

Religion 103

Religion and Culture

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:40-5:30 Ladd 307

Office Hours: Mondays 4:30-5:30 and Wednesdays 11-12

Course Description:

In this course we will examine the expression of some primary characteristics of religion in primary sources from a variety of religious traditions. We will focus specifically on the ways in which ideas about the sacred are formed and how they are used to order experience, with a focus on space, time, and story. All of these, in turn, are part of imagining deity. We will then look at how these ordering concepts are used to formulate guidelines for daily life, as expressed in ritual, ethics, and doctrines of salvation.

Goals for the course:

Re103 is intended to fulfill the all-college requirement in Humanities. The goals of this course are as follows:

1. You will be familiar with the categories scholars use for inquiry into religion and how it works. These include the sacred, sacred space, myth, ritual, scripture, deity, theodicy, and ethics, among others.
2. You will become familiar with three religious traditions, Judaism, Hinduism, and Christianity.
3. You will compare them on the basis of the above categories, to get first, a better sense of what the categories themselves include and exclude, and second, to get a sense of the particularities of each tradition, so that we can understand differences in experience across cultures.
4. You will gain an understanding of some of the questions posed by Religious Studies such as a) How do religious communities understand the divine, the human situation, and the world? b) With what sorts of apparatus do they do this? c) What is the interplay between religious texts and communities? d) What is the interrelationship of religion with other dimensions of human experience, such as politics, technology, and the arts?
5. Finally, you will gain an appreciation of the breadth and range of religious experience.

The Structure:

This course is based in the processes of dialogue - between the texts we read, the cultures we know, and with each other. While we will rely on our textbook (*Anatomy of the Sacred*) to provide themes, terms, and context for our discussions, we will focus most intently on how ideas about religion and its meanings play out in primary religious sources.

Getting in touch:

My office hours will be held on Mondays 4:30-5:30 and Wednesdays 11-12 in 215 Ladd Hall. I can be reached by e-mail at msegol@skidmore.edu

Required Texts:

1. Livingston. *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*. Fifth Edition
2. Van Voorst: *Anthology of World Scriptures*
3. Coursepack

Course Requirements:

1. **Presence** is required. Two absences are permitted, and any subsequent absences will result in grade reduction. **You'll fail if you miss 7 or more classes.**
2. **Class participation** is required. (10%)
3. **Final Paper Proposal**
4. **Final Paper** 35%
5. **Reading Questions:** 35%
6. **Presentation** 10%

7. Your final grade will consist of the sum of credit gained by meeting the above requirements. Please note that research papers must follow the guidelines appended to the syllabus, and that grading will be based on adherence to that criteria

EXPECTATIONS & COURSE POLICIES:

General Expectations:

You read. Everything. You take notes. You think. You come. You listen. You talk. You learn. We have fun.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class sessions. You can miss two classes, no questions asked. After that, you lose points from your participation grade. If you miss seven classes or more, you will fail, without exception.

Participation: 10%

I'm setting it up. You're doing it. So you've got to be there, prepared, and ready to think, talk, and listen. Sometimes you'll need to write in class also.

Reading Questions: 35%

You'll have homework EVERY time. There is a reading question assigned for each class meeting. I'll expect you to answer the reading question in full sentences, justify your answer, and provide examples. Also, write down any questions that you'd like to ask in class. You should get them out at the beginning of class, and use them when it's time for discussion. They MUST be typed and printed out, no excuses.

I will collect them ten times during the term at random intervals. If your response is thoughtful and it shows adequate consideration of the material you will receive full credit, of 3.5 points per assignment. If you are not present, you will not receive credit for the assignment.

I will regularly ask individual students to present their answers to these questions to kick off class discussion. These students will be given credit toward class participation on these occasions.

Final Paper Proposal: 10%

You'll choose your final paper topic based on one of the readings. The proposal will include, first, the main question you'll explore, how you intend to answer it (in either narrative or outline form) and a bibliography of the sources you intend you use.

Final Paper: 35%

This paper will be 5 pages long. You will choose one of the reading questions from the first half of the term. You will present an argument that answers this question and develop it in this paper. You will be expected to choose and submit your topic by the beginning of the second week of class. ON the day that the reading question is assigned for class, you will present your research to date.

You will submit your choice of topic by the seventh week of class, though earlier if you want to discuss materials from weeks 7 and 8.

Presentation: 10%

The first presentation should take about five minutes. It will consist of

1. Your answer to the reading question for that day
2. Something that interested or surprised you about the reading
3. A discussion question

The second presentation will focus on your final paper. It should take about 7 minutes. You'll write the final paper on the reading for a class that you've chosen. You'll give the presentation on the day we cover that material. The presentation will include:

1. Your answer to the reading question for that day
2. Something that interested or surprised you about the reading
4. The argument you anticipate making for your final paper
5. A discussion question

Course Policies

All course assignments must be handed in on time. NO LATE PAPERS.

All written assignments are due at the beginning of class.

Students are expected to complete readings and assignments before class.

When preparing writing assignments for this course, please refer to the Skidmore College Expository Writing Network (available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/INDEX.html>) and/or the Writing Center for additional help.

Expected Style: All written papers are expected to be well-written (e.g., well-organized, correct spelling, appropriate grammar), double-spaced, using 1" margins and 12 point font, stapled, and accompanied by a cover sheet. In addition, students must adhere to either MLA or Chicago style when citing sources in text and when generating reference lists for assignments of any kind.

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to adhere to the college's honor code. Academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, failure to cite, cheating) will not be tolerated, and the Integrity Board will be notified of suspected violations. Skidmore's Expository Writing Network (available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/writingbrd/INDEX.html>) has helpful information on the ethics of writing. Please make use of this campus resource.

Disability Accommodations: Any student with special needs requiring accommodations should give me his/her memo of accommodations in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with me regarding all accommodations that require my participation. The student is advised to ensure full use of testing accommodations by coming to talk to me at least seven days before any test on the syllabus. The Coordinator for Students with Disabilities is located in the Office of Student Academic Services. You can make an appointment by calling extension 5180.

Syllabus: While every attempt is made to include all course information on this syllabus, some changes may be necessary. Any changes will be announced in class. Students are responsible for adhering to the information contained in the syllabus and any announcements in class pertaining to course information.

Class Schedule:

1/22

- A. Syllabus Review, course policies
- B. What do we know about religion?

1/24

1. Situating Religion

- A. Chapter 1 Livingston:
- Question: What is religion and how is it studied? Focus on the methodology of the book: How is it structured and why?

The Sacred

Presentation Choices Due today

1/29

2. What is the sacred? From Rudolf Otto: The Idea of the Holy

Question: How does Rudolf Otto define religion? What does he want to exclude from his definition and why? Is there anything he excludes without meaning to do so?

1/31 Point: The Sacred in Judaism

1. Introduction to Judaism coursepack: Fisher pp 90-103

Question: Just take notes and come to class with questions.

2/5: Readings from the Hebrew Bible:

- 1. Van Voorst, 209-12
- 2. Genesis 32: coursepack

Question: What is the sacred in these passages, and how is it experienced? Does Otto help us to conceptualize this?

2/7 Counterpoint: the sacred in Hinduism

A. Intro Hinduism: Fisher, coursepack, pp 45-58

Question: Take notes and come to class with questions

2/12

C. Reading on Soma, Van Voorst p 48-9,

D. Selections from the Bhagavad-Gita, pp 55-63

Question: Does the reading about Soma use a different idea about the sacred than Otto's writings? How about those appearing in the Bhagavad-Gita? If so, how?

Question: Compare the ideas about the sacred in these writings to those expressed by Otto, and in the Jewish source materials.

2/14

Rethinking the Sacred:

A. Livingston: The Sacred and the Holy

Question: There are a number of different ideas about the sacred expressed in this chapter, with emphasis on Rudolf Otto's. Considering what you have read so far, which is the most convincing and why?

Sacred Space:

2/19

Judaism:

B. Exodus 29:42-32 from *The Jewish Study Bible*

Question: Draw a map of the temple described in this passage. Then explain what you learned as a result: thinking about how space is made sacred here? And whether: Eliade's ideas about sacred space are based on this Biblical reading.

2/21

Christianity:

A. Intro to Christianity: coursepack: Fisher: 113-28

B. van Voorst. 252-8

Question: How is space sanctified in these short narratives? Is anything sanctified instead of space? How does it compare to sacred space in the Jewish and Hindu sources we've read?

2/26

Early Christian legend: Vita of Saint Mary

Question: How is space sanctified here, and what difference does it make? Explain what is sacred and what makes it so. What happens as a result?

2/28

J.Z. Smith: Map is Not Territory

Question: What is Smith's main argument? Does he help us to refine our ideas about sacred space? What does he say about storytelling? Are his ideas better than Eliade's?

3/4

Ritual:

A. Livingston: Ritual Chapter 4

B. Leviticus: 13-15

Question: How can our readings on ritual applied to the Leviticus readings?

Final Paper Topics Due Today

3/6

A. 13. Mary Douglas, from *Purity and Danger*

B. Sacred cows, Harris

What is Mary Douglas' main argument? Can we apply her argument about purity to the texts we've read from both Judaism and Hinduism? In what ways is this possible, and in what ways is it not?

3/8-16: Spring Break

Final Paper Proposals Due

3/18

14. Sacred Myth and Symbol:

A. Livingston, Chapter 3: Sacred Symbol, Myth and Doctrine

For this class, please know the differences between symbol and sign, and be able to express the relationship between myth and doctrine. You should also be able to discuss the ways in which religious myth works.

Question: Discuss myth and symbol in any two primary sources we've read so far.

3/20

A. Livingston Chapter 5: Sacred Scripture

B. Account of King Josiah

How does scripture work in the account of King Josiah? How is it used, and how does it affect people? Use Livingston to analyze the passage.

3/25

A. **Book of Mark, all**

Question: Both JZ Smith and Bruce Lincoln argue that one of myth's most important functions is to narrate a taxonomy, a systematic naming of what exists in the world. Does the Gospel of Mark give us a taxonomy of any kind? If so, how does it deliver that taxonomy? In the process, please pay close attention to the literary forms used in Mark, to think about how they are used in conveying the message of the text.

B. Begin film: Jesus de Montreal

3/27

Film: Jesus de Montreal:

Question: What kinds of conflicts are experienced by the characters in this film so far? How do they speak to the problems of interpreting scripture?

4/1

The making of scripture: A comparison

A. Van Voorst: 27-34; 202-9; 245-52

Compare the histories of scripture in Hinduisim, Judaism, and Christianity. How were they made, how are they used, and what can we learn from comparing these accounts?

Deity

4/3 Deity

A. Livingston Chapter 7

Question: What are the different classifications of deities, and how would you classify the ones you've had the most exposure to?

4/8

A. Hinduism on the Birth of the Gods, van Voorst 34-40; 54-62

B. Ezekiel 1:1-2; van Voorst 215-20

C. John 14-15

D. Flying Spaghetti Monster: <http://www.venganza.org/>

Compare and contrast these depictions of the deity. What can we learn from this?

Question: According to these readings, how are these gods alike, and how are they different? How are humans instructed to relate to these gods? What are the commonalities and the differences?

Cosmogony

4/10

Livingston Chapter 8: Cosmogony: Origins of the Natural and Social Order

Question: Why do cosmogonies matter in every day life? How do we use them?

4/15

Comparing Creations

A. Judaism/ Christianity: Genesis 2, from kvam, 22-6, 77-85

B. Christianity: Kvam: 117-19; 132-6

C. Hinduism: Van Voorst: 40-41, plus Purusha Hymn, coursepack

Question: There are two stories of Genesis. In each case the author seems to have picked one. Why does the choice matter? Include the Hindu scripture assigned and explain how cosmogony relates to social order.

Theodicy and Ethics

4/17

A. Livingston: Theodicy

B. Begin watching *The Quarrel*

Question: What are the different kinds of theodicy? Which makes the most sense to you and why?

4/22

Finish Watching *The Quarrel*

Ethics: Livingston Chapter 11

Question: What are the different theodicies expressed by each character so far? What are the different sorts of ethics expressed by each character so far?

4/24:

A. Continue discussing Livingston Chapter 11

No question

4/29: wrap-up

No question for today.

Paper due 4/30

Paper Guidelines:

1. Papers should be 4-5 pages long. They should be double-spaced, and in 12-point font with one-inch margins.
2. They should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
 - a. The introduction should introduce and present your thesis, and explain how you intend to prove it.
 - b. The body should support your thesis with quotes from the work, and from whatever secondary sources you intend to use. Quotes must be interpreted as well as presented in order to be effective.
 - c. The conclusion should explain your progress. That is, it should not only restate your thesis, but it should acknowledge some of what you have learned about it through writing your paper. You should not introduce any new ideas in your conclusion, but instead, you should show a more nuanced understanding of your original thesis, with the benefit of the experience of your paper.
3. It is very important to focus on the question by supporting your ideas about it with quotations from the text. This means that if you believe something to be true about a text you must include or refer to those parts of the work from which you deduced this idea.
4. Citations: The following items must be cited:
 - a. pieces you have taken from the work in question
 - b. all secondary sources- criticism, facts, figures, etc.
 - c. ideas: if you got an idea about the work from a book, you should cite it even if you do not quote it directly.
5. Using sources productively: You must include quotations from the textual sources you discuss in your paper. The proper way to use a quote includes three steps:
 - A. You introduce and contextualize the quote.
 - B. You cite it properly according to MLA or Chicago style guidelines
 - C. You conclude by analyzing the quote and showing how it supports your point.
 - D. Here is a very simple example: (A) In Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, the main character justifies his desire to practice three religions by espousing a universalist understanding of religion, asserting that "the God of the Hebrews and the Christians is the same as the God of the Muslims!" (B) (Martel, p 72) (C) In this, Piscine expresses his belief that because these three religions work toward the same goal, serving the same God, he is justified in practicing both Christianity and Islam.
6. Papers must include and **USE** full text printed academic sources. **No web sites are permitted** except those I have designated on the syllabus, for material covered in the second part of the semester. You may use campus databases of full text articles such as JSTOR. Otherwise, you must use books to prove your points.
7. Your paper must explicitly treat course material.
8. Use the bibliographies and suggestions for further reading provided at the end of each chapter of *Anatomy of the Sacred* to find secondary sources.
9. For your information: for our purposes a primary source is a sacred or literary text. A secondary source is one that analyzes and theorizes the primary source. For example: The biblical book of *Exodus* is a primary source, and Nahum Sarna's *Exploring Exodus* is a secondary source. Your textbook is a secondary source because it theorizes primary religious sources. However, when I ask you to use a secondary source I do not mean your textbook because it is the starting point of our inquiry, and I am asking you to go further.
10. Failure to cite your sources properly is **plagiarism** and will be treated as such.