

ST. NORBERT COLLEGE
DE PERE, WI
SPRING 2019



THEO 589: ENGAGING WORLD RELIGIONS COMPARATIVELY

Meeting Time: Thursdays, 4:30pm–7:30pm MST/5:30pm–8:30pm CST/6:30pm–9:30pm EST
(NB: We are running this class in three different time zones, so follow accordingly!)

Dates: March 21, April 4, April 11, April 25, May 2, May 9 (NB: I have a previous commitment on 3/28 and so we will not meet this week; 4/18 is Holy Thursday and so we will not meet this week.)

Location: Online

Instructor

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Google Hangout Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Nostra Aetate calls for the Church to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values” of the many faith traditions of the world and, specifically, to do so “through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions.” Moving from this directive, this course holds that studying non-Christian faith traditions can enable deepened understanding of and appreciation for the Christian tradition. Students will gain familiarity with specific aspects of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and indigenous traditions by placing these traditions in conversation with specific aspects of Christianity. Through this scholarly dialogue with diverse traditions, students will develop their own theological commitments. Students will also reflect critically on the methods and resources used in comparative theological engagement.

Required Course Texts

- Steven Prothero’s *God is Not One* (HarperOne, 2010): available in print or on Kindle

As a graduate level seminar, this course is reading-intensive. Thoughtful and engaged reading is ***critical*** to success in this course. Students will be expected to prepare reading carefully before class; students should have assigned readings, as well as their notes on the readings, accessible during our class meeting.

Assigned readings are noted under the *Reading* header on the Course Calendar & Schedule of Assignments. Besides the Prothero book, there are no books for this class. We will be reading only digital selections of books and articles (all of which will be posted to Google classroom).

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. ...speak about “comparative theology” as a method for learning about religious traditions;
2. ...identify beliefs, practices, and theological commitments of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and indigenous religions;

3. ...draw comparisons between Christian and non-Christian beliefs, practices, and theological commitments;
4. ...articulate a theological and/or scholarly statement on the promises and limits of comparative engagement.

Evaluation

Description	Related Objectives
<p>Participation (20%) The success of this course will greatly depend on your active participation. You are expected to attend class faithfully, and to come to class fully prepared and ready to engage in conversation about the material. You should be able to answer and ask questions about the assigned readings, and to make regular and meaningful contributions to seminar-style discussions (including questions, comments, evaluations) <u>based primarily on assigned readings</u>. The response papers will help you prepare to be an effective participant in conversation.</p>	#1–3
<p>Prep Papers (25%= 5%/paper x 5 papers) For Class Meetings 2–6, you will be required to submit a short paper (of approximately 2–3 pages in length) to help you prepare for class discussion. Further instructions on the Prep Papers attached to this syllabus.</p>	#2–3
<p>Prothero Notes (20% = 4%/note section x 5 notes) For Class Meetings 1–5, you will submit a specific set of notes on the Prothero chapter for each meeting. Further instructions on the Prothero Notes is at the end of this syllabus.</p>	#2
<p>Take-Home Exam (15%)</p>	#1, 3
<p>Final Position Paper (20%) As a way to wrap up your learning in this course, you will write a short, reflective essay (approximately 3–4) pages discussing the promise and limits of comparative theological engagement for Christian faith and practice. Further instructions on the position paper to come.</p>	#4

The learning process succeeds only when students perform honestly on assignments and examinations. All students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Code. It defines academic dishonesty and sets forth the responsibilities of faculty and students in the event of alleged dishonesty. Possible penalties for dishonesty include reduction of a grade, failure in the course, failure and suspension, or failure and dismissal. Please refer to the current *St. Norbert College Student Handbook* for the text of the Academic Honor Code.

“In keeping with the St. Norbert College mission to help students develop their full potential, and in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the College provides supportive services to students with disabilities. For enquiries and further details, please visit the Academic Support Services Office located in Todd Wehr Hall, Room 211, call at 403-1321, or visit the website www.snc.edu/academicsupport/disabilities.html.” .

COURSE CALENDAR & SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

- Assignments should be completed as noted on the syllabus.
- Please have all assigned readings accessible for class discussion.

<p>Before Meeting 1</p>	<p>Pre-Assessment Reflection</p> <p>Before doing any reading for this course, please write answers to the following questions. After you finish writing and polishing, set your writing aside and make no further changes to them. You'll submit the Pre-Assessment Survey on or before the first day of class, Thu. 3/21.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a religion? 2. What are the best ways to learn about religions you are not a part of? 3. What role (if any) should non-Christian religious traditions play in the theological imaginations of Christians? <p>*There aren't "right" answers to these questions! They present opportunities for you to reflect and think through your own ideas.</p>
<p>Meeting 1</p> <p>Thu. 3/21</p>	<p>Engaging Religions Comparatively</p> <p>The goal for this meeting is to ask some "big questions" about engaging the diverse religions of the world. We will ask methodological questions: <i>What does it mean to engage religions comparatively?</i> Theological questions: <i>What theological "good" comes from comparative engagement?</i> And critical questions: <i>What assumptions are embedded in exploring religions in this way?</i></p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religion</i> • F. Clooney, "Religious Diversity and Comparative Theology," pp. 3–23 • B. Nongbri, "Introduction" pp. 1–8 (only read to the top of p. 8) • B. Nongbri, "What Do We Mean by Religion?" pp. 15–24 • Prothero, "Christianity: The Way of Salvation," 65–99 <p><i>Assignment Due:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Assessment Reflection • Prothero Notes on Christianity chapter
<p>Meeting 2</p> <p>Thu. 4/4</p>	<p>Islam and Mary</p> <p>Honoring Mary is central to Muslim faith, as well as to (some) communities of Christians. How is Mary represented in the scriptures and tradition of each religion? Does she represent an opportunity for "harmony and collaboration" for Muslims and Christians?</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M. Ayoub, "The Need for Harmony and Collaboration between Muslims and Christians," pp. 9–16 • R. George-Tvrtkovic, "Scriptural Prelude," pp. 1–16

- S. Prothero, "Islam: The Way of Submission," pp. 25–64

Assignment Due:

- Prep Paper 1
- Prothero Notes on Islam chapter

Meeting 3

Hinduism and the Embodied, Plural Nature of God

Thu. 4/11

Themes of divine plurality and incarnation are resonant in both Hindu and Christian theology. How does each tradition understand God as "many" and God as embodied? What are the points of convergence and departure? To what extent do Hindu conceptions challenge or deepen a Christian understanding?

Reading:

- D. Eck, "The Names of God: The Meaning of God's Manyness," pp. 45–80
- D. Eck, "The Faces of God: Discovering Incarnation in India," pp. 81–117
- S. Prothero, "Hinduism: The Way of Devotion," pp. 131–168

Assignment Due:

- Prep Paper 2
- Prothero Notes on Hinduism chapter

Meeting 4

Judaism and the Way to God

Thu. 4/25

The goal of this meeting is work through the theologically thorny issue of how the Jewish and Christian communities relate to each other, addressing along the way themes of covenant, salvation, supercessionism, and messiahship.

Reading:

- D. Novak, "What to Seek and What to Avoid in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," pp. 1–7
- D. Novak, "From Supercessionism to Parallelism in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," pp. 8–25
- M. Boys, "Does the Catholic Church have a Mission "to" Jews or "with" Jews," pp. 1–19
- A.J. Levine, "Jesus and Judaism," pp. 17–52
- S. Prothero, "Judaism: The Way of Exile and Return," pp. 243–273

Assignment Due:

- Prep Paper 3
- Prothero Notes on Judaism chapter

Meeting 5

Thu. 5/2

Buddhism and Emptiness as a Theological Category

The goal of this meeting is learn about “emptiness” as a category of understanding in Buddhism and consider one Catholic theologian’s use of emptiness as a way to deepen the idea of God’s incomprehensibility.

Reading:

- W. Rahula, “The Buddhist Attitude of Mind,” pp. 1–15
- J. Fredericks, “The Mind on Fire,” pp. 51–71
- J. Fredericks, “Buddhist Emptiness and the Incomprehensible God,” pp. 72–95
- S. Prothero, “Buddhism: The Way of Awakening,” pp. 169–202

Assignment Due:

- Prep Paper 4
- Prothero Notes on Buddhism chapter

Meeting 6

Thu. 5/9

Indigenous Practice and Christian Hospitality**Theme TBD***Reading:*

- **TBD**
- C. Pohl, “A New Look at an Old Tradition,” pp. 3–15

Assignment Due:

- Prep Paper 5

Post-Class WorkSun. 5/12 by
11:59pm**Take-Home Exam and Final Position***Assignment Due:*

- Take-Home Exam
- Final Position Paper

PREP PAPERS

Nuts & Bolts

- The success of this course will greatly depend on your active participation. I expect you to faithfully attend class. You must come to class fully prepared and ready to engage in conversation about the material. You should be able to answer and ask questions about the assigned readings. To that end, students will prepare a Prep Paper for each class meeting.

Objectives

The Prep Paper assignments will:

- allow students to reflect on and respond to course materials in a focused manner;
- prepare students to engage in conversation during class meetings;
- encourage students to identify and reflect upon the beliefs, practices, and theological commitments of the religions of the world;
- give students the opportunity to draw comparisons between Christian and non-Christian beliefs, practices, and theological commitments.

Evaluation

- Each Prep Paper will be graded on 10-point scale, for perceptiveness, depth of analysis and interrogation, insightfulness, and clarity of writing.

Assignment Specifics

- The Prep Paper must include two comments about/responses to each of the assigned readings for that class session, with the exception of the Prothero readings (please note: you have a separate assignment to help you work through Prothero; your reading of Prothero may help form a background for your discussion of the other readings). You must address each reading individually. You should also include a final section which briefly discusses the overall theme of the readings and some questions or points for discussion.
- The Prep Paper should be approximately no more than 2–3 pages in length, typed with 10–12 pt. font. You may organize comments and questions in bullet point/listed form or as written paragraphs. Either way, be sure to use full sentences (sentence fragments and half-formed thoughts will result in poor grade for your Prep Paper).
- You might reflect on the following: What did you learn? What ideas from the reading(s) struck you as particularly interesting and/or important? What ideas challenged you, made you think, or caused you to question? Was there a part of the reading that you struggled to understand, or about which you'd like clarification? How do the readings relate to your experience—of Christianity and other religious traditions? What topic/question seems worthy of class discussion?

PROTHERO NOTES

** You may choose to read the Prothero book in advance of our class. Feel free to “work ahead” on this assignment, as its purpose is to help you make a structured record of what you have read and your thoughts about it. You can then use your comprehensive notes as background for other reading and class discussion.

Objective

The Prothero Notes assignment will:

- provide students with a structure to summarize, reflect upon, and respond to Prothero’s discussion of various religious tradition of the world;
- help students to cultivate effective and deep reading skills, which will lead to thoughtful dialogue in class;
- prepare students to gain the background necessary to make comparisons between Christian and non-Christian beliefs, practices, and theological commitments.

Evaluation

- Each set of Prothero Notes will be graded on 10-point scale. Questions guiding my evaluation will be:
 1. How complete/thorough is the journal? Has the writer read all of the material and written in the journal about all of the main points? Has the writer used proper spelling and grammatically complete sentences throughout his/her writing?
 2. Has the writer delved into these theoretical writings as far as he/she can? Are there thoughts, reactions, and questions contained in this journal reflective of graduate level work? Has the writer made a good faith effort to complete this assignment?
 3. Has the writer tried to use all of the techniques suggested in the guidelines for the Summary and Reflection sections?

Assignment Specifics

1. *Prepare your document.* Begin by titling your document with the author name (Prothero), chapter title, and page numbers. Record the date and time you begin your work. Next, divide your document into two columns or two sections. One section (the top or the left) should be titled Summary. The other section (the bottom or the right) should be titled Reflection.
2. *Prepare to read.* Skim the assigned readings, watch for chapter breaks and other means of division in the text, and break the text into smaller units according to the way you understand the material from a very cursory reading.
3. *Summarize.* Read the first section of the text, and when you have finished, summarize the main points of the section in your Summary section. If summarization is not the most effective way for you to begin to understand the text, quote the portion of text which you having difficult interpreting for yourself. If you don’t know a word in the text, note it, underline it, and find a definition in the text for it. (If you Google or look up the concept elsewhere, make a note in your Reflection section about this, and what you find out.)
4. *Reflection.* When you have completed the summary and/or quotations, review it and the section you are reading once again. In the Reflection section, record your comments *about* the section of your summary. These comments may be in the form of questions about the author is saying or connections you can make with other things you have read or other examples of the point the author is making or ideas about the

author's writing. Use this section of the journal also to react intellectually or emotionally to the reading and reflect on its meaning.

5. *Wrap up.* When you have finished reading, summarizing, and reflecting on the text, read your summary and your comments, questions, reflections. Add any new thoughts that you have from this new perspective of reading your own reflections. Record the date and time each time you complete your work with the text.