



Religious Studies 4400F/G (570)
Making Sense of Religious Diversity
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: J. Kato

Email: jkato@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

This seminar aims to study critically the often competing claims by diverse world religions about the best path to the ultimate. At the same time, it will foster an appreciation for the richness and beauty of different religious traditions.

Prerequisite(s): Third- or fourth-year standing in an Honours Specialization, Specialization, or Major module in a Religious Studies program, or permission of the Department.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: RELSTUD

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.



Department of Religious Studies

Religious Studies 4400 – Religious Pluralism

Course Outline (2025 v1 July Version)

Class Time: Tuesdays, 11:30~2:30 pm
Instructor: Dr. Julius-Kei Kato, S.S.L., Ph.D.
E-mail: jkato@uwo.ca
Office Hours: by appointment. Email me at jkato@uwo.ca

Facebook: I also encourage students to like my public FB page 'JK Kato-Studying the Human Quest for Depth and Transcendence' where I occasionally post things relevant to the study of religion and spirituality. If there is any post directly relevant to this course, it will be labeled #kingsrs4400

Course Description

An advanced seminar in world religions that aims to provide a synthesis of comparative thematic material presented in earlier years and to deal explicitly with questions posed by the similarities and differences among religious traditions.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, the students should:

- Be familiar with the general contours of the different worldviews that make up major religious traditions and their truth claims
- Know well the different positions regarding the question of religious pluralism, foremost among which are: exclusive, inclusive, pluralistic, and hybrid
- Be able to state the different voices from Christianity and other major religious traditions that argue for the possibility of religious pluralism
- Be familiar with some prominent thinkers in the Christian theological scene who deal with the question of religious pluralism

Required Texts

Paul F. Knitter, ed. *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

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

Julius-Kei Kato: "Where we went from 'Anonymous Christians': The Theology of Religions as seen through Paul Knitter vis-à-vis Karl Rahner" Found in:
http://www.catholica.com.au/gc4/jkk/004_jkk_030215.php (Make sure you read this resource in the course of the semester!)

Patheos: **World Religions: An Introduction to Five Major Traditions**. Link:

<https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2010/09/world-religions-an-introduction-to-five-major-traditions>

****IMPORTANT!****

Please consult my webpage regularly for important links on World Religions and Pluralism:

<https://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/religion/>

Texts for Reference

** Chia, Edmund Kee-Fook. *World Christianity Encounters World Religions: A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018. (This will be particularly useful for writing a research paper for this course)

Clooney, Francis. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Hick, John and Brian Hebblethwaite. *Christianity and Other Religions*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2001.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003.

Sharma, Arvind. *Our Religions*. New York: HarperOne, 1994.

Swidler, Leonard. *Dialogue Principles*. See: <http://dialogueinstitute.org/dialogue-principles/>

***Young, William. *The World's Religions: Worldviews and Contemporary Issues*. Third Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2010.**

Good Introductions to the Five Great World Religions from Patheos.com :

Judaism: <https://www.patheos.com/library/judaism.html>

Christianity: <https://www.patheos.com/library/christianity.html>

Islam: <https://www.patheos.com/library/islam.html>

Hinduism: <https://www.patheos.com/library/hinduism.html>

Buddhism: <https://www.patheos.com/library/buddhism.html>

Short Video Introductions to the Seven World Religions from Oprah Production *Belief*:

Judaism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJbg_cXYFyM&t=15s

Christianity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z6CArFTLmk&t=17s>

Islam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgP_OSOS3IA&t=10s

Hinduism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EICcU9oN-s>

Buddhism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxq-RiLb-6M&t=51s>

Jainism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_VA7mWWn58&t=9s

Sufism : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD4vvIPMQrw>

Additional required readings will be made available either on OWL or placed on Reserve in the Cardinal Carter Library.

The Bible. The **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with Apocrypha** (or the Catholic edition) is the preferred translation for this course. If you wish to use a different translation, please consult the instructor. NRSV is available online <<http://bible.oremus.org/>>

There will be various books for reference. Check the 'on reserve' section for this course on the library website.

Course Requirements (*tentative, minor details might still change as we go on*)

Your final mark will depend on how well you show that you are learning the course material, reflecting critically on it, and doing your own research about the course topics. Specifically, these are the following areas that will be evaluated:

(15%) RESEARCH PRESENTATION. A major task of a 4000 level research seminar is research. From the beginning, students will be asked to prepare to write a research paper that they will submit toward the end of the course. They will have to work on that project little by little throughout the semester. I will set aside days to let the students share their research with the whole class in order to receive feedback which they can incorporate into the final version of their paper. This presentation will be graded and is worth 15%.

(30%) NOTE WELL! Participation. Because active participation is required for an effective seminar, 30% of the course mark will be based on participation. Half of the participation mark is based on active participation (asking questions, raising alternative viewpoints, contributing to the discussion) and half will be based on written comments on the readings or course topics in your weekly 'Journals' (to be done at MS Teams).

This category includes 'attendance' of course! I ENCOURAGE YOU TO SUBMIT AT LEAST 5 journal entries (this is the minimum).

(30%) Research Paper. More instruction will be given on this in the course of the semester.

(25%) Final Open Book Evaluation. There will be an examination at the end of this course worth 25%. I'm thinking of making this a timed open-book/open-notes one.

Academic Honesty & Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

By the time you submit your essays, I will be familiar enough with your style of writing because you will have submitted several critical reaction notes already. Plagiarism will then be sufficiently easy to detect and so it is highly inadvisable.

Nevertheless, as per departmental policy, all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com

Assigned Readings & Schedule

Students are expected to cover the assigned readings before the class period of every week. Assigned readings are essential to your successful completion of the course, both for comprehending lecture topics and completing assignments and examinations.

Good luck and if you have any other concerns, know that I'm always available to discuss them personally with you.

Schedule of Topics – Readings

Version 1-July 2025

TOR – *Theologies of Religion* / MRS – *The Myth of Religious Superiority*.

IMPORTANT: Supplementary readings will be posted regularly on OWL and communicated to the students by email. Please check often!

Week	Date	Topics to be covered in lectures and readings	Readings (unless noted readings are from the course textbooks)
1	Sept 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminaries 1 • Overview of the Course Material • Basic Questions - What is it: Religion? Religious Studies? Faith? Theology? Worldviews? Religious Pluralism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOR: Introduction (pp. 1-15) – Many Religions, Plurality • Please read my article: Kato, <i>Where We Went from 'Anonymous Christians'?</i> at: http://www.catholica.com.au/gc4/jkk/004_jkk_030215.php
2	Sept 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Worldviews of Different Religious Traditions • • The “traditional” worldviews of: • Monotheistic Religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) – to be compared and contrasted with the worldview of South Asian-rooted religious traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young, <i>The World's Religions</i>, Chap 1 (in OWL) • Ninian Smart “7 Dimensions of Religion” (OWL) • Please view the introduction to the five major religions. Link #3 below • (Just for Reference) Consult Link #4 below to give you a quick refresher about the world's major religious traditions
3	Sept 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminaries 2 • Foundational Perspectives • Beyond Dialogue • Introduction to: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism • Is the Pluralist Model a Western Imposition? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Just for Reference) the “Introduction to Five Major Religious Traditions” at Patheos. Link: https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2010/09/world-religions-an-introduction-to-five-major-traditions • READ THIS! MRS – Introduction and Part I (chaps 1 – 3)
4	Sept 30/ non-instructional day. No in-person meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Replacement Model • The Fulfillment Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOR – Part I (pp 19-60) • TOR – Part II (pp 63-106)

5	Oct 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Mutuality Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · TOR – Part III (pp 109-169)
6	Oct 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The Acceptance Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · TOR – Part II (pp 173-237)
7	Oct 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Evaluation of Christian Perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · MRS – Part V (chaps 11 – 15) · We will focus on chaps 14 and 15 – Protestant Christian Perspectives
8	Oct 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Perspectives from Monotheistic Traditions · Jewish Perspectives · Muslim Perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · MRS – Part IV (chaps 9 – 10) · MRS – Part VI (chaps 16-17)
9	Nov 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Perspectives from Non-Monotheistic Traditions · Hindu Perspectives · Buddhist Perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · MRS – Part II (chaps 4-5) · MRS – Part III (chaps 7-8)
10	Nov 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Research Presentation Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·
11	Nov 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Research Presentation Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·
12	Dec 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Multiple Religious Belonging-HYBRIDITY · Finding common criteria: Principles for Dialogue · <i>IF NECESSARY, research presentations</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Selections from Paul Knitter’s <i>Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian</i>. (OWL) · Online lecture of Paul Knitter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlvkxYs85vc · Swidler: Principles for Interreligious Dialogue. Link: https://dialogueinstitute.org/dialogue-principles
13	Dec 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Finding common criteria: the Global Ethic · The Golden Rule · Developmental Stages and Religious Pluralism · The Perennial Philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What’s a Global Ethic? (2:30 mins) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZZDsKyOEUo · Global Ethic Document ” (OWL-Resources). · Global Ethic (with nicely done embedded video clips!): https://parliamentofreligions.org/globalethic/ · James Fowler. Links #1 and #2 below · Charter for Compassion: Watch the video and read the charter text carefully: https://charterforcompassion.org/sign-the-charter.html · The “Perennial Philosophy” according to Roger Walsh: http://spiritual-notandyet-religious-jkk.blogspot.com/2020/12/the-perennial-philosophy-its-main.html ·
	FOR EXAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Interreligious Dialogue · Epistemic Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Read Kato’s “<i>The Seed that Has to Die for Authentic Religious Dialogue to Occur</i>” (OWL-Resources).

SOME RECOMMENDED LINKS

(1) Wolski Conn on Fowler's Developmental Stages:

<http://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/jkato/assets/File/Summary%20of%20Stages%20of%20Faith.pdf>

(2) Chart of Fowler's Stages: <http://jkato.kingsfaculty.ca/jkato/assets/File/Fowler%20Stages%20-%20Scott%20Peck%20simplified.pdf>

(3) The five major world religions - John Bellaimy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6dCxo7t_aE&list=PLV7Diz4DTv4mnAutv5CEqN7Y9HRKmejor&index=10

[Optional]

[4] Link Set to Short Introductions to the World Religions from Oprah's *Belief*:

- Judaism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJbg_cXYFyM&t=15s
- Christianity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z6CArFTLmk&t=17s>
- Buddhism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxq-RiLb-6M&t=51s>
- Hinduism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EiCcU9oN-s>
- Islam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgP_OSOS3IA&t=10s

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with your instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.