WR601– Methods of Interreligious and Intercultural Encounter
UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Spring 2015 – Intensive Format

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course prepares students to encounter diverse religious traditions in various cultural settings. Coursework introduces students to a confessionally Christian engagement of comparative theology and diverse spiritual practices. Practical engagement involves an immersion-pilgrimage experience.

II. TEXTBOOKS:

Required Reading (prior to on-campus):

Required Reading (on-campus & for final paper):

Articles (to be read for class, on-campus): (in course shell)
**Recommended Reading:**


Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Orbis, 2006. 978-1570754197


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**III. Goals:**

This is a required course (for Masters of Divinity students) that introduces conceptual frameworks and practical methods for understanding and encountering the Church in its mission in both local and global contexts (Core Competency Three). It must be completed before any intercultural-immersion experience organized through the Academic Dean’s Office. We will explore contemporary practices of congregations encountering “others” and critically examine several theological frameworks rooted in historic Christian traditions for interreligious and intercultural encounters of open-hearted surrender to the sovereignty of God, resulting in compassionate gospel witness and authentic interreligious learning in action, word, and silence. Students will be expected to apply a chosen theological framework for cruciform service, vulnerable learning and peace-making testimony in situations of interreligious/intercultural difference. Such love-knowledge for the church & world today requires both conceptual understanding and embodied wisdom, meeting polarizing conflicts in “other-izing” with a gentling spiritual discipline of Christian presence and fruit of Spirit.

**IV. Specific Objectives:**

Upon conclusion of this course, in order to exhibit an understanding of the Church and its mission in both local and global contexts, students will be expected to

- distinguish, compare & contrast at least three habitual frameworks within which leaders in confessional faith traditions have related to religious-cultural plurality
- recognize and analytically describe (at least) five dimensions with which s/he and current community(ies) of faith may newly conceive of engagement with "others"
- explore appropriately and experiment practically with differing (spiritual) disciplines or practices in which to encounter—with gentle conviction and open-hearted compassion—interreligious and intercultural difference
- formulate preliminary criteria and guidelines for a “model of encounter” to be engaged in future ministry contexts with deepened capacity to compare and contrast with colleagues’ models
• assess the value, merit, and integrity of that model/framework of choice in confirmation (and/or revision) through intercultural immersion experience(s)

V. TEACHING STRATEGIES:

This course engages a variety of teaching/learning strategies: plenary lectures, small-group discussion, shared leadership, media-as-text and practice-reflection. Regular writing and discussion assignments offer students opportunity to demonstrate competency in theory and practices of encounter. Practice assignments help to contextualize textual and writing work, all in preparation for an immersion experience and cross-cultural awareness in more embodied dimensions than belief.

A 'method of encounter' traditioned in a two-week 2013 leadership academy in the Conscious Feminine, offered in print in *Women Writing for (a) Change: a Guide for Creative Transformation* by Mary Pierce Brosmer (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2009), guides the implementation of new/old teaching-learning practices for this course: poetry (as language of event-and-encounter), talking pieces (to encounter practice of deeper listening), read-arounds (to practice deeper listening of one another), readbacks (to offer gifts of deep listening to one another), and soul-cards (to care for our shared work in both shadow and light, together) shape the mutual, constantly interactive encounters with one another and the diverse voices of text-authors and video-clip speakers' perspectives. More can be learned about this leadership community at [www.womenwriting.org](http://www.womenwriting.org).

VI. CALENDAR OF TOPICS AND READINGS:

PREWORK (completed by February 17th):

- Read all required course texts (3 books, 1 article, 1 chapter/inventory-survey) prior to arrival on campus, writing and submitting onto the VirtualUnited shell a 3-4 page review of each but W. Paul Jones’ chapter/inventory. (See syllabus Appendix C for review-writing instructions).
- Read and complete the *Theological World Inventory*, filling it out and scoring it, prior to arrival on campus. Come prepared to speak to your own ‘theological world(s)’ within the terms of W. Paul Jones’ introductory summaries.
- With a printed course-syllabus in front of you, listen to “Introductory Matters,” the opening video-lecture available on the VU shell. It is about 14 minutes long.

OPTIONAL PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT, equivalent to one critical book review. Available on the VirtualUnited shell, two choices of a 7-day practice-assignment are encouraged for those who would like to engage course material in a more active, differently-cognitive fashion. You may select to keep kosher-observance for 7 days (instructions provided online) or to pray salat for 7 days (5 times/day, ordered prayer with body movements, instructions provided online), writing a 2-page reflection on the experience, in either case, due by February 17th, midnight, on the VirtualUnited shell.

February 18
Creating Containers of Encounter – Learning Methods in Mind and Body
Have all texts read, we will focus here today:
Yong, *Hospitality & the Other*, Chap 1
TWI – bring pdf copy, completed and scored
Worlds Given and Made – Difference in One and Differences in Many
Yong, *Hospitality & the Other*, Chap 3
Dresser, *Multicultural Manners*, 151-166
Clarke, “Dialogue or Diatribe,” pdf

February 19
Local-Global/Inner-Outer: Costs of Difference Neglected & Listening Anew
Prothero, *God is Not One*, pp. 1-99)
Space/Time-Holidays as Dimensions of Encounter
Standaert, *Sharing Sacred Space* (entire)
Prothero, *God is Not One*, Chap 7, pp. 243-278
Dresser, *Multicultural Manners*, pp. 115-120, 177-180

February 20
Food/Body as Dimensions of Encounter
Hess, “Encountering Habits of Mind” (pdf, Moodle Shell)
Dresser, *Multicultural Manners*, 71-90
Yong, *Hospitality & the Other*, Chap. 5 (pp. 129-160)
Speech unto Being/Understanding—Dimension of Encounter to Love (?)
Prothero, *God is Not One*, (Chap 5 & 9, pp. 169-202 &317-330)
Standaert, *Sharing Sacred Space* (Chap 3-4, pp. 61-98)
Olthuis, “Introduction: Love/Knowledge: Sojourning with Others/Meeting with Differences” and Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love,” (pdf, Moodle Shell)

February 21
Facing the Fables…Naming your Way into Love & Challenges of Confessional Compassion
Yong, “From Demonization to Kin-domization” and *Hospitality & the Other* (Chap 4, pp. 99-128)
Friedman’s Fables (pdf, Moodle Shell)

Final Papers Due: Tuesday March 17th, midnight; no exceptions. Any extension of deadline requires consultation with the Academic Dean.

VII: SEMINARY STANDARDS:

**A. Inclusive language**
United Theological Seminary has an official policy regarding the use of Inclusive Language. The policy may be found in the Seminary Catalog and further explained in the Student Handbook. If you have specific questions, please see the instructor.

**B. Academic Integrity**
Student integrity regarding all work assigned in this class is a basic expectation of the Seminary community. A detailed policy regarding what constitutes a violation of academic integrity can be found in the Student Handbook.

**C. Online and Classroom Confidentiality**
One of the highlights of the classroom is that students can draw from the experiences shared during class discussions and in written work. However, it is imperative that students do not share
information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. In addition, students are expected to honor the privacy and confidentiality of their classmates by not disclosing online conversations with those outside of the classroom.

VIII: USING ONLINE RESOURCES:

For information about how to access United Online and where to find help if you need it may be found on the seminary website at http://www.online.united.edu. Help guides are also in the student computer lab and in the Student Handbook. For online help, please e-mail onlinehelp@united.edu.

IX. EVALUATION:

Assignments

1. PARTICIPATION & DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT: 30%
2. TEXT REVIEWS: 40%
3. FINAL PAPER (15-20 PAGES): 30%

A. Final Grades – This is an Intensive-format class, which means pre-work must be completed upon the first day of on-campus class and final assignments will be due three weeks upon conclusion of the on-campus portion of the class.

B. Evaluating Assignments

1. Participation & Depth of Engagement – Each of us brings gifts of speech and listening into the classroom. I recognize participation and collegial responsiveness by the level of engagement demonstrated in both active listening [the ability to connect strands of contribution (those of your own and of your classmates) to the material] and active reflection in critical discourse [wrestling with the material and colleagues’ diversity in intellectually virtuous fashion, aloud and in written forms]. 30% of grade

2. Reading Reviews (4, or 3 reviews with one 7-day practice assignment, 2 pg reflection) – Write a review of four of the five required (prior to campus) texts (3 books, 1 essay). Papers should be between 4-5 pp double-spaced Garamond font 12 pt. Two pages should be a complete summary of the text. The next two pages should offer your interaction with the 3 most important points of the text. State the points. Share your agreement or disagreement. State why. Use cogent, objective, logical, open-minded, thinking that reflects the nature and methodologies of the course. Only the last page is to be an application of the text in a ministry setting. See Appendix C for thorough instructions on writing a critical review. 40% of grade

3. Final Synthesis Paper – Write a 15-20 page paper (dbl-spaced, Garamond 12-pt font) in accord with a) the final-project guidelines or b) in analysis and articulation of method in dialogue with Friedman’s Fables, The Friendly Forest, or c) 3 popular-culture artifacts and rigorous analysis. Upon consultation with the professor, other options are available, should intellectual
the Spirit inspire you to pursue an integrative, synthesis project of another order. 30% of grade

X. STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS:

It is very important for students to submit a course evaluation toward the end of the semester. Instructors do not see the student evaluations at all until after the instructors have submitted the students’ final official grades. Students should feel free to evaluate the course without any negative ramifications.

XI. REFERENCES


Venard, Olivier-Thomas, “The Belief in the Incarnation of God: Source of Religious Humility or Cause of Theological Pride?”
Beginning Thinking About Final Project/Papers – Due March 17th, midnight
Uploaded to VU Shell – File named: lastname-firstname.doc(x)

**Final Synthesis Paper** – Write a 15-20 page paper (dbl-spaced, Garamond 12-pt font) in accord with a) the final-project guidelines listed in Appendix B below or b) in analysis and articulation of method in dialogue with *Friedman’s Fables*, “The Friendly Forest,” or c) in dialogue with three popular-culture media of song, movie, and book. Upon consultation with the professor, other options are available, should intellectual curiosity and/or the Spirit inspire you to pursue an integrative, synthesis project of another order. **30% of grade**

The objectives of this final project include the following:

- To recognize at least five dimensions through which s/he and current communities may encounter and engage an “other”
- Formulate preliminary criteria for and persuade a reader toward one theological framework, with comparison and contrast to another framework
- Assess the value, merit, and integrity of that framework of choice in confirmation (and revision) through an immersion experience aimed toward years of sustainable ministry to come

**Options:**

1. Appendix B: Guidelines for Final Paper (most structured, (perhaps) least engaging)
   a. This option feels more like a ‘take-home exam’ than a research/synthesis paper.
   b. It offers an option for those desiring more structure than this disciplinary area/coursework challenges provides (easily).
2. Analysis and Interactive “Method of Encounter” in Dialogue with “The Friendly Forest” by Edwin Friedman (*Friedman’s Fables*)
   a. This option allows a bit more creative license to consider the gifts and challenges of a gospel-witness, peacemaking yet savvy “method of encounter” for each of these fable ‘characters’ immersed in a utopian environment with hidden power-dynamics clearly at play.
   b. The instructions for this option:
      i. Define your theological framework of encounter, your method of encounter, in its theoretical terms as presented in class and nuanced by course-texts [Threefold framework, to be nuanced with Knitter’s “Models of Theologies of Religious Pluralism”].
      ii. Describe the model/method most suited to your conviction/narrative/history, citing at least three coursework sources (texts, lecture)
      iii. Compare/contrast it with another model/method, and then
      iv. Flesh out your chosen method by considering how it aids your encounter—better than another method—with each fable character in “The Friendly Forest”: the sheep, the tiger, the friends, the final voice/character in the story, at the very least.
3. Popular Culture and Methods of Encounter—Description/Interpretation/Application
   a. This option invites you to choose a popular song, a movie, and a book in which to describe, interpret, and apply your chosen theological “method of encounter” (recommendations below, but open to suggestions).
   b. Instructions for this option:
      i. Choose selections from list or confirm your selections of popular-culture/media with LMH;
ii. Describe your “method of encounter” within the coursework objectives (threefold frame, lecture on Knitter’s TRP models of encounter), making your argument from at least three course texts/lecture materials and your context for why you’ve chosen this particular method.

iii. Compare/contrast with another method of encounter.

iv. Bring your “method” into dialogue with the popular song, movie, and book you’ve selected to engage.
   1. What “method of encounter” do you see active in the media-piece (main character or one of the characters)?
   2. How does it compare or contrast with your own method, and why?
   3. Does his/her method—and yours—meet the course objectives/purposes of “cruciform service, vulnerable learning and peace-making testimony in situations of interreligious/intercultural difference”? Or love-knowledge for the church & world today with both conceptual understanding and embodied wisdom, meeting polarizing conflicts in “other-izing” with a gentling spiritual discipline of Christian presence and fruit of Spirit?

Each methods-paper should aim toward the course-objectives/goals of “cruciform service, vulnerable learning and peace-making testimony in situations of interreligious/intercultural difference.” AND love-knowledge for the church & world today with both conceptual understanding and embodied wisdom, meeting polarizing conflicts in “other-izing” with a gentling spiritual discipline of Christian presence and fruit of Spirit.”

Popular Culture List:

Songs:
- Dar Williams’ “Christians and Pagans”
- Katy Perry “Firework”
- Lady Gaga “Born This Way” or “Poker Face” or “Alejandro”
- Martin Solveig & Dragonette “Hello”
- Mumford & Sons “Little Lion Man”, “Awake My Soul”
- Sugarland “Stuck Like Glue”
- Carrie Newcomer, “The Gathering of Spirits” or “I Believe”
- Mason Jennings, “I Love You and Buddha Too”
- Lazyboy “Desiderata”

Movies:
- Of Gods and Men
- Martin Sheen The Way
- Arranged
- Whale Rider
- Romero
- The Mission
- The Apostle
- As Good as it Gets
- Babette’s Feast
- The Big Kahuna
- Black Robe
- Chocolat
- Gandhi
- The Gods Must Be Crazy
- The Horse Whisperer
- The Green Mile
- Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner
- Keeping the Faith
- Leap of Faith
- Local Hero
- Pleasantville
- Pay it Forward
- Ratatouille
- Watership Down

Books:
- Chaim Potok, My Name is Asher Lev
- Brad Hirschfield, You Don’t Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right
Appendix B – Final Project – Paper Guidelines
WR601 Methods of Interreligious and Intercultural Encounter

The objectives of this final project include the following:

- To recognize at least five dimensions with which s/he and current communities may define and engage “others”
- Formulate preliminary criteria for and persuade a reader toward one theological framework, with comparison and contrast to another framework
- Assess the value, merit, and integrity of that framework of choice in confirmation (and revision) through an immersion experience aimed toward years of sustainable ministry to come

The following guidelines are to make accomplishing these objectives as straightforward as possible. Follow the directions and your final project should be both fun for me to read and demonstrative of your learning(s). It is recommended for you to read Knitter’s *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Orbis, 2006, but not required if you took good notes of the course lecture.

1. First, reflect on the course as a whole. In 1-2 paragraphs, identify at least five dimensions in which an “other” may be encountered. Give 1 or 2 examples of encounter with someone from another religious tradition or cultural background, naming the dimensions involved in the encounter.

2. Choose a scriptural metaphor or image (not a propositional text or command) from either Hebrew Scriptures or our New Testament.
   a. Describe the image, locating it in text as well as in broader scriptural canonical context. Tell the story, as you intend it. (1-2 paragraphs)
   b. Write 1 paragraph of rationale for this scriptural metaphor/image as a guiding revelation for interreligious/intercultural encounter. Why are you drawn to this image?
   c. Write 2-3 paragraphs of descriptive example, from your local context of ministry in which this image encourages life-giving encounter

3. Considering *all* the practical and conceptual coursework of the semester, what framework or model of IR/IC encounter do you choose as best “fit” for your calling, your context, your vocational journey as led by Spirit?
   a. Name the model/framework
   b. Write 1 paragraph describing what in your own fidelity-experience leads you to choose this model.
   c. Give at least 5 preliminary criteria by which you will live out this model in the immersion experience and in future ministry settings. At least 2 of them must be distinct from other models. (at least 4-5 paragraphs—naming criterion, describing it, perhaps giving an example…)
   d. Name 3 strengths of your model
   e. Name 3 weaknesses or difficulties in your choice of models

4. Choose another model or framework which you will compare and contrast with the one you’ve chosen.
   a. Name the model/framework
   b. Describe *its* primary characteristics, its criteria.
c. Name 3 strengths of this model, and compare/contrast with those of your own.
d. Name 3 weaknesses in this model, and compare/contrast with those of your own

5. Reflect on what obstacles you anticipate encountering, given your faith experience and the model for reflecting on your upcoming immersion experience. Name at least 3 obstacles, guided in description by the following:
   a. Describe the obstacle (1 paragraph)
   b. Give an example, showing how your model of choice encourages peaceable encounter in face of such obstacles/difficulties (2-3 paragraphs)

6. Bring your scriptural image/metaphor into conversation with your theological model/framework.
   a. How does the image/metaphor resonate with your model?
   b. Does the image/metaphor challenge or extend your thinking in the model you’ve chosen, in any way?

7. Conclude your final paper in any fashion you deem fit: surprises in your learning as you encountered and then chose a framework; anticipations for the immersion experience with any specific prayers tendered; scriptural roots of your intention(s); challenges you see facing the church and world as we learn how to encounter one another more peaceably…
Appendix C – Writing a Critical Book Review
Hess Commentary and Guidelines for Successful Completion of Objectives

Writing a critical book review is a good exercise in “literary community” and critical thinking, both of which aid a pastor in skills of observation, listening, connecting, and communicating with his/her congregation and community. The pedagogical rationale, in other words, is to receive an author’s offering (in prose and life’s perspective) and allow it to season your own offerings (present and future) while you think critically about your current assumptions, practices, and visions for future ministry(ies). Toward that end, you are looking for 1) what the author(s) is(are) trying to say and 2) how well, in your estimation, the author(s) accomplishes saying it. My “advice” (i.e. requirement) involves several steps:

1. Do a quick ‘read’ of the book by looking at the Table of Contents.
2. Read closely the Introduction (if there is one) for “the structure of the book” summary, and then turn to each chapter to read the first paragraph or two of each chapter. At this stage, you are looking for an overall ‘gist’ of the book-project as a whole.
3. With a tablet or computer screen handy, do a quick browse of each chapter, looking for primary points or elements the author appears to emphasize in some way. Jot down key phrases or page numbers (or use sticky post-it flags) that will contribute to your summary of the ‘key points’. Try to catch yourself if you attempt to take notes of the chapters! This is not note-taking, but theme-identification. You’re looking for bobbing floats, not fish or weeds.
4. Think of your reading audience (which for this assignment/context is your classmates and your professor). What concerns does the context or audience highlight in a review-reading? [Hint: church renewal, leadership development, theological vision, interreligious-intercultural encounter…]. Who might a good reader be for this book?
5. Begin to draft your review with a summary or Key Focus and Contribution (thesis of argument, reason for writing the book, main point(s) you think author is making). This seems to be easy, but given the assignment is only a couple pages of text, you have to choose what are the central pieces to mention or summarize—hence, critical thinking develops.
6. Draft the next section—about 1-2 pages—of elements or argument points (contributions) you find compelling for church renewal and pastoral ministry concerns.
7. Draft the next section—about 1-2 pages—of elements or argument points you think are weak or misguided, with reasons why that move beyond your own preference or experience. How would you convince an adolescent Sunday school participant why your view is more logical?
8. Draft a conclusion—one paragraph, at least—for who might be a good reading audience for this book; how churches might use it in their ministry settings; how pastors or religious leadership might find it useful.
9. And REMEMBER: this is an act of literary community. Imagine how the author might respond to your views, if s/he were to read your comments. Be professional, polite, but gently convicted about your own perspectives. Be gracious and appreciative of what you have learned from the author’s perspective.