

TS325/525 RELIGIOUS HUMANISM

Meadville Lombard Theological School

Dr. William R. Murry Email: bmurry21@msn.com Phone: 410-757-4248

INTRODUCTION

This course deals with the history, theology and practice of religious humanism in the Unitarian and Universalist movements, and topics include the historical development of religious humanism, the theist/humanist controversy, the problems and weaknesses of religious humanism, a theology for a new humanism, and issues related to ministry with and by humanists in UU congregations. The class format will include presentations, classroom discussion, panels and lectures.

The purposes of the course are:

1. to explore critical issues within the historical and contemporary development of religious humanism;
2. to prepare for ministerial leadership in liberal religious communities with a strong humanist presence;
3. to introduce a new theology of religious humanism for the current era;
4. to develop knowledge and understanding for participation in the future development of religious humanism.

REQUIRED READING

John Dewey, *A Common Faith*

Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (1997 edition)

William R. Murry, *A Faith for All Seasons*

William R. Murry, *To Be More Fully Human: A New Religious Humanism* (if this book is not published by November 1, the author will send copies of the manuscript to students)

Mason Olds, *American Religious Humanism*

Selections from the *Course Reader* (reader is available from the Registrar's Office)

Additional Reading: These books are not required but are excellent resources. Excerpts from the Pinn and Gaylor books are in the Course Reader.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, ed., *Women Without Superstition: No God—No Masters*

Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*

Anthony Pinn, ed., *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **REGULAR ATTENDANCE** and participation in class discussion that engages the substance of the issues and contributes to the progress of the group. (20% of final grade)

2. **READING REFLECTION JOURNAL** – As you finish each book, write a page or two dealing with some of the questions and/or important points the reading raised for you. Summarizing the main argument is a good way to begin. Plan to bring the Journal to class each day to help in your contribution to the discussion. The instructor will review journals during the intensive week, so please have it completed before you come to class. You do not have to do this for the Course Reader, just the five books. (15% of grade)

3. **INTERVIEW** a religious humanist, either a minister or a lay person. Talk with the person about his/her religious journey, understanding of humanism, etc. Come prepared to share the substance of the interview with class members in a 10 minute oral report. A written summary of the interview (maximum 3 pages) is due on Tuesday of intensive week. (10% of final grade)

4. **ORAL REPORT** in class on two of the readings from the reader. These must not exceed 10 minutes each and should emphasize the gist of the article and your questions or critique. Please email the instructor the titles and authors of four essays you would like to review, indicating your priorities, 1-4. I will assign your first and second choices if they are still available; if one or both are already taken you will report on your next choices and of course if they are taken we'll continue the process until we find two articles for you to review. The sooner you select, the better your chances of getting your first choices, but all reports must be assigned by December 15 at the latest. If you do not choose articles I will assign them to you. (10% of grade)

5. **POSITION PAPER ON RELIGIOUS HUMANISM (4-5 Pages)**. Include as many of the following topics as possible: Your definition of religious humanism; where you are, theologically, in relation to religious humanism; thoughts about your vision/suggestions/images of a healthy humanistic congregation; the implications of the things you have learned in this class for your future ministry. Paper due on February 18. Electronic submission is acceptable. (15% of final grade)

6. **FINAL PAPER OR PROJECT**. Choose a topic to explore in depth for a final paper or creative project. Paper should be 10-12 pages (2500-3000 words). Examples of projects include development of a religious education workshop or curriculum about religious humanism for congregational use; preparation of a complete worship service dealing with religious humanism (and including a sermon); an artistic project such as design and execution of a banner or chancel decorations for a worship service. Several pages of scholarly discussion and reflection must accompany any creative project. (30% of grade)

Share your thoughts with the instructor no later than the lunch break on the last day of class. Your final proposal is due to the instructor by Feb. 10 and the completed paper or project is due by March 15.

D.Min. students: Your final paper/project must be longer than indicated in number 6 and should probe more broadly and deeply into the subject. You may also be asked to do more than two reports as described in number 4 above, depending on the size of the class. Please consult with the instructor about this assignment.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(The morning classes meet from 9-12; the afternoon sessions are from 1:30-4:30 or 2-5 if the class prefers)

Monday morning – Introduction to course and history of religious humanism
Text: Olds, *American Religious Humanism*

Monday afternoon – History (continued) and Interviews
Reader: Humanist Manifestos I and II
Reports on Interviews

Tuesday morning – Discussion of Dewey's *A Common Faith*

Tuesday afternoon – Women Humanists and Freethinkers
Reports on essays by Frances Wright, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ernestine L. Rose, Carol Hepokoski, Sharon Welch, (from Reader)
More Reports on Interviews

Wednesday morning – “Secular Humanism”
Text: Lamont's *Philosophy of Humanism*
Secular v. Religious Humanism
Murry, *To Be More Fully Human*, chapter 4

Wednesday afternoon – Other Voices: Varieties of Religious Humanism
Black Humanism - Reader: James Forman, Alice Walker, Two essays by Anthony Pinn,
Humanistic Judaism – Reader: Sherwin Wine
Buddhism – Reader: Stephen Batchelor
Paganism – Reader: Margo Adler
Feminism – Reader: Rebecca Parker
Reports on essays by David Bumbaugh, Barbara Merritt, Frances West

Thursday morning – The New Religious Humanism
Murry, *To Be More Fully Human*- chapters 1-3, 6-12

Thursday afternoon – Humanist Ministry – A Panel of UU Ministers

Friday morning – Humanist Pastoral Ministry
Murry, *A Faith for All Seasons*

Friday afternoon – Completion of Unfinished Discussions, Summing Up