

IDS – 495.02 Decoding Pluralism
Senior Seminar
Office Hours: MTWR 9:30-11:00 or by appointment

Spring 2010
Don Luidens, Instructor

Prologue

A good friend of mine proudly calls himself “a Zen, Quaker, Samurai.” How can that be? How can someone be BOTH a Zen follower AND a Quaker, much less BOTH a Quaker (who are historically pacifists) and a Samurai (who all act like Tom Cruise)? These were my questions when I first came to know him. I was assuming that there was an “exclusivity clause” in each of these ways of looking at the world. If you were one, you couldn’t possibly be the other. As I came to know and greatly appreciate my friend, I found that he did, indeed, embody much that I associated with Quakers and Zen practitioners as well as with the Samurai caste in Japan.



Christianity sometimes makes a claim to exclusivity. Either you’re a Christian or . . . , well, nothing. But is this necessarily so? Must any of us, whatever the faith we bring to a community, automatically exclude (on some seemingly arbitrary basis or another) someone else and their faith? This will be the central consideration of our senior seminar. At a time unprecedented in human history, we live in a world of competing “exclusives” – one in which a plurality of voices all make claim to our listening and our ways of looking at the world. We will consider various authors, some who are exclusionists and some who are not. We will consider the arguments which they use and the contexts which seem to have nurtured each of these perspectives. And we will “try on” exclusionist and inclusivist perspectives for ourselves.

Official Senior Seminar Objectives (taken from “Revised Senior Seminar Guidelines: A Summary”)

“An overarching objective Hope College is to develop ways of living and of how commitments that people students cannot achieve course, and all college in this regard, the Senior designed to do so and of students’ attempts to do undergraduate study.



of a liberal arts education at an awareness of Christian they relate to the variety of make and assume. Although this large objective in any one courses should help students Seminar is specifically should serve as the capstone so throughout four years of

“The specific purpose of the Senior Seminars is to confront questions of value and belief in a practical and concrete way and to clarify how the Christian faith can inform a philosophy for living. Emphasizing neither a specific methodology nor specific course content, the Seminars are distinct from other courses in deliberately raising fundamental questions about human values and in combining those questions with a challenge to students to reflect on their own choices--how they have come to make them and how their choices might affect their future.”

“Any course qualifying as a Senior Seminar will assist students to:



1. acquire knowledge of Christian ways of being, knowing, and living.
2. articulate their own value commitments and discuss them in light of Christianity.
3. acquire an awareness and tolerance of differing values that people affirm and live by.
4. increase their ability to discuss differences of value openly, sensitively, and reasonably.
5. acquire an ability to reflect on their own philosophy for life and to write about it in a personal, coherent, and disciplined manner.”

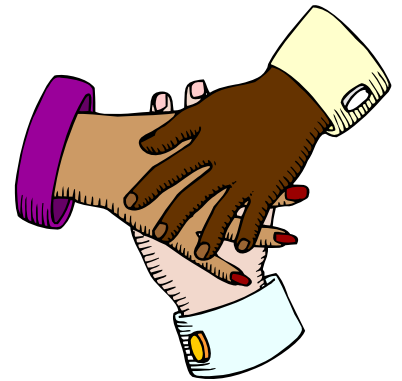
<http://www.hope.edu/academic/ids/guidelns.html>

My Real Objectives

We live in a world in which faith traditions overlap in unprecedented fashion. You are likely to work and play and interact with an immigrant from India who is a Hindu, a Chinese professional whose family has historically been Confucian or Buddhist but may now be nominally atheist, a Jewish American who has a strong affinity with Zionism, or a Muslim from Indonesia or the Middle East who wonders about the decay in western civilization. Indeed, you might have a friend who is a Zen Quaker Samurai!

Here’s the dilemma that this unprecedented diffusion of faiths has created: ***How do we create a world in which our religious plurality will not lead to humanity’s destruction?***

This dilemma leads to several related questions: ***Are the religious boundaries necessary which have historically separated us from each other? Is there a way to be faithful (as Christians, Hindus, Muslims, or whatever) and not be condemning or destructive of those who do not share our faith?***



We have to answer these “simple” questions this semester. That’s it. Those are my full and complete objectives.

How We're Going to Do This



- 1) Throughout this course syllabus, I've used the term "we." I see this class (and answering these questions) as a joint enterprise. I am very much in the middle of the muddle, and I look forward to our exchanges as an opportunity for me to think further with you on this timely topic. There are no foregone conclusions that I bring to the table (except to raise what I see as a legitimate and pressing moral and social issue), so you are already "right" in your thinking. Now let's grapple together, honestly, with the matter at hand.

- 2) As is the case with all senior seminars, this course will require your active participation in classroom discussions. As you will see, a significant proportion of your grade will be based on this involvement (you'll help me evaluate each other's contributions). Accordingly, it is imperative that you complete the reading and journal entry tasks in advance of the class meeting so that you can enrich the discussion.

- 3) In addition, you will be asked to produce two significant papers. One, "The Liberal Arts Reflective Writing Assignment," is a bookend piece to the reflective essay you wrote when you were a first year student. The second paper is a "Life View Paper" which shares your own considered perspective on the issue under review in this course (more about both of these papers later). You will have the chance to share the substance of your Life View Paper with your classmates.

- 4) Journaling is a time-honored way to "think on paper." You will be required to reflect on your readings and on our class discussions in a journal. I am not particular about the form of the journal (you may use a blank diary, a loose-leaf notebook, typed pages, or a series of blue books; I prefer to have a hard copy for reasons I'll explain in class). You are to make at least two entries each week (perhaps after you have finished the reading assignment for the week or after class discussions); an entry will consist of at least 150 words. Needless to say, if you wish to write more, that would be fine. I will pick-up the journals twice during the semester in order to monitor your progress and to help me generate further class reflections.

- 5) We're going to use a number of resources ("readings") to help us think through the questions of this class. In addition to the three books which are listed below, there will be a couple of hand-outs. Here are the books in the order in which they will be used:





Harvey Cox. The Future of Faith. New York: Harper/Collins. 2009

Peter J. Gomes. The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart. New York: Avon Books, 1996 (paperback).

Dan Brown. The Da Vinci Code. New York: Doubleday, 2003 (hardcover).

We will also have handouts from time to time.

6) Your grade will be based on the following:

Reflective Writing	20 points
Life View Statement	30 points
Journal Reflections	20 points
“Who is In? Who is Out?” Paper	10 points
Life View Presentation	5 points
Classroom Participation	<u>15 points</u>
Total	100 points

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Date Reading/Assignment

- Jan. 13 Getting started: How would you portray your social universe?
- 18 Durkheim handout: Defining “Religion”
Paper: “Who is In? Who is Out?”
- 20 Cox: Chap. 1 – An Age of the Spirit: The Sacred in the Secular?
- 25 Cox: Chap. 2 – Einstein’s Snuffed-Out Candles: Awe, Wonder, and Faith
- 27 Cox: Chap. 3 – Ships Already Launched: The Voyage from Mystery to Faith
- Feb. 1 Cox: Chap. 4 – The Road Runner and the Gospel of Thomas: What Happens When It Wasn’t Really that Way?
Paper: Reflective Essay on Hope’s Philosophy of Education
- Feb. 3 Cox: Chaps. 5 & 6 – The People of the Way: The Devolution from Faith to Belief, and “The Bishop Is Your High Priest and Mighty King”: The Rise of the Clerical Caste
Journal Submitted for Initial Review
- 8 Cox: Chaps. 7 & 8 – Constantine’s Last Supper: The Invention of Heresy and No Lunch with the Prefect: How to Fix the Papacy



Date	Reading/Assignment
10	Cox: Chap. 9 – Living in Haunted Houses: Beyond the Interfaith Dialogue
15	BREAK
17	Cox: Chaps. 10 & 11 – Get Them into the Lifeboat: The Pathos of Fundamentalism and Meet Rocky, Maggie, and Barry: Which Bible Do the Bible Believers Believe?
22	Cox: Chap. 12 – Sant’Egidio and St. Praxedis: Where the Past Meets the Future
24	Cox: Chaps. 13 & 14 – Blood on the Altar of Divine Providence: Liberation Theology and the Rebirth of Faith and The Last Vomit of Satan and the Persistent List Makers: Pentecostals and the Age of the Spirit
Mar. 1	Cox: Chap. 15 – The Future of Faith Panikkar Article – Handout
3	Gomes: Apologia – Chap. 1 What’s It All About
8	Gomes: Chaps. 2 & 3 – A Matter of Interpretation and The Bible in America
10	Gomes: Chaps. 4 & 5 – Hard Texts and Changing Times and The Bible and Race: The Moral Imagination
15	Gomes: Chap. 7 – The Bible and Women: The Conflicts of Inclusion
17	Gomes: Chap. 8 – The Bible and Homosexuality: The Last Prejudice
19-28	BREAK
29	Hough and Berger Articles – Handout
31	Brown, Prologue – Chap. 20 (pp. 1-98)
Ap. 5	Brown, Chaps. 21 – 47 (pp. 99-202)
Ap. 7	Brown, Chaps. 48-70 (pp. 203-297)
12	Brown, Chaps. 71-95 (pp. 298-392)
14	Brown, Chaps. 96-Epilogue (pp. 393-454) <i>Journal Submitted for Final Review</i>
19-28	Life View Presentations
May 6	<i>Life View Statement due at noon</i>

