

RELIGION AND CULTURE

RE 103-001
Fall, 2007

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Skidmore College

An introductory study of the nature of religion, the interaction of religion and culture, and the function of religious belief in the life of the individual. Consideration will be given to such phenomena as myth and ritual, sacred time and space, mysticism, evil, conversion, and salvation. Readings will be drawn from classical and modern sources.

Required Texts:

1. Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside, Third Edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1993).
2. Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, tr. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).
3. -----, The Bhagavad-Gita, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).
4. Damien Keown, Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction (New York: Oxford, 1996).
5. -----, The Dhammapada, tr. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (Berkeley: Parallax, 1995).
6. The Book of Job, Stephen Mitchell (tr.) (New York: Harper-Perennial, 1992).
7. Marcus Borg, The Heart of Christianity (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 2004).
8. Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).
9. Jamal J. Elias, Islam (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999)

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

WHAT IS RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION?

- 6: Introduction: What is religion?
- 11: (a) Ellwood, Scenarios for the Real Self, Ch. 1; #1
(b) Ellwood, History of Religion on Planet Earth, Ch. 2.
- 13: Ellwood, Oases of the Mind: Psychology of Religion, Ch.3.#2
- 18: Freud, The Future of an Illusion, all (pp. 5-71).
- 20: (a) Ellwood, Traveling together: Sociology of Religion; #3
(b) Ellwood, Secularization & the Religious Future, pp.197-200
- 25: (a) Ellwood, Magic Doorways: Symbol, Rite, Religion, Ch. 4. #4
(b) Ellwood, Faith through Form: Religion and Art, Ch. 5.

27: Exam (in class) on Freud (all) & Ellwood (Ch 1-6 & pp.197-200)

HINDUISM: Krishna and The Bhagavad-Gita

- 2: (a) Kinsley, Central Hindu Beliefs (handout);
(b) The Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. 1-6, pp. 21-87.
- 4: The Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. 7-18, pp. 89-154. #5

BUDDHISM: Buddha and The Dhammapada

- 9: Keown, Buddhism, Ch. 1-4 & Ch. 7-8;
film: "Buddhism: Footprint of the Buddha".
- 11: (a) The Dhammapada, Ch. 1-26; #6
(b) Keown, Buddhism, Ch. 5-6 & 9.

WESTERN RELIGIONS: The Problem of Evil

- 16: Hick, The Problem of Evil (handout).
- 18: (a) reread Hick, The Problem of Evil; #7 vs. #8
(b) Ellwood, Truth Messages: The Conceptual Expression of Religion, Ch. 7.

THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BIBLE: Eve/Adam, Abraham, Moses, Job, Jesus

- 23: (a) Genesis 1-3: God, the Creation, & the Fall (handout); #9
(b) Treble, Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread (handout).
- 25: (a) Genesis 22: God, Abraham & Isaac (handout); #10
(b) Exodus 20-21: God, Moses, Ten Commandments (handout); #11
(c) Matthew 5-7: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (handout); #12
(d) Ellwood, How Shall We Live? Religion and Ethics, Ch. 8.
- 30: The Book of Job, all, pp. 5-91.
- 1: Essay #1 due at start of class; discuss topic in class.

CHRISTIANITY: Two Visions of Jesus

- 6: Borg, The Heart of Christianity, Ch. 1-3 (pp. 1-60).
- 8: Borg, The Heart of Christianity, Ch. 4-5 (pp. 61-100).
- 13: Borg/Wright, How Do We Know about Jesus? (Ch. 1 & 2). #13
- 15: (a) reread Matthew 5-7: The Sermon on the Mount (handout);
(b) Borg/Wright, What did Jesus Do and Teach? (Ch. 3 & 4). #14
- 20: Borg/Wright, "God Raised Jesus from the Dead" (Ch. 7 & 8). #15
- 22: Thanksgiving break.

27: Borg/Wright, Was Jesus God? (Ch. 9 & 10). #16

ISLAM: The Quran, Muhammad, and the Five Pillars

29: (a) Islam in Everyday Life and Society (Ch.1);
(b) The Birth of Islam (Ch. 2);
(c) Beliefs, Rituals, and Practices (Ch. 4).

4: Essay #2 due at the beginning of class.

6: (a) Theology, Law, and Mysticism (Ch. 3);
(b) Islamic Thought in the Modern World (Ch.5);
(c) Looking to the Future (Ch. 6).

11: Selections from the Quran (handout) and from Rumi (handout).

Course Requirements:

1. **Participation** (20%): Participation in class meetings is essential to your learning in this course, and I encourage you to participate in discussions actively. It is extremely important that you keep up on the assignments because later assignments presuppose earlier ones. Also, this course emphasizes discussion as an essential component, and if you haven't read the assignment, you won't get much out of the discussion.

Attendance is required at every class. (Don't even think about missing the class just before Thanksgiving break.) Missing even one class will severely damage this portion of your grade.

The following guidelines express my expectations about attendance:

A or A- = attend all classes and make useful contributions to discussion in nearly every class.

B+ or B = attend all classes and make regular contributions.

B- = attend all classes but seldom speak.

C or D or F = one or more absences no matter how much you talk.

Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depends on how well you have prepared the reading assignments, so read the assignments carefully and critically. Readings about religion are difficult, so I strongly recommend underlining or highlighting passages and outlining or taking notes on the reading. Often you will need to read the assignment, or part of it, more than once. Read actively, not passively, by raising questions and criticisms about the readings. Come to class prepared to actively participate in our discussion.

Note that this course earns four, not three, credits. This means that this course involves considerable more work than a three credit course. Compared to a three credit course, each of our classes will meet an extra 20 minutes longer (1 hour 50 minutes instead of 1 hour 20 minutes). The Skidmore College guideline is that students should spend two hours preparing outside of class for every hour of class time. Thus I expect you to spend about 3 ½ hours preparing for each class, and I have assigned work based on that expectation. Be careful to adjust your schedule to accommodate this additional amount of work. I suggest that you work out a study schedule that sets aside a regular 3 ½ period of time to prepare for each class.

Please don't arrive in class late. Please do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely necessary. (Leaving class is rude and distracts me and other students. It also suggests a lack of concentration or lack of interest on your part.) Please be sure that your cell phone or pager is turned off.

One **class presentation** will be required. Your presentation will consist of you, another student, and me leading the discussion on the assigned reading. You and the other student will meet together outside of class to discuss what to focus on. Don't summarize the reading. Instead, raise questions about some important point in it.

Study Guides (brief written assignments on the readings) will be due regularly. These will be graded pass/fail. Late Study Guides will not be accepted--have them finished and ready to turn in at the beginning of class.

The combination of the above requirements will count 20% of your final course grade.

2. **Exam** (20%): On Sept. 27 there will be an exam in class on the readings on Freud and Ellwood. It will count 20% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed instructions soon.

3. **Essays** (60%): Two major essays will be due, each counting 30% of your final course grade. I will provide detailed instructions for each well in advance. Essay #1 will be due at the beginning of class on November 1. Essay #2 will be due at the beginning of class on December 4. **There is no final exam for this course.**

I would be delighted to talk with you outside of class. Make an appointment or drop by during my office hours:

Office hours: Monday: 4:30- 5:30 Office: Ladd 217
Tuesday: 2:30- 3:30 Office phone: 580-5407
Wednesday: 2:30- 3:30 (please don't call me at home
Thursday: 2:30- 3:30
Friday: 2:30- 3:30 Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu
(other times by appointment)