PHI-815 History of the Integration of Religion and Society

Obed Alcime

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. David Ward

**Obed, the opening paragraph of your Course Learning Journal was so good that, “You had me at hello,” as the classic movie line goes! Your opening sentence captured the essence and purpose of the course exactly: “how religious movements, theological convictions, and cultural forces have integrated throughout history to influence social structures and societal change.” You were also on target about the placement of PHI 815 early in the curriculum to lay the foundation that it did for you. You grasped the “important notion; religion has served both as a catalyst and a constraint for society!” I have never it put so concisely and accurately. You have impressed me into offering my services if you need a chair for your final research project!**

**I like the catalyst for social transformation description for the integration of religion and society. I also find the "Christianity as constraint on social progress" useful as a sociological critique of dysfunctional religion. By contrast see James 1:27 “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (NASB).**

**You wrote, "I discovered that my prior understanding of religious history was narrowly focused on specific theological debates, rather than the broader social impact of faith movements." That was my background as well, until the professor I took this course from introduced me to Schmidt’s (2004) How Christianity Changed the World. I will send the book to you, you should read the whole thing. It changed my perspective about how God uses His people to advance His kingdom in so many ways that affect all of society and not just religion.**

**You wrote, “PHI 815 effectively advanced my professional, religious, and academic goals by clearly highlighting the dynamic alignment of historical scholarship and contemporary faith-based leadership.” This was gratifying to see that the course achieved its intended purpose. Your APA form is excellent. Keep up the great work, Obed. If you ever have any questions about assignments or research resources, just email me at dward@ogs.edu**

**-- Dr. Ward Grade: A**

**Assignment #4 – Course Learning Journal**

The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course. The Learning Journal integrates the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor insights gained as a result of the course. The course learning journal should be 3-5 pages in length and should include the following sections:

1. Introduction –Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

2. Personal Growth - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or challenged you– and your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained.

3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning in your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study?

4. Conclusion – Evaluate the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

**Course Learning Journal**

The intent of PHI 815: History of the Integration of Religion & Society is to discover how religious movements, theological convictions, and cultural forces have integrated throughout history to influence social structures and societal change. In the Omega Graduate School (OGS) doctoral curriculum, this course is pivotal as it is positioned early in the core sequence. Understanding the history of this integration will be vital foundationally for the remainder of my DSL program.  PHI 815 provides the historical point and critical tools that allow me to have a greater understanding of an important notion; religion has served both as a catalyst and a constraint for society. This perspective is foundational to the OGS’s overarching goal, which is to equip Christian scholars with the capacity to merge faith-based insights with rigorous social research for constructive social impact (Ward, 2014).

**Christianity as a Catalyst**

Christianity has frequently acted as a catalyst for social transformation. The early church broke with prevailing ideas by advocating for universal education and care for the marginalized, and promoting values that transcended class and ethnicity. This revolutionary activity paved the way for social changes, encouraging believers to challenge unjust hierarchies and inspire collective action. The legacy of this catalytic force is now evident in contemporary movements where faith-based ideas mobilize communities to address issues such as poverty, human rights, and environmental justice; demonstrating that when religious values are applied in modern contexts, like government policy, the possibility for change increases drastically (Haynes, 2023).

**Christianity as a Constraint**

Conversely, Christianity has also functioned as a constraint on societal progress, particularly when rigid doctrinal interpretations have inhibited social change. In the history of Christianity, dogmatic stances sometimes restricted intellectual inquiry and reinforced social hierarchies, limiting the ability to question established norms. In those contexts, adherence to traditional beliefs slowed the pace of reform by discouraging innovative approaches that challenge the status quo. For example, the condemnation of Galileo in the 17th century serves as a specific historical case where the Church's dogmatic adherence to a geocentric worldview suppressed scientific inquiry and delayed the acceptance of helio-centrism. This incident not only restricted the intellectual advancement of the period but also reinforced social hierarchies that limited the questioning of established norms (Rothausen, 2023). Thus, the dual nature of Christianity is evident: its enduring values can both inspire profound societal transformation and impose significant constraints on progress. While Christian values can provide a moral framework, their rigid application, at times, can constrain broader social progress by discouraging dissenting views.

**Personal Growth**

      Throughout this course, I discovered that my prior understanding of religious history was narrowly focused on specific theological debates, rather than the broader social impact of faith movements. Engaging with the seminal readings, requesting tutoring sessions, and participating in the pre-assignment forums expanded my thinking on how faith and history have shaped political, economic, and cultural forces. Learning about how early Christianity transcended ethnic and class boundaries pushed me to reevaluate my assumptions about inclusivity and social welfare in our modern contexts. This new perspective on religion’s role in shaping ethics and moral values has not only broadened my historical knowledge but also strengthened my analytical skills, encouraging me to see the study of religious history as a tool in evaluating and changing social problems.

**Reflective Entry**

In my professional field, this course’s emphasis on the tri-fold connection between faith, history, and social change is extremely relevant. I often interact with diverse faith-based organizations that mobilize resources for community impact. Studying historical precedents, such as the early Christian commitment to universal education has inspired me to collaborate more intentionally with church-affiliated groups in my region. However, one question will continue to arise in my work. How can I maintain an inclusive approach when working with organizations that have distinct historical doctrinal stances? This concern will motivate me to develop a more nuanced engagement strategy that values faith-based contributions while also respecting diverse doctrines. The main insight here is that historical examples of faith-driven reform can inform present-day collaborations, as long as I remain mindful of our diverse cultural and religious perspectives (Munir, 2025).

**Conclusion**

PHI 815 effectively advanced my professional, religious, and academic goals by clearly highlighting the dynamic alignment of historical scholarship and contemporary faith-based leadership. Academically, I gained deeper historical literacy about religion’s multifaceted roles in social structures. Professionally, I gleaned practical insights on how to harness faith-based motivation for ethical leadership and community engagement. Religiously, my personal convictions found renewed clarity and purpose, reinforced by the many examples of moral courage and collective action throughout history. Overall, this course proves that the history of the integration of religion and society is not just a record of past events but a rich library of lessons that can guide transformative research in this present day.

**Works Cited**

Haynes, J. (2023). Christian nationalism and politics in Ghana. *Religions, 14*, 1202. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091202>

Munir, F. (2025). Humanities education for engineering students: Enhancing soft skills development. *Societies*, *15*, 12.<https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15010012>

Rothausen, T. J. (2023). Diverse, ethical, collaborative leadership through revitalized cultural archetype: The Mary Alternative. *Journal of Business Ethics, 187*, 627–644. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05259-y>

Schmidt, A. J. (2004). *How Christianity changed the world*. Zondervan.

Ward, D. C. (2014). Interdisciplinary faith-learning integration for social change. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 26*(1/2), 29–56.