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**Religion 111: Introduction to World Religions**

This course is an introduction to the history and beliefs of select world religions. While no course can cover all the religions of the world in one semester, this course aims to provide an introduction to some of the most influential and important religious traditions. To that end, we will study Native-American religion, Ancient Mesopotamian religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In addition, we will spend a significant amount of time thinking critically about theoretical approaches to world religions. Specifically, we will consider Karl Jaspers’ notion of the “axial age,” John Hick’s approach to religious pluralism, Karl Barth’s critique of religion, and Francis Clooney’s “comparative theology.” Our guiding questions are: What are we to make of religious diversity, given that all major religions claim to be universally true? If Christianity is “true,” must that mean that Islam is “false”? Can all religions be equally “true”? Are all religions simply perspectives on one divine (or secular) reality? What can different religious traditions teach us about our own tradition?

**COURSE GOALS:**

Upon successful completion of this course,

1. The student will be familiar with the historical context and major beliefs of the religions surveyed in this course.
2. The student will have an appreciation for the diversity of world religions.
3. The student will be able to employ critical thinking skills in evaluating various theoretical approaches to world religions.
4. The student will be able to relate the religious traditions he/she studies to his/her own tradition (whether that tradition be religious, secular, or otherwise).

**TEXTS** (required, available at the Bookstore):

1)  Theodore M. Ludwig, *The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).  ISBN: 978-0-13-153903-7

2)  Robert E. Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011).  ISBN: 978-0-495-80879-4**SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS** \*

\*Readings listed in parentheses after each lecture topic should be read **before** the lecture.

Abbreviations: **SP** = *Sacred Paths;* **WS** =*World Scriptures*; **M**= readings on Moodle

**INTRODUCTION**

Aug. 28: Why are we here?

Aug. 30: The axial age hypothesis (**M:** Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, pp. xiii – 6; **M:** John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 60 – 78)

**I. TRIBAL RELIGION: THE NAVAJO.**

Sept. 2: From mimetic to mythic culture: Navajo creation myths (**SP:** 48 – 57 [ending at “Society and the Good Life”] **M:** Maureen T. Schwarz, *Navajo Lifeways: Contemporary Issues, Ancient Knowledge*, pp. 3 – 21.)

Sept. 4: Myth and contemporary Navajo culture: The Hunta Virus (**SP:** pp. 61-67 [starting from “Modern Transformations of Indigenous Societies”]; **M:** Maureen T. Schwarz, *Navajo Lifeways: Contemporary Issues, Ancient Knowledge*, pp. 22 – 42.)

Sept. 6: Myth and contemporary Navajo culture: The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute (**M:** Maureen T. Schwarz, *Navajo Lifeways: Contemporary Issues, Ancient Knowledge*, pp. 43-69.)

**II. ARCHAIC RELIGION: ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA**

Sept. 9: Creation and Monarchy: *Enuma Elish* (**M:** Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, pp. 165 – 191.)

Sept. 11: Kingship: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (**M:** Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, pp. 193 – 219.)

Sept. 13: God and King in Archaic Religion (**M:** Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, pp. 210 – 226 and 262 [starting at, “There are clear continuities…”] – 264.)

Sept. 16**: EXAM I**

**III. AXIAL RELIGION I: HINDUISM**

Sept. 18: How does the axial age differ from what came before? (M: Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, pp. 265 – 282.)

Sept. 20: Historical foundations of Hinduism: Aryans and the early Vedic period (**SP**: pp. 71 – 76 [ending at, “Searching for the One Reality Behind all This”]; **WS**: pp. 27 – 32 [through the section entitled, “The God Indra.”])

Sept. 23: The middle and late Vedic periods: (**SP:** pp. 76 [starting at, “Searching for the One Reality…”] – 85 [ending at, “Muslim Presence and Impact in India.”]; **WS:** pp. 33 – 36)

Sept. 25: Hindu beliefs: Brahman= atman, Vishnu, Shiva (**SP:** pp. 91 – 96 [ending at, “Existence in the World”]; **WS:** pp. 52 – 60 [“Selections from the *Bhagavad-Gita*”].

Sept. 27: Hindu beliefs: Dharma, Samsara and the Three paths (**SP:** pp. 96 [starting at “Existence in the World”] – 107.”

**IV. AXIAL RELIGION II: BUDDHISM**

Sept. 30: Buddhism and the Brahmanic tradition (**M:** Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, pp. 527 – 543.)

Oct. 2: Gotama Buddha (**M:** Movie: “The Life of the Buddha”; **SP:** pp**.** 127 – 133 [ending at “Historical Transformations”]; **WS:** pp.73 – 81.)

Oct. 4: After the Buddha’s death (**SP:** pp**.** 133 – 141 [ending at “Buddhism in the Modern Era]; **WS:** pp.85 – 90)

Oct. 7: Buddhist beliefs: Dharma, Nirvana, the Buddha (**SP:** pp.144 – 157.)

Oct. 9: Buddhist beliefs: The four noble truths (**M**: Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp. 12 – 36.)

Oct. 11: **EXAM II**

**V. AXIAL RELIGION III: JUDAISM**

Oct. 14: The Near Eastern historical context of Judaism (**M:** Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 15 – 27.)

Oct. 16: Sacred history: Creation to Monarchy (**SP:** pp. 347 – 355 [ending at, “The Founding of Judaism”]; **M:** Genesis 1-3; **WS:** pp. 219 – 223.)

Oct. 18: Exile and Diaspora. (**SP:** pp**.** 355 – 356 [beginning at “The Founding of Judaism” and ending at “The Maccabean Revolt and Roman Dominance”]; **M:** Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 25 – 49.)

Oct. 21: CLASS CANCELED. HAPPY FALL BREAK!

Oct. 28: Rabbinic and Modern Judaism. (**SP:** pp. 356 – 366; **WS:** pp.249 – 252.)

Oct. 30: Jewish Beliefs: Monotheism, Creation, Sin and Torah (**SP:** pp.367 – 378; **WS:** pp.225 – 231.) **PAPER 1 DUE!!!**

**VI. AXIAL RELIGION IV: CHRISTIANITY**

Nov. 1: Judaism and early Christianity (**M:** Chadwick, *The Early Church*, pp. 9 – 31. **WS:** pp. 262 – 269.)

Nov. 4: Christianity in Context: from the Gospel writers to the Roman Empire (**M:** Movie: “From Jesus to Christ, Part 2.”)

Nov. 6: Medieval Christianity, the Reformation and Modernity (**SP:** pp. 409 – 416 [ending at, “Struggles with Modernity”; **M:** Anselm, *Proslogion,* pp. 84 – 89**; M:** Descartes, first and second meditation)

Nov. 8: Christian Beliefs (**SP:** pp.419 – 430; **WS:** pp. 272 – 280, 282 – 285 [ending at, “Paul’s Directions Concerning Marriage.”])

Nov. 11: Christian Ritual and Practice (**SP:** pp. 431 – 447; **WS:** 282 – 285.)

**VII. AXIAL RELIGION V: ISLAM**

Nov. 13: The early history of Islam: Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Prophet (**SP:** pp. 448 – 452 [ending at “Establishing the Ummah in Medina”]; **M:** Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, pp. 1-11; 15 – 18; 29 – 49.)

Nov. 15: The early history of Islam: Hijrah, the death of the prophet, and the Classical period. (**SP:** pp. 453 – 464 [ending at, “Medieval Empires.”]; **M:**  Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, 85 – 92; 116 – 124; 297 – 312; 332 – 345.)

Nov. 18: Medieval and Modern Islam. (**SP:** pp. 464 [starting at, “Medieval Empires.”] – 471.)

Nov. 20: Muslim Beliefs (**SP:** 472 – 497)

Nov. 22: Muslim Beliefs continued.

Nov. 25: **EXAM III**

**VII.** **PLURALISM AND WORLD RELIGIONS**

Dec. 2: Our approach thus far: religious pluralism and the problem of relativism (**M:** John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, pp. 40 –59)

Dec. 4: Scientific approaches and the problem of “penultimacy.” (**M:** Robert N. Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*, pp. ix – xxiv, 600 – 606; review Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, pp. xiii – 6;)

Dec. 6: Karl Barth’s response. (**M:** Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.1, pp. 179 – 184; *Church Dogmatics* I.2, pp. 297 – 309, 325 – 333.)

Dec. 9:Comparative Theology: What is it? How is it done? (**M:** Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, pp. 1 – 23, 111 – 127). **PAPER 2 DUE!!!**

Dec. 11: Comparative Theology in practice: Christianity and Hinduism (**M:** Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 128 – 153)

**TBA: FINAL EXAM**

**Note:** University policy stipulates that final examinations are given **only** during the scheduled examination period. Please review your exam schedule before you make end-of-the-semester plans.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1) **Regular attendance** at and informed participation in class meetings (1:30-2:20 MWF). Every student should try to speak-up regularly!

2) **Quizzes (10%)**  Throughout the semester I will give a number of quizzes designed to assess your comprehension of the course readings**.** Your lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

**3) Papers (15% – 5% and 10%, respectively)**

**Paper 1** (Exposition paper. 1,000 words. Final draft submitted on Moodle by 5pm on Oct. 30).

*General advice*: Your essay should include an introduction with a clear thesisstatement. Every paragraph in the body of your paper should be germane to your thesis. The concluding paragraph should neatly summarize your essay, while also offering your final thoughts on the matter. All quotations should be properly cited. Failure to do so will be considered plagiarism. Under no circumstances should you use bullet points.

*Writing Prompt.* Pick a concept, idea or figure from your study of Navajo religion, Ancient Mesopotamian religion, Hinduism, Buddhism or Judaism. Explain it.

**Paper 2** (Argument paper. 1,000 words. Final submitted on Moodle by 5pm on Dec. 9).

*Writing Prompt:* Construct a Barthian critique of John Hick’s idea of religious pluralism. In the course of your essay, you should concisely summarize Karl Barth’s and John Hick’s arguments concerning religious pluralism. You should then develop a critique of John Hick based on Karl Barth’s argument. Be sure to identify the precise elements of Hick’s argument to which Barth would object.

NOTE: It is your responsibility to make sure that your papers are submitted on time. No extensions will be given for computer malfunction.

4) **Exams (50%)** (Sept. 16, Oct. 11 and Nov. 25) Each exam will cover the lectures and reading assignments that precede it. Your best exam will count for 20% of your course grade . Your other two exams will count 15% each. Please remember to bring your own blue book to the exam. They are available at the MERC.

5) **Final Exam (25%)** (exam schedule TBA). The final exam will be cumulative and comprehensive. To do well you will need to have a thorough grasp of all the material that we have covered during the semester.

6) **SI Review Sessions (EXTRA CREDIT!):** If you attend every review session leading up to an exam, you will receive 3 points extra credit on that exam.

**GENERAL GRADING RUBRIC:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter Grade** | **Lower Numerical Cutoff** | **Description** |
| A | 94 | Exceptional work that shows creativity and careful analysis of material. A-level work is sophisticated, well-written, and free from errors in grammar and spelling. |
| A- | 90 | Shows exceptional mastery of concepts, and goes well beyond requirements. |
| B+ | 87 | Work in the B-range is above average. B level work may be excellent work with several small errors or flaws. It is solid work, and shows significant command of concepts. |
| B | 84 |  |
| B- | 80 |  |
| C+ | 77 | Work in the C-range is average and satisfactory. It fulfills the criteria of the assignment, but does not display the same level of analysis, comprehension, and/or creativity as B and A-level work |
| C | 74 |  |
| C- | 70 |  |
| D | 60 | Work in the D-range is substandard. It may have major flaws, or show little mastery of major or minor concepts.  |
| F | 0 | Work in the F-range shows no mastery of relevant material. F-level work fails to complete requirements or is otherwise unacceptable. |

\*\*Letter grades are equivalent to a numerical score 1 point above the lower numerical cutoff. For example, an A paper is equivalent to a numerical score of 95

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**:

During your college years, by responsible class attendance you can establish a reputation for reliability that will help your professors to write good reference letters for jobs or programs of graduate study. I value faithful attendance highly, as an indication of your commitment to the course goals.

You are allowed THREE excused absences. You may request that an absence be excused for an appropriate reason such as sickness, a medical appointment, athletic competition, dangerous driving conditions, etc. An excused absence is based on an email request from you (**not** on a note from a nurse, a list from a coach, or your telling me why you missed class). **Before or right after any** **absence, please email me, giving the date and the reason that you missed class, if you want me** **to consider excusing the absence.** **If you do not email me before or soon after your absence, I will assume that it is unexcused**. Unexcused absences will reduce your course average by 2 points for each such absence.

**Note: I do not give make-up quizzes or exams. If you miss an in-class assignment or exam, you will receive a zero.**

**PARTICIPATION POLICY:**

Informed participation is expected. You should be physically and mentally present and engaged in every class! Your learning process will be helped immensely by participating actively in the course, so don’t be afraid to ask questions, or engage your peers (and me) in discussion. Follow the Apostle Paul’s advice: Be bold!

Non-participation (e.g., sleeping, eating your lunch, staring off in the distance for extended periods of time, disruptive behavior and so forth) will negatively impact your course grade.

**COMPUTER AND CELL PHONE POLICY:**

A successful class requires the active participation of everyone involved. Cell phones are distracting and disruptive; they are detrimental to both individual learners and the class as a whole. Consequently, the use of cell phones in class is strictly forbidden. Turn them off before class begins—off, not vibrate! I will give you one warning per semester, after which I will deduct one point from your final grade for every violation of this policy. If I see your cell phone during an exam or quiz, you will automatically receive a ZERO on that exam or quiz.

The use of laptops in class is prohibited unless you receive an accommodation from the Powell Resource Center.

**How to Get the Most Out of This Course**

As with any course, what you invest will determine your return, not simply in the grade you earn but in the knowledge and perspectives you take with you. Things to do, more or less in order of importance, are:

1. **Keep up with the assignments**. There is a good deal of reading in this course, and more than in the ordinary 100-level course. Stay current with the reading assignments. If you fall behind you will have a hard time catching up.

2. **Prepare conscientiously for class discussions**. Read closely the texts assigned, ponder the questions provided, make notes, and be ready to participate in discussion in a thoughtful and well-informed manner.

3. **Take advantage of the office hours of the instructor**. My office hours are for your benefit. They provide opportunities for you not only to ask questions and obtain clarifications, but also to get to know me and to let me get to know you.

4. **Familiarize yourself with the specialized vocabulary of the academic study of religion**. There are many technical terms and fifty-cent words: learn what they mean and how to pronounce and spell them. To this end, you should freely and frequently consult the glossary provided at the back of the textbook (**SP**: 523-538).

5. **Make use of resources beyond those required for reading or purchase**. There are many, many commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, etc. Don’t be afraid to consult outside sources!