



RE 103: RELIGION AND CULTURE

SPRING 2010

Prof. Olga Solovieva

Section 1: M 10:10-11:05, T Th 9:40-11:00, Tisch 302

Section 2: M 11:15-12:10, T Th 11:10-12:30, Tisch 302

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"Religion [means] orientation--orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world. . . . The religion of any people is more than a structure of thought; it is experience, expression, motivations, intentions, behaviors, styles, and rhythms."

Charles H. Long, *Significations*

Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which meaningfully to dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters.' Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence.

J.Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory*

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the study of religion as an important dimension of human experience and culture. By looking at a variety of cultural media (texts, film, ritual, visual art), we will explore how religious imagination operates within particular cultural contexts as to formulate, and practically engage with, the ultimate questions of human existence. Our topics will include the nature and characteristics of religious language; the possibilities and limitations of visual images in conveying the ultimate realities and meanings; cultural imaginations and experiences of space, land and sacred landscape; and the notions of the self, human body, gender, and personal transformation as articulated in religious practice and thought across cultures and times.

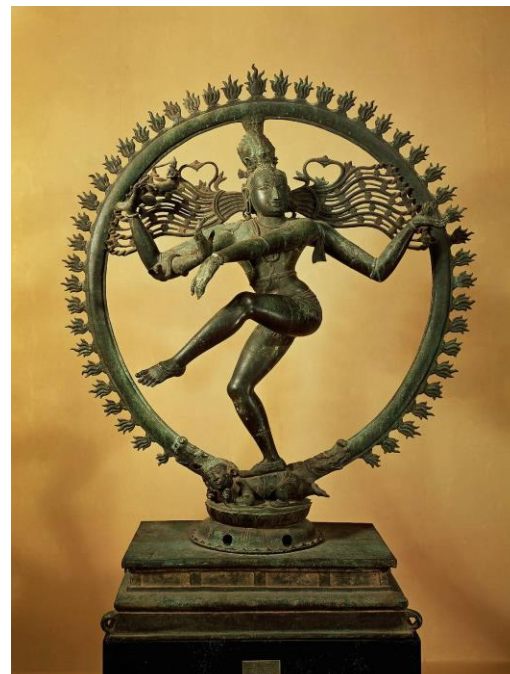
Required Texts

James Livingston, Anatomy of the Sacred (6th ed.)

Diana Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India

Course Reader (= "CR" on syllabus)

Books are available for purchase at the Skidmore Bookstore; they are also placed on a 3-hour reserve at the library. Other readings will be available on-line and as a Course Reader (Part I is available now, Part II will be available later in the semester). In addition, there will be occasional handouts distributed in class; please note that it is your responsibility to obtain and keep the copies of all handouts throughout the semester. There will also be a number of videos screened in class; should you miss any screenings, please make sure you arrange to watch that video as soon as possible.



Requirements

1. Participation	10 points
2. Tests (2 x 25)	50 points
3. Reading Journal (Reflection Papers)	25 points
4. Religious Visitation Project	15 points

Grading Scale

This course will be graded on the following scale (point values approximate, subject to adjustment at the instructor's discretion):

100-95 = A	75-72 = C
94-91 = A-	71-70 = C-
90-87 = B+	69-67 = D+
86-82 = B	66-62 = D
81-80 = B-	61-60 = D-
79-76 = C+	below = F

A: Active and in-depth involvement with the material as demonstrated in class discussions and written and oral assignments; outstanding quality of writing and ability to analyze and appreciate difficult concepts and ideas.

B: Above-average performance on written assignments and tests; demonstrates consistent and thoughtful engagement with the material.

C: Adequate performance on tests; consistent attendance and on-time completion of reading log entries.

Class participation

- (a) Your participation is vital to the success of our course, so please take this requirement seriously! Certain times in class each week will be reserved for discussion, usually centering around the close reading of the assigned texts and your responses to them. Please bring your copies of the assigned readings to class and be prepared to talk about them.
- (b) Your participation is assessed based on your presence and preparation, so that an active and well-prepared participation in class discussions will raise your participation grade (5 points/C+ by default), while no-shows or evident negligence in reading will lower it.
- (c) Attendance is required and will be recorded beginning the second week of the semester. Each student is allowed 2 unexcused absences; please plan your time accordingly. Each additional absence will lower your participation grade by 1 point, unless it is a documented emergency (acceptable documents include: a note from your doctor or health services for medical emergencies; a letter from appropriate departments, offices or faculty for athletic and academic events; a note from the Dean of Students office and/or parents in case of family emergencies).
- (d) Please note that consistent failure to attend classes (over 6 missed classes) will result in a failing grade and/or removal from the course, at instructor's discretion (and I'm not joking!)

Tests

- (a) Two tests will be administered in the course of the semester, on the dates specified in the Schedule of Readings. Each test is worth 25 points of your final grade.

- (b) Both tests will be a combination of in-class and take-home assignments; you will need to prepare and type up the essay questions in part 2 prior to coming to class, and answer questions in part 1 in class on the day of the test (see instructions in the study guides).
- (c) Tests are non-cumulative; they will be designed to cover material presented both in our readings and in class (lectures, discussions and videos), so it is to your advantage to familiarize yourself with all the material covered in appropriate section of the course. Study guides will be posted on-line at least 48 hours before the tests; when time allows, there will be brief in-class review sessions conducted before each test, or else we will do it on-line, using Blackboard “discussion” feature. You are encouraged to prepare for the tests by reviewing terms and concepts identified in these guides, and by reflecting on the questions presented. Please note that no make-up tests will be given except for legitimate reasons and with prior arrangement.

Reading Journal / Reflection Papers

- (a) These reading/writing assignments are designed to help you engage with the course readings in an in-depth and creative way. You are asked to identify important themes and key concepts introduced in the readings, and also—very important!—to engage with them in a critical (i.e., serious/scholarly) yet imaginative way, by offering your own interpretations and reflections. For some of these papers, you will need to respond to specific questions that I will post on Blackboard ahead of time; in others, you will be free to choose your own issues and questions, including but not limited to: What are the central concepts/figures/themes introduced in the reading? What images, descriptions, or characterizations of deities/humans/rituals/places strike you in the text, and why? How are they significant for understanding the ways of being religious? How do the issues and themes presented in the reading relate to your own experience, academic and/or existential? What questions do you have, or would have liked to ask—whether of your instructor, the text’s author and characters, or yourself? (Please note: reflections on your personal experiences and issues are allowed and even encouraged; however, make sure that you also cover the actual material presented in the readings).
- (b) Each paper must deal with the readings specified in the appropriate sections of the Schedule of Readings. Your papers must be 3-5 paragraphs (between 1 full page and 2 pages in length), typed, double-spaced, standard font. If you write more than 2 pages, I’ll forgive you (as long as you keep it under, well, let’s say, 5 pages); but if you write less than 1 page, beware!
- (c) You must submit your Reading Journal Entries (a.k.a. Reflection Papers) on-line via Blackboard system (“Assignments” tab on the left); paper or e-mail submissions will not be accepted except by prior arrangement for special circumstances, and are submitted at the student’s risk for all delivery failures.
- (d) Papers must be submitted on the dates noted on the syllabus prior to coming to class. No late entries will be accepted for any reason other than documented medical emergencies—please organize your time accordingly.
- (e) There are 21 possible entries; you must do 12 of them to receive full credit for this assignment. Completed entries will be graded on a pass/fail basis: 1 = does not meet expectations; 2 = meets expectations. You will receive full credit (25 points) for this assignment as long as you get “2” or above on 12 entries. Those students who consistently submit outstanding Reading Journal entries will be awarded extra points on this assignment (0.5 point per entry, up to 2 points total).

Religious Visitation Project

This is an independent “fieldwork” project to be undertaken outside of class time, which will involve a visit to a religious service in a tradition you are not already familiar with, and a subsequent oral and written reports on this visit. Detailed guidelines for this assignment are posted in the “Assignments Instructions” folder on Blackboard; we will also discuss them in class later in the semester.

Notes and Policies:**Disability:**

Skidmore College is committed to providing students with disabilities full and meaningful access to all college programs and activities and strives to offer individualized accommodations necessary for students to realize an equal opportunity to succeed. To arrange for special accommodations, you will need to contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in Student Academic Services (Starbucks Center, tel. 518.580.8150, http://cms.skidmore.edu/academic_services/accessibility/index.cfm). You should also talk to the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

Academic Integrity:

I will expect all students enrolled in this course to adhere to standards of academic integrity outlined in Skidmore’s Honor Code (http://cms.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.cfm) and avoid any forms of academic dishonesty. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism) will be referred to the Dean of Studies and may incur such penalties as a failing grade on a part or the whole of course requirements or removal from the course, at instructor’s discretion.

Course Outline and Schedule of Readings*

*Any changes will be announced in class, via e-mail and/or on Blackboard

All readings must be completed prior to the class period for which they are assigned; please don't forget to bring your copies of books and/or course readers to class. Reading designations: "t" = read from/to the first full paragraph at the top of the page; "m" = the middle of the page; "b" = the last full paragraph at the bottom of page; no designation at all means you should read the entire page

I. Introduction

Jan 25-28 Introduction to the Course and the Study of Religion

Readings: Livingston, 3-33t, 125m-127t
Selections from Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (CR)
Selections from Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (CR)

Feb 1-4 Religion in Popular Culture

Feb 1
(RJ 1) *Readings:* Hoover, "Visual Religion in Media Culture" (CR)
Martin and Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred*, introduction, 1-12 (CR)

Reading Journal Entry # 1 due before class, Feb 1

Feb 2 *Video:* *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (we'll watch selected episodes in class on Feb 2 and 4, I'm presuming—hopefully, correctly—that most of you are already familiar with this cinematographic opus)

Feb 4
(RJ 2) *Readings:* Martin and Ostwalt, *Screening the Sacred*, Part Two: "Mythological Criticism," 65-71 (CR)
Selections from Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (CR)

Reading Journal # 2 due

Feb 8-15 The Sacred. Conceptions of the Ultimate Reality

Feb 8
(RJ 3) *Readings:* Livingston, 37-42b
Selections from Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (CR)
Reading Journal # 3 due (answer the question in Bb instructions)

Feb 9
(RJ 4) *Readings:* Livingston, 153-163b, 167b-178b (skim through to get a general sense of the major forms/conceptions of the sacred reality, e. g., polytheism, monotheism, etc.)
Eck, 22m-31

Video: *330 Million Gods* and/or *Footprint of the Buddha*

Reading Journal # 4 due

Feb 11 No class—I will be out of town

Feb 15
(RJ 5) Readings: Livingston, 330b-33 (for background on the Buddhist teaching)
 Selections from *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhist on the Contemplative Way* (CR)
Reading Journal # 5 due (answer the question in Bb instructions)

II. Talking About the Sacred

Feb 16-18 Religious Symbols. Myth
(RJ 6) Readings: Livingston, 53-58, 63-71
 The Homeric Hymn to Demeter (CR)
 Genesis 1:1-3 (CR)
Reading Journal # 6 due Feb 16 (answer the question in Bb instructions)

Feb 22-23 Parables
(RJ 7) Readings: Livingston, 59-62
 The Parables of Jesus, selections (CR)
Reading Journal # 7 due Feb 23

Feb 25 Mystical Languages
(RJ 8) Readings: Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, introduction (CR)
 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, selection (CR)
 Rumi, *Love Is A Stranger*, intro and selected poems (CR)
 Emily Dickinson, selected poems (CR)
Reading Journal # 8 due

III. Imaging the Sacred

Mar 1-2 Religion and/as Visual Practice
(RJ 9) Readings: Selections from Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, selections (CR)
Reading Journal # 9 due Mar 1 (answer the question in Bb instructions)

Mar 4 Issues of Visual representation in Western Religious Traditions
(RJ 10) Readings: Miles, "Image" (CR)
 Averintsev, "Visions of the Invisible: The Dual Nature of The Icon" (CR)
Reading Journal # 10 due

Mar 8 Seeing the Divine Image in India
(RJ 11) Readings: Eck, 3-22m, 32-58
 Video: *Puja*
Reading Journal # 11 due

Mar 9-11
(RJ 12) Religious Seeing in Film
Video: *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring*.
Readings: Conroy, "Seeing with Buddha's Eyes," *Journal of Religion and Film* 11:2
<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol11no2/ConroyBuddha.htm>
Livingston, 81b-82, 223m-27m, 246-47m, 268t-b (Bodhisattva),
309b-11b (for background on Buddhist theology and ethics)
Reading Journal # 12 due Mar 11

Mar 11 Test Review

Mar 13-21 No classes—Spring Break

Mar 22 TEST # 1

IV. Locating the Sacred

Mar 23
(RJ 13) Sacred Space
Readings: Livingston, 42b-49b
Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, selections (CR)
Eck, 59-63b
Reading Journal # 13 due (answer the question in Bb instructions)

Mar 25
(RJ 14) Sacred Land
Readings: Deloria, "Sacred Land and Religious Freedom" (CR)
Video: *In the Light of Reverence*
Reading Journal # 14 due

Mar 29-30
(RJ 15) Pilgrimage: Seeking the Sacred
Readings: Wolfe, "The Real Mecca" (CR)
Eck, 63b-75
Video: *Inside Mecca*
Reading Journal # 15 due Mar 30

Apr 1
(RJ 16) The New "Sacred Spaces"?
Readings: Selections from Ira Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America* (CR)
Reading Journal # 16 due (answer the question in Bb instructions)

V. Ritual

Apr 5-6
(RJ 17) Types and Functions of Ritual Action
Readings: Livingston, 74-89m, 92m-93
Video: *Ritual: Three Portraits of Jewish Life*
Reading Journal # 17 due Apr 6

- Apr 8
(RJ 18) Embodying the Sacred
 Readings: Helminski, “Naked and Vulnerable on Ramadan” (CR)
 Selections from Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment* (CR) +
 Livingston, 363m-365t
 Video: *The Changing Face of Worship*
 Reading Journal # 18 due
- Apr 12
(RJ 19) Sacrifice
 Readings: Livingston, 89m-92m
 Genesis 22, Leviticus 3, 17, 16 (CR)
 Selections on Animal Sacrifice from Hesiod, *Theogony*, and
 Zaidman and Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (CR)
 Selections from Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (CR)
 Reading Journal # 19 due

VI. Religion and Gender. Religion and Society

- Apr 13-15 **Women’s Roles and Voices**
(RJ 20)
 Apr 13 Judaism and Christianity: Recovering Women’s Voices
 Readings: Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina* (CR)
 Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” (CR)
 Rita Gross, “Female God Language in a Jewish Context”
 Livingston, 365t-369b
- Apr 15 Women’s Issues in Islam
 Readings: Leila Dabbagh, “Muhammad’s Legacy for Women” (CR)
 Kecia Ali, “Rethinking Women’s Issues in Muslim
 Communities” (CR)
 Saraji Umm Zaid, “Why Every Mosque Should be Women-
 Friendly” (CR)
 Samer Hathout, “Abuse, Polygamy, Exclusion: Three Stories
 of American-Muslim Women” (CR)
 Livingston, 369b-373m
 Video: *Wearing Hi’jab*
- Apr 19 Reimagining Traditions
 Readings: Livingston, 362m-365t
 Linda Hess, “Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man’s
 Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife” (CR)
 Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” (CR)

Reading Journal # 20 due Apr 13-19

Apr 20-22 (RJ 21)	Religion in the Contemporary Society: Challenges and Possibilities
Apr 20	Religious Fundamentalism. Religion and Violence/Religion and Peace <i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 341-357 Thich Nhat Hanh, "Working for Peace," in <i>Being Peace</i> (CR) Ali Minai, "A Time For Renewal" (CR) Farid Esack, "The Muslim Vanguard" (CR)
Apr 22	Religion and the State. Secularism. <i>Readings:</i> Livingston, 373m-393t Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster http://www.venganza.org/
Reading Journal # 21 due Apr 20-22	
Apr 26-29	Visitation Project Reports
Apr 29	Test Review
May 3	TEST # 2
May 4	Course Wrap-up (Tests Returned / Course Review)
May 11	VISITATION PROJECT PAPERS due by 5 p.m. at Palamountain 421 or on-line (Blackboard)