

**IE/ST 327**  
**DOUBLE BELONGING**  
**SPRING 2017**

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**INSTRUCTORS:** John J. Thatamanil

**OFFICE:** AD 411

**INSTRUCTOR'S OFFICE HOURS:** Wednesday 11:00-12:00; By appointment

**INSTRUCTOR'S PHONE:** (212) 280-1538

**INSTRUCTOR'S EMAIL:** [jthatamanil@uts.columbia.edu](mailto:jthatamanil@uts.columbia.edu) (The best way to be in touch)

**TEACHING FELLOW:** Christopher Fici ([clf2138@utsnyc.edu](mailto:clf2138@utsnyc.edu))

**CLASSROOM:** AD 307

**MEETING TIME:** T 6:10-9:00 PM

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS**

Increasingly persons are taking up practices from more than one religious tradition. Some go so far as to claim “double belonging.” This course explores a range of practices and the identities that emerge from those practices. The terminology used for these practices and identities is quite extensive: multiple religious participation, multiple religious belonging, syncretism, hybridity, double belonging and so forth. This profusion of terms is likely due to the fact that we are speaking about a wide range of rather different phenomena. After a descriptive/empirical exploration of some of these phenomena, we will ask the following normative and theological questions:

- 1) Is it truly possible to belong to two (or more) different religious traditions at the same time? Is religious “double-dipping” possible? Is it worthwhile? Is it necessary?
- 2) What is a “religion” in any case? Are religious traditions neatly and cleanly separable? Does talk about multiple religious participation or double belonging presuppose unsustainable or implausible notions of what religions are?
- 3) What theology of religious diversity (TRD) might authorize such religious multiplicity? What TRD might follow from multiple religious participation?
- 4) More broadly, can multiple religious participation/double belonging be theologically justified? If so, on what grounds? Conversely, what has theology to learn from multiple religious participation/double belonging?

This course will begin with a) some forays into empirical/descriptive studies of multiple religious participation before b) proceeding to the challenge of defining “religion” and then turning to c) the intersection between multiple religious participation and theologies of religious diversity and d) finally asking broad questions about the theological meaningfulness and defensibility of multiple religious participation/double-belonging. This course will consider contributions both from those who oppose and those who defend double belonging.

Students will be expected to be fully conversant with debates surrounding the questions listed above and to formulate their own theological convictions about them.

## COURSE TEXTS

- MM** Cornille, Catherine. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Wipf & Stock Pub; Reprint edition (April 1, 2010). Note: *Older editions of this book are also available used. You are welcome to purchase such an edition.*
- MYO** Rajkumar, Peniel Jesudason Rajkumar and Dayam, Joseph Prabhakar. *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*. WCC Press, 2016.
- BB** Miller, Susan Katz. *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family*. Beacon Press, 2014.
- WB** Knitter, Paul. *Without the Buddha, I Could Not Be a Christian*. One World Press, 2013. Note: *An older edition is available (2009) that lacks a new conclusion. If you happen to have the 2009 edition, that's fine. The concluding 10 pages will be made available to you through Moodle.*
- BAC** Drew, Rose. *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*. Routledge, 2011. Note: This book is now available as paperback. You are encouraged to purchase it, but some selected chapters will be made available to you through Moodle.
- BCDB** D'Costa, Gavin and Thompson, Ross, eds. *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*. Ashgate, 2016. Note: This book is entirely unaffordable. Therefore, some selected chapters will be made available to you through Moodle.
- OT 3:1** Several essays from *Open Theology* 3:1. Special thematic volume on Multiple Religious Belonging.  
<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/opth.2017.3.issue-1/issue-files/opth.2017.3.issue-1.xml>

## REQUIREMENTS/EXPECTATIONS

### 1. ATTENDANCE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION (15%)

In a discussion driven class that meets just once a week, attendance is crucial. Missing class meetings will impair your ability to keep up with the ongoing conversation. Moreover, the continuity of our common life will be disrupted when persons are absent. A deduction of 25% from your participation grade will be recorded for each unexcused absence. Missing more than two missed classes can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Students should strive to make regular contributions to classroom conversation. **However, frequency of contributions alone is not a mark of excellence.** While it is the responsibility of

the instructors to modulate for frequency of contributions, you should also strive to be self-reflexive. *Am I speaking so often that other voices are not being heard? Am I speaking so little that my peers are left to wonder what I am thinking?* You should also keep the following questions in mind: Does my contribution demonstrate that I have read the assigned readings with care? Are my comments made in a spirit of respectful collaboration? Am I asking questions that help the class struggle with the critical issues of the course? Am I being fair to the texts and to my peers when making a critical point? Bear these questions in mind as you assess your own contributions to the life of this class.

There are multiple ways of participating in the life of our seminar. These include active listening, asking clarifying questions, and weaving together strands of conversation. The best conversations are multidirectional and are not just a series of individual conversations with the instructor seriatim; listening well and responding carefully to your peers in the classroom are vital skills.

## **2. ONLINE POSTINGS (15%)**

You are required to read the assigned texts for each session and then prepare **SEVEN** 350-500 word (1.5-2 pages) responses over the course of the semester. That means you will post a response in just over half of our course meetings. The purposes of this response are twofold: 1) to present key issues about some theme from the readings for the week, 2) to present your own response/reflection on that theme. The emphasis should be on the second element. These entries can take many forms. You may choose to pose an open-ended question that is likely to prompt conversation. Or you could test out taking a strong position on the topic for the week. Whatever you chose to do, be concise, be reflective, and be sure to engage at least one of the key assigned texts for the week. Be aware that you will be asked to present your online in class post a few times over the course of the semester.

The paper is due no later than **NOON each Monday** on Moodle to your colleagues and to the instructor. You are asked to read as many reflections by your peers as time permits. In any given week, you should aim, at the minimum, to read at least 3-5 reflections so that you get a sense for what your peers are pondering. Note: even introverts can engage in this form of participation by reading in advance, reflecting on what you have read, and then clarifying your own thoughts in preparation for class conversation.

## **3. MIDTERM PAPER (30%)**

In this reflection paper (**6-8 pages**), carefully explore these two crucial questions knowing that you will return to them in greater depth when you write your final paper.

1. Is it truly possible to belong to two (or more) different religious traditions at the same time? Is religious multiplicity possible? Is it worthwhile? Is it necessary?
2. What is a "religion" in any case? Are religious traditions neatly and cleanly separable? Does talk about multiple religious participation or double belonging presuppose unsustainable or implausible notions of what religions are?

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traditions other than Christianity.

To develop competencies in understanding social and cultural contexts that are significant for contemporary theology, the life of the church, and the promotion of justice in the world.

**Outcomes:**

Demonstrates an ability to articulate contextually informed and world-engaged theological perspectives.

Demonstrates an ability to analyze and address contemporary ethical issues from Christian and interreligious perspectives.

**COURSE SCHEDULE\***

- 1/31 **INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE:**  
Reading: **MYO**, 5-26 (Chapter 1); 75-88 (Chapter 5); **MM**, 7-19 (Chapter 2)  
Linda Mercadante, "How Does it Fit? Multiple Religious Belonging, Spiritual But Not Religious, and the Dances of Universal Peace."
- 2/7 **JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN?**  
Reading: **BB**, pp. ix-106
- 2/14 **CARING FOR INTERFAITH FAMILIES**  
Reading: **BB**, 107-226 (Chapters 7-Conclusion)
- 2/21 **COMPLEMENTARY AND CONVERGENCE**  
Reading: **MM**, 20-121
- 2/28 **VARIETIES OF HYBRIDITY**  
Reading: **MYO**, 1-4, 45-74, 89-180 (Introduction, Chapters 3-4, 6-13)
- 3/7 **MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION AND THE QUESTION OF RELIGION**  
Reading: Thatamanil, "Comparative Theology After Religion" & Defining the Religious: Comprehensive Qualitative Orientation  
Paul Hedges, "Multiple Religious Belonging After Religion"
- 3/14 **MIDTERM PAPER DUE BY 5:00PM ON MOODLE**
- 3/14 **NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK**
- 3/21 **MULTIPE RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION AND THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**  
Reading: **MYO**, 27-44 (Chapter 2); S. Mark Heim, "The Shifting Significance of Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick

Publications, 2014) Available through Moodle.  
Dan Oostveen, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Hermeneutical  
Challenges for Theology of Religions." Available through Moodle  
Revisit Thatamanil's, "Eucharist Upstairs and Yoga Downstairs" and TBA

- 3/28 **JESUS AND THE BUDDHA**  
Reading: **WB**, ix-130 (Preface-Chapter 5)
- 4/4 **PROMISCUITY OR HYBRIDITY?**  
Reading: **WB**, 131-227 (Chapter 6-New Conclusion)
- 4/11 **FACING THE ULTIMATE: THE BUDDHA AND JESUS**  
Reading: **BC**, 1-107 (Chapters 1-4); Available through Moodle
- 4/18 **TREADING THE PATH**  
Reading: **BC**, 109-231 (Chapters 5-7); Available through Moodle
- 4/25 **CHALLENGES: THE IMPOSSIBILITY AND IDOLATRY OF DUAL BELONGING**  
Reading: **BCDB**, 71-158 (Chapters 4-8), Available through Moodle; **TBA**
- 5/2 **EXPLORATIONS: OTHER PERSPECTIVES ON BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DOUBLE BELONGING**  
Reading: **BCDB**, 161-248 (Chapters 9-12)
- 5/9 **TERM PAPER DUE BY NOON ON MOODLE**

\* Subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

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