persuade non-Muslims to embrace Islam. The organizer herself was unhappy with the presentation, and apologized profusely. Again, it was an excellent learning experience for our students, but scarcely an opportunity for dialogue. The third meeting that was arranged once again involved only the organizer and another imam. In that meeting, it emerged that they had significant disagreements about the role of women in Islam. This was fascinating for my students, but again unhelpful for real dialogue.

All three sessions were arranged at different times and places to match the organizers schedule, and this made consistency difficult as well as creating a sense among the students that the meetings were driven less by a desire for dialogue than the organizers own particular agenda.

As a whole, the three events gave the students excellent insights into some of the challenges of dialogue and the particular needs and fears of the Muslim community, but did not fulfill what had been hoped for and expected. Most of the Perkins students struggled with trying to

objectively analyze their own learning through the experience and the various ways that they had felt offended by the ways in which the imams characterized Christianity and the Christian community. One Christian woman, in the third session, insisted after the initial presentation by the imam that the group sit in a circle rather than in rows facing the imam. Because the imam had spoken extensively of the role of women in Islam she then suggested that the group focus on different understandings of women and men in the two faiths. This led to a somewhat more reciprocal exchange, but the imam's ongoing insistence that Christianity turned women into prostitutes because they were not under the protection and guidance of their fathers, brothers, or husbands both embarrassed the organizer and irritated our entirely female contingent of students.

The dialogue group organized within the Ismaili community had some initial challenges due to the fact that the organizer could not be present at the first meeting, and it took some time to re-establish that the purpose of the group wasn't primarily to inform Christian students about Islam, but to engage with them in dialogue. This issue arose in part because the Ismaili participants felt strongly that Christians confused them with other Muslim groups and did not understand their unique origins and historical experience. Nonetheless it was relatively easy for the group to move into a more dialogical mode, particularly after it emerged that some Christian students likewise felt misunderstood when they were identified with conservative or fundamentalist Christianity. While the dialogue was able to proceed in subsequent sessions, and underlying theme was the ongoing desire of the Ismaili participants to inculcate an appreciation among the Christians of the uniqueness of their practice and spirituality, as well as the richness of their tradition of contributions to human well-being.

In contrast to the groups mentioned below, all of the dialogue groups that experienced a degree of difficulty had problems with their moderators. When they were set up it was understood that the Muslim organizer and a Christian chosen by the course instructor would co-moderate the group, using the NCCJ guidelines. What emerged were situations in which one or both moderators were absent, were reluctant to follow those guidelines because they had a specific agenda beyond the guidelines, or were reluctant to interfere with those who essentially took leadership of the group for their own purposes. It is clear that long term success will depend on having all the moderators meet one

another in advance and be empowered to jointly or individually keep the groups focused on the NCCJ guidelines.

Of much greater success from the standpoint of the participants were the two Muslim groups organized by a leader of the Muslim women's community with long experience in inter-religious dialogue. In these groups, all the participants knew in advance what was expected and the discussions followed the NCCJ guidelines fairly closely. Sessions began and ended in a timely manner. All the participants expressed strong appreciation for the others and in several instances have continued contact beyond the dialogue groups. To a large extent the success of these groups was attributed by the participants to the organizer and the student moderator, who co-moderated and consistently kept the group focused and reminded the group of the basic guidelines for dialogue.

The Jewish dialogue group was a similar success, with the rabbi and a member of the Perkins faculty moderating the group. The only drawback was that due to cancellations and schedule changes the group had a disproportionate number of Christian participants, and was forced to meet in a relatively distracting public environment. Nonetheless the careful work of the moderators insured that all voices were heard. Participant evaluations were uniformly positive, and as in the other groups, some participants arranged to meet with one another after the formal dialogue sessions ended.

Results of the Dialogue Sessions

Non-Christian Participant Evaluations

Evaluations by the non-Christian participants in the groups varied. The Hindu participants noted that they were initially confused about the purpose of the meeting, but enjoyed the opportunity to engage in both educating Christian students and dialogue. Most had little or no actual exposure to Christian beliefs or practices until the meetings. Both the organizer and one member of the temple committee who participated focused on the ongoing need for Christians to understand Hindu beliefs and practices, and hoped that more such groups would be organized by Perkins. Similar assessments were offered by the Ismaili community participants, focusing strongly on the desire that Christians participate in an upcoming program on Ismaili social programs worldwide, and that Perkins continue to organize dialogue groups. Two

participants noted that the Ismaili community has better, longer relationships with Christians, particularly through sponsorship of local and statewide politicians, than other Muslim groups but that they have had few opportunities to discuss their beliefs and practices. They noted that the Ismaili community is defined less by consistency of practice in the mosque than by family and community ties. This was somewhat different than other dialogue groups, which consisted of non-Christians drawn together primarily because of a renewed interest in specifically religious matters.

None of the imams from the less than successful Muslim group provided direct feedback regarding their experience. One, who is a personal acquaintance of the instructor, said that he had never been clearly told what to expect in meeting the group and hoped that similar groups might be organized, perhaps through other means, in the future. He expressed a real interest in dialogue, particularly over women's issues. The other two imams, when contacted, offered to teach classes on Islam but expressed no interest in future dialogue per se.

The evaluations of the other dialogue groups were uniformly favorable. Muslim participants were initially surprised that there would actually be a dialogue over religious beliefs and experiences rather than the more usual listening to presentations. Those participants who responded praised the NCCJ guidelines as a way of doing something they had never done before. In contrast one Muslim leader noted that a long standing dialogue group of women from the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities that did not use the NCCJ guidelines had broken down the previous year after the war in southern Lebanon because there had been no way to mediate the strong feelings over the political situation.

Student Evaluations

Student evaluations of the more positive Jewish and Muslim groups expressed surprise that both Muslims and Jews were so open and friendly. Most students were also surprised to find a variety of beliefs and sometimes substantial disagreement among participants, not least among their fellow Christians. For many the realization that Muslims didn't all hold identical views was the single most outstanding outcome of the dialogue. Second to this was their realization that it was possible to have fruitful conversations with persons of other faiths that included respectful honesty about their own beliefs. A large number of

the students assumed that dialogue meant the suppression of their own religious views.

Students who only met only with different Muslim leaders agreed that they learned a great deal, but gave a negative evaluation of their experience over all. Several reported that they ended with a negative impression of Muslim leaders, and in particular the imams whom they met. They characterized two of these men as closed-minded, largely ignorant of American culture and Christianity, and misogynist. They were more sympathetic with the organizer, but wondered why she was so enamored with the authority of the imams. I spent more time with this group than any other processing their experience, and trying to overcome the negative stereotypes that developed out of it. At my encouragement several of the students met individually with other Muslim women, and all reported that these experiences were far more positive than their experience in the mosques. Individual meetings were thus a way of diversifying the dialogue experience and overcoming the negative consequences of poorly planned or executed dialogue experiences.

Student evaluations of the Ismaili dialogue group were similarly positive, but most noted that problems getting started in the first session kept them from moving toward a deeper sharing of beliefs in subsequent sessions. Similar comments were made by students involved in the Hindu dialogue session. Both groups wished that the NCCJ guidelines had been implemented earlier and more intentionally.

Facilitator Evaluations

Four persons, in addition to the course instructor, acted as facilitators for the dialogue groups. All four reported that the NCCJ guidelines that they followed were helpful. They were likewise uniform in affirming the value of the experience for them as facilitators as well as for the students. Their critiques of the process were specific to the groups they led. The faculty member facilitating Jewish-Christian dialogue noted that in the end the disproportionate ratio of Christians to Jews in the Jewish dialogue group made conversation difficult, and allowed some students to effectively withdraw from participation. The student facilitator of the Hindu-Christian group noted that despite advance preparation and her own familiarity with the Hindu leaders and community, it was difficult to move into a genuine dialogue. This was in part the result of a single strong-minded Hindu leader who

continued to insist that Hindus understood both Jesus and Christianity better than the Christian participants themselves, and who likewise tended to cut short or reinterpret the contributions of Hindu members of the group. Because of this person's status in the community, attempts to open the dialogue to others succeeded only with continual effort. Finally, a student facilitator noted that the Christian-Muslim dialogue groups she led would have been better with more male Muslim voices.

Visits to Religious Centers and Interviews

Students were responsible for formulating a series of interview questions for a person of another faith, reviewing those with the instructor, then making contact with that person for an interview and visit to that person's religious center. This gave the opportunity for discussions with individual students about their conceptions of other religions and an opportunity to brief them individually regarding the basic etiquette of interfaith relations.

The most common problems with the interview questions formulated by the students were:

- The assumption that people of other religions had the same theological, ethical, and spiritual concerns as Christians.
- A tendency toward one dimensional understandings of religion, focusing on just beliefs, or practices, or personal spirituality, or family life.
- A tendency to put all the interview questions in terms of Christian categories.

In my personal visits with the students I emphasized that the initial question of the interview should be to invite the interviewee to share what is most important to him or her about his or her religion, in short to let the interviewee set the agenda. We then worked through individual questions looking for ways to make them meaningful and comprehensible for those outside the Christian context – drawing on the material already available to the student through lectures and assigned readings. *This process of discussing the interview questions became an important means of putting the global lessons of diversity into a concrete form that involved the student's own work in fostering dialogue.*

Most students choose interviewees based on previous personal contacts with persons of other religions, or by approaching a leader or member of a mosque, temple, or other religious establishment in the proximity of their own home or church. The students uniformly reported that these visits were interesting and fulfilling, helped them understand the other person's tradition better, and led to further follow up conversations and even the development of genuine interfaith friendships. *It is my belief that because these interviews were student-initiated, they had as important an impact as the dialogue groups in terms of learning about and appreciating other religions.*

Lectures by Non-Christian Religious Practitioners

While not strictly part of the practice of dialogue, it was essential to the basic presuppositions of the course that each religion be presented in part by a practitioner of that religion. These presentations varied widely, reflecting the personal self-understandings of the different religious practitioners and the understanding they projected on a student audience. Thus the woman who presented Islam focused on issues like the role of women in Islam and the relationship between Islam and terrorism that she assumed were of primary interest to the students. The rabbi who presented Judaism focused, on the other hand, on the "pastoral" duties of the rabbinate that she assumed would be of interest to Christian pastors in training. The representative of the Falun Gong chose to present the "secret" metaphysical teaching of his group that he thought would be more interesting to theologians than the usual focus on practice and health typical of Falun Gong literature, and he certainly did amaze the students. Overall these presentations served well as a buffer against any simplistic understanding of either individual religious traditions or the supposed similarities between all religions.

Dialogue in the Context of the Course

In addition to the dialogue groups and individual interviews and visits to religious centers students were engaged in dialogue in the context of the course. This included not only the informational aspects of lectures and readings, but also the theological and spiritual framework within which both the presence of non-Christian religions and the need and prospect of dialogue were placed. The theological and spiritual dimensions of the study of non-Christian religions framed the entire course. Before the students studied specific religions we reviewed

various theologies of religions. Then, based on participation in both dialogue and the formal study of non-Christian religion, the class returned to theology and spirituality for a fuller exploration. Dialogue as a desirable mode of encounter with non-Christian religions was introduced prior to beginning engagement in dialogue, and was then discussed in depth after the students had experience with dialogue.

Out of the readings and class discussion several persistent questions and issues arose. A certain portion of the students came from backgrounds that emphasize heavily that only those who verbally confess Jesus as their savior and join the Christian community will ultimately live in God's grace and be saved from eternal damnation. These students enjoyed the dialogue from the perspective of learning about other people and religions but sometimes characterized it as theologically pointless. Given their initial framework, dialogue was a temporary approach to solving social problems, but ultimately needed to lead to overt evangelism. Another portion of students, - the majority, - were essentially universalists who likewise saw dialogue as a useful community building exercise, but of no consequence theologically except in perhaps introducing a larger repertoire of spiritual practice into their Christian beliefs.

I found these attitudes unsurprising based on previous experience. Thus, I offered lectures in the form of a framework for understanding Christian relations with non-Christians that focused on the vocational imperative of Christians to "go to the nations" with the gospel. One lecture was devoted to the history of mission as an imperial and colonial enterprise, and the ongoing danger of using dialogue to essentially "colonize" the religion, culture, or even good intentions of others. Other lectures focused on Christian identity in relation to the imperative to engage persons of other faiths with the gospel, while recognizing that "God has not left God's self without witnesses." Other lectures focused more specifically on the history of modern dialogue, and the lessons learned from participation in dialogue found in the Roman Catholic and WCC documents. Describing the full theological framework which I introduced is beyond the scope of this paper, but it can be found in a published article entitled "Christian Identity in a Pluralistic World" (Missiology, an International Review, April 2008). I maintain that a distinctly Christian understanding of other religions cannot be formed except through dialogue, and is compelled on Christian grounds to leave open the question of ultimate salvation in order to focus it on mutual sharing of insights into God's Reign and

related concepts in other religions. These ideas are introduced to students through in depth exploration of the somewhat problematic scripture passages Matthew 28:19 and John 14:6. Only such an exploration of scripture gives credibility to any theology of dialogue or non-Christian religions among students from an evangelical background.

Overall course evaluations were positive, with most students commenting favorably on the combination of dialogue groups, lectures by religious leaders, and the one on one interviews with persons of other religious faiths. In fact, 100% of evaluations suggested that this format be used in all subsequent courses. Most students commented that these would have been more effective if the dialogue groups had started earlier, and saw this as an area for future work in organizing the course. A few expressed skepticism about any theology of religions or any practice of dialogue that did not finally lead to evangelism, and remained unconvinced by either the presentation in the required reading by Paul Knitter or my lectures.

Unanticipated Outcomes

During the period the course was running, I was given an award by the regional Islamic Society of North America for service to the Muslim community through my own rather intense work of interpreting the Muslim experience to non-Muslims in a variety of civic and Christian settings. As a result of the negative experience of one group, and the negative attitudes toward Muslims that it engendered, I initiated a series of conversations with Muslim leaders about the ways in which Muslims themselves portray their faith to non-Muslims. I approached friends among the leadership of ISNA, CAIR, and the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue to discuss the ways in which different Muslim leaders and communities were presenting Islam to non-Muslims. The results of these discussions are beyond the scope of this case study, but do underscore an important concern in the teaching of dialogue in the context of contemporary relationships between Christian and non-Christian communities. While our school and students are acutely aware of their lack of knowledge of their non-Christian religious neighbors, it emerged in the course and its dialogue sessions that non-Christian groups are equally unaware of the Christian community: its diversity, basic beliefs, attitudes in civil society, and particularly self-understanding. Dialogue that is ongoing and emerges out of conversations outside normal institutional controls thus plays an

important role in bringing to light approaches to engagement from any side that may be counter-productive to cooperation in a pluralistic society. Ultimately dialogue can lead to and include a shared project of understanding any particular religion as it wishes to be understood.

Summary of lessons learned:

- Dialogue must be planned to take into account religious holidays of all the involved religions, rather than being subject to only the academic schedule.
- It would be useful to have a pre-dialogue meeting with all those arranging dialogue groups so that they can work together to get a clear understanding of expectations.
- Trained moderators are critical to successful dialogue sessions, in particular as those who bring to each group the expectations previously agreed upon.
- Given the desire of non-Christian groups to first represent their lives, religion, and practice to Christians it is helpful to use the initial session to let non-Christians introduce their religion and worship space, then proceed to dialogue.
- It is useful to have a variety of experiences of meeting with groups or representatives of different non-Christian religions. This not only helps students see the diversity of each religious tradition, but also moderates the effects of individual negative encounters.
- Students continually struggled to form for themselves a theological framework within which to understand relationships between Christians and people of other faiths. For the course to be effective it must finally either offer such a framework, or give the students confidence that such a framework can emerge in the process of both faithful reflection and participation in dialogue.

Further Issues

While not directly related to this case study, there remain a number of questions to be considered in terms of the place of teaching inter-religious dialogue in a seminary setting. The first of these, and related directly to the teaching of this course, is whether dialogue should be related to Christian mission, or whether it more

appropriately belongs in the realm of systematic theology and the identification of religion as an object of inquiry, or perhaps within the realm of ethics and engagement with a pluralistic society. Related to this is the shared object of dialogue, which will vary depending on what the dialogue partners intend to explore together. Students wondered more than once about the explicit point of a course in World Religions and whether it was intended to change the attitudes of student participants towards other religions, develop a theology of religions, encourage further study of other religions, create a better pastoral understanding of care in a pluralistic world, or just encourage thinking about Christian mission. Both the instructor and students were aware that inadequate attention was given to folk/popular religion, particularly in the Latino context, and to so-called new religions such as the Falun Gong and Mormonism. Answering these questions will require a deeper consideration of the entire curriculum and just where, given the realities of a pluralistic world, the correct emphasis lies in training pastoral leaders. It is my own conviction that since mission is the defining activity of the Christian community and that mission necessarily involves encounters with persons of other faiths, the appropriate setting for teaching inter-religious dialogue in the curriculum is in the context of mission. Such an academic setting is consistent with the actual development of theologies of dialogue in Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Ecumenical circles.

Conclusion

Overall the course was a success, receiving exceptionally high marks in the final evaluation. Students valued all aspects of the teaching of dialogue, from the dialogue groups, to individual interviews, to having guest lecturers from other religions. In the future these aspects of teaching dialogue will become a regular part of the pedagogical method in the course, taking into account the lessons learned above in order to improve the overall experience. It still remains to do follow up surveys of graduates to determine if the lessons they learned through and about dialogue are being implemented in their ministry.

Fall 2007
WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY: A GLOBAL
PERSPECTIVE
Dr. Robert Hunt

Course Description: This course examines religious contexts and issues of Christian mission and ministry, offering resources for theological reflection on tasks of individuals and local church communities from a global perspective. It sets the following concrete objectives:

- To study key features of major religious traditions, for an appreciation and reflective analysis Of the situation of religious diversity in contemporary society.
- To explore the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue as the primary form of Christian engagement with non-Christian religious traditions.
- To consider the theological, pastoral, and spiritual implications of Christian mission and Ministry in a culturally and religiously pluralistic world, on the global and local levels.
- Students will be expected to both reflect theologically on inter-religious engagement and Learn specific skills related to facilitating and participating in inter-religious dialogue.

Readings and Resources

Required:

- Brockman, Habito, and Hunt (draft essays and readings): World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and Ministry in a Global Society:
- Esposito, Fasching, Lewis, World Religions Today (Oxford)
- Robert Hunt, Muslim Faith and Values: What Every Christian Should Know, (GBGM Press)
- Wesley Ariarajah, The Bible and People of Other Faiths (WCC Publications)
- Paul Griffiths, Christianity Through Non-Christian Eyes (Orbis)
- Paul Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religion
- Selected articles, including items available on reserve, or as file attachments to be emailed to students, or as internet sites. (See class schedule below for particulars)
- Readings from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Spirituality Vol. 1 and 2. (PDF on Blackboard)

- Readings from Constance Padwick, Muslim Devotions (PDF on Blackboard)

Recommended:

- Ruben Habito, Healing Breath: Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth (MKZC Publications)
- Jane Smith, Islam in America. (Columbia University Press)
- Diane L. Eck, A New Religious America (Harper San Francisco)

Video Resources:

Puja (29 min); Four Holy Men (37 min) (Hinduism); Guests of God (Islam); Land of the Disappearing Buddha (52 min); Spirit and Nature (88 min) (Religion and Ecology); ??JUDAISM??

Course Requirements

Required For Credit:

- Report – “Religious Groups in my Home Town or Neighborhood” due Sept. 10th. The report is due in writing.
- Participation in assigned dialogue groups. These groups will meet 4 times during the semester.
- A four page report and analysis of each dialogue meeting demonstrating an awareness of key issues in the theology and practice of dialogue found in the required readings.
- Scribblings – a half page note written immediately after each class and reflecting on personal reactions and questions arising from the class. These notes are due immediately after class had written or by email within 24 hours of the class.
- Visit to a religious center of another religious tradition and an in-depth interview with a member of that tradition.
 - o You must make an appointment with Dr. Hunt and present your proposed interview questions before the interview.
 - o You must submit a reflection paper on the visit/interview (7 – 10 pages, double spaced, 11 point type. Your report must have page numbers and your name at the top right hand Corner of each page. Reports should be stapled in the upper left hand corner and should not be in a folder or binder.). You must make this visit and interview by November 1st. The interview reflection paper will be due on December 1st.
- Mid-term examination on October 15th
- Final essay/exam (Due December 10th.)

Desirable: An open mind and open heart, willingness to learn new things, see different perspectives, and consider various theological, spiritual, and pastoral options in the face of contemporary realities.

Grading

- The report “World Religions in My Hometown” should be a listing with address of institutions or other indications of your sources of information.
- The mid-term exam will be an hour long short answer test taken by each student and based on the readings in *World Religions Today*.
- The interview paper should clearly characterize the interviewees responses to your questions, what you learned from his or her responses, how these compare/contrast with what you have observed visiting the interviewee’s religious community and learned in the classroom and reading. Finally it should include briefly what implications you see for ministry.
- The final essay will be based on a case study. You will be required to analyze the case in light of the question: “How would I be faithful to the gospel in this situation.” You should expect to answer 4 subsidiary questions in your essay: a. What are the central religious features of this situation? b. What are the possible Christian responses? c. What should be the primary response, and why? d. What would you expect for an outcome in this situation?
- Reports and essays should have a clear structure with a single sentence thesis, arguments for the thesis, and a concluding summary pointing toward implications for ministry. Essays should be double spaced, with 11pt Times New Roman type. They should be left justified and have the students name in the upper right hand corner. Multiple pages should be stapled. Footnotes should be in a standard style. All papers are due in printed form. No emailed papers will be accepted. All late papers will be graded down for lateness.
- Course grade based on Dialogue Group Reports [20%], Midterm [20%], Final Exam [30%], and Interview Paper [30%] with up to one-half letter-grade deducted based on class presence, participation, and other assignments.

Guidelines for Classroom and Dialogue Dynamics. (Source: NCCJ Manual on Dialogue)

Protocols for Interviews related to Human Subjects in Research (Source: Jack Seymore, Garrett Evangelical School of Theology)

Class Schedule

Part I. The Contours of Religious Diversity

- Prior to the beginning of the course 6 persons will be trained as interfaith dialogue facilitators using the NCCJ Manual
- Dialogue Sessions Begin: Meetings every 2 weeks for 8 weeks.
- Reading: Paul Knitter *Introducing Theologies of Religion*. Reading of this text should be completed by the 4th class session.

Session 1: Christian Mission and Evangelism in a Pluralistic World – outline of a Vocational Theology of inter-religious engagement.

Session 2: Dialogue: Key Documents and Concepts

Obstacles to Dialogue: Sources of our fears and prejudice concerning people of other faiths.

Reading: *Interfaith Dialogue* (WCC Ecumenical Dictionary Entry)

Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (WCC)
Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions (WCC)

Session 3: Facilitating and Participating in Dialogue – (Guest Lecturer: Isobel Docampo of the Perkins Faculty.)

Readings: NCCJ Guidelines and Training Manual for facilitating Interfaith Dialogue.

“The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue” by Leonard Swidler. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1, Winter 1983, 1984.

Session 4: Hinduism – Origins

Readings: *World Religions Today*, pp. 270-339

Christianity Through Non-Christian Eyes, pp. 191-246

Bhagavad Gita,
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ANCINDIA/GITA.HTM>
. Read all, Carefully read sections 1-5, 9, 12, 13.

Session 5: Hinduism – Contemporary Manifestations

(Report from and discussion led by Hinduism Dialogue Group)

Readings: Solomon Raja – Folk Hinduism, Chapter 3 (PFD file on Blackboard)

Video: Puja, Four Holy Men

World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito, and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV.

Session 6: Guest from the Hindu Community

Session 7 Religions of China - Confucianism, Taoism, and the Chinese religious system

Readings: World Religions Today pp. 34 – 62

Students may select readings from Lao Tze, Confucious, Han Fe Tze, Mencius. (Asiapac Comic Series on Blackboard and on reserve in Bridwell)

www.beliefnet.com ,

www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism/

Session 8 Chinese Religions – Contemporary Manifestations

(Report from and discussion led by the Chinese Religions Dialogue Group)

Readings: World Religions Today, pp. 416 – 494

<http://www.falundafa.org/eng/index.htm> (Review this site and learn the origins and beliefs of the Fu Lan Gong.)

World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito, and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV

Session 9 Guest from the Taoist/Confucian Tradition

Session 10 The History of Buddhism

Readings: World Religions Today pp. 340 – 415.

Video: Land of the Disappearing Buddha.

Reading from the Sutras. The Teaching of the Compassionate Buddha, “The Sermon of Benares” p. 5, “Questions Tending to Edification”, p. 8 (PDF on Blackboard)

Students may select readings from The Flowering of Zen in China, or The Book of Zen, (Asiapac Comics on Blackboard and on reserve in the library)

Session 11 Contemporary Buddhism

(Report from and discussion led by the Buddhism Dialogue Group)

Readings: Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes, pp. 130 – 181

Reading from the Sutras. The Teaching of the Compassionate Buddha, “The parable of the Burning House” p. 119, “Nagarjuna’s Analysis” p. 147, “The White Lotus Ode” p. 188, “The Seasons” p. 193” (PDF or Blackboard)

World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito, and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV

Session 12 Guest from the Buddhist Tradition

Session 13 Survey of Muslim History and the development of Islamic Civilization

Readings: Muslim Faith and Values Chapter 1

Constance Padwick, Muslim Devotions (Read chapters 10a, 10b, 11a, 11b, and 5a)

Session 14 Basic Muslim Beliefs and Practices

Readings: Muslim Faith and Values (Chapters 2 and 3)

Islamic Spirituality Ed. Nassar (Chapter 16)

Video: Guests of God

Session 15 Muhammad and the Qur’an

Readings: Muslim Faith and Values (Chapters 4 and 5)

Qur’an, Surahs 100 – 114

Islamic Spirituality (Chapters 1, 2, and 3)

Session 16 Shari’ah Civilization – Contemporary Islam

(Report from and discussion led by the Islam Dialogue Group)

Readings: Muslim Faith and Values (Chapter 6)

Selections from Mawdudi, Towards Understanding

Islam, Chapters 6 and 7. (Available online at

[http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/](http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/M_tui/chapter6.html)

Books/M_tui/chapter6.html and [http://www.witness-](http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/M_tui/chapter7.html)

pioneer.org/vil/Books/M_tui/cha

pter7.html)

Striving Together in Dialogue, A Muslim-Christian Call to

Reflection and Action (WCC)

World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and

Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito, and Hunt

(draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV

Session 17 Guest from the Islamic Tradition

Session 18 Judaism - Historical Development

Readings: World Religions Today, pp. 64 – 129

Session 19 Contemporary Judaism

(Report from and discussion led by the Judaism Dialogue

Group)

Readings: Christianity through non-Christian Eyes, pp. 13 –

53

World Christianity Among World Religions: Mission and

Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito, and Hunt

(draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV

Session 20 Guest from the Jewish Community

Session 21 Mid-Term Exam.

Part II. Implications for Theology, Ministry, and Spirituality –

Directions in Dialogue. One or more of the following classes is to be presented by a member of a different religious community.

Session 22 Dialogue and the Sanctity of Creation

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Section I, Relevant

Essays from Section IV

Session 23 Dialogue and Peacemaking

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from Section IV

Session 24 Dialogue and Shared Community Life

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from

Section IV

Session 25 Dialogue and Shared Spirituality

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Relevant Essays from

Section IV

Session 26 The History of Christian Attitudes toward Non-Christians

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Section II

Session 27 Contemporary Theologies of Religion – A review and discussion

Readings: World Christianity Among World Religions:

Mission and Ministry in a Global Society: Brockman, Habito,

and Hunt (draft essays and readings) – Section III

Session 28 The Christian Vocation in a Pluralistic World

Session 29 Final Examination