

RELIGION AND CULTURE

Religion 103 (03)

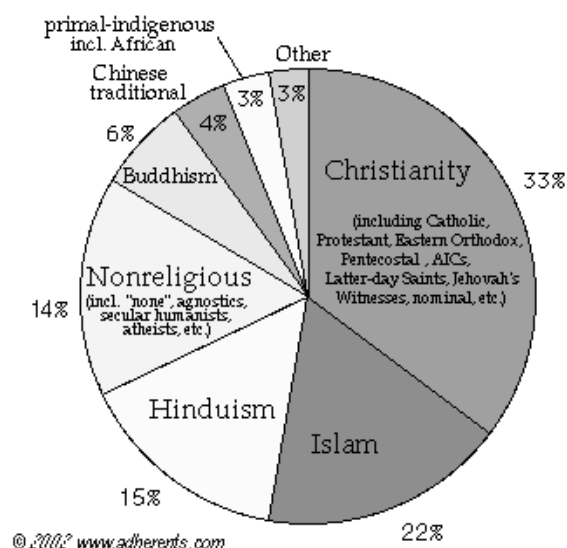
Skidmore College – Fall 2007

3:40-5:30 TTh – Ladd 307

Prof. Katherine Ulrich

Ladd Hall 212

Office Hours: T, Th 11:15-1 & by appointment



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction to Religions is a thematic introduction to religion, the world's religions, and their study in the context of a nonsectarian liberal arts learning curriculum. Each week we will explore one of the world's major religious traditions while examining three broad themes: (1) Suffering, Death, and the Afterlife; (2) Pilgrimage and Place; and (3) Religion and Violence. Religious traditions covered include Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the religions of China and Japan. Classes will consist of a combination of lectures, discussions, films, and group exercises.

This is an introductory course, designed to introduce you to the basic practices, beliefs, and subdivisions of the world's religions and to teach you to *think* in a sophisticated manner about religions, religious people, and religious practices. To acquire a deeper understanding of any particular religion, you will need to take further courses in religious studies!

COURSE GOALS

By the end of this course, you should . . .

- (1) know the basic practices, beliefs, & subdivisions of the world's major religions;
- (2) have a more in-depth knowledge of the ways in which suffering and sacred place are understood, challenged, or provoked by the major religions, and the ability to think analytically about these themes;
- (3) have a sense of the complexity of religions & of the interdisciplinary field of religious studies;
- (4) be aware of the fact that religions, religious people, and religious practices are both eerily similar to one another *and* remarkably diverse.

WHAT THIS COURSE IS NOT (or: THE WARNING LABEL)

- (1) an easy, comfortable, or patronizing survey. You will be challenged (intellectually, emotionally, and/or spiritually). You will have to work hard, and will probably end up reflecting upon – or even doubting – your basic assumptions about the world.
- (2) a series of instructions on how to be a good Buddhist, Christian, Jew, etc.
- (3) an insider's (ie, believer's) view of religion.
- (4) an over-simplified, 'World Religions for Dummies' parade of facts.

REQUIRED READING

- (1) Michael Coogan, ed. *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*. Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN 019521997X
- (2) Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*. Harvard University Press, 1997. ISBN 0674667662
- (3) Articles on electronic reserve via blackboard

REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Biweekly Quizzes (35%):** non-cumulative & covering readings, lectures, and discussions. Your lowest two quiz scores will be dropped. There will be no make-up quizzes; you will receive a zero. Quizzes will be a combination of short answer and multiple choice and are designed to test your knowledge of basic facts, terms, and concepts.
2. **Midterm and Final (50%).** The midterm is a combination of essay and short answer; the final exam is a take-home essay exam.
3. **Attendance & Participation (15%).** I expect you to attend class daily save for legitimate, documented excuses (serious illness or death in the immediate family). More than five absences will result in automatic failure for the course. The scale for attendance is as follows: 5= came to all classes; 4= missed one or two classes; 3= missed three or four classes; 2= missed five classes. Frequent tardiness will result in the attendance grade being dropped further. Given my policy, I cannot accept emailed excuses for absences; the only remedy for a missed class is for you to make up the time by coming to see me during office hours in order to discuss the material that you missed. While in class, students are expected to participate in class discussions. At the end of each class, I make a note of which students participated and if any students were obviously inattentive (napping, reading the paper, etc.) or disruptive. The scale for participation is as follows: 5 = frequently contributed to discussion (spoke most days); 4 = contributed regularly (spoke about once a week); 3 = contributed occasionally (every few weeks); 2 = rarely, if ever contributed; 1 = slept in class or was obviously inattentive or disruptive. These grades will be adjusted upwards or downwards if the quality of your contributions are well above or below average. For the shy in class: in lieu of speaking in class, you may also come see me during office hours or send me emails with questions or comments.

General: It is the assumption of this course and the university as a whole that people will behave in a responsible and ethical manner. This includes behaving respectfully towards others - classmates, instructors, the authors we read, and the people whose religious beliefs we are studying. Discussion and writing should be characterized by honesty, enthusiasm, critical thought, and respect for the lifestyles, worldviews, and beliefs of others. Note that 'critical thought' does not mean being nasty to or about other people, but evaluating their ideas and practices intelligently and with a spirit of collegiality and good will.

Special Needs: Students with special needs (physical challenges, learning disabilities, etc.) are welcome in this class. Please notify the University's ADA coordinator and your instructor in advance if you will need accommodations and/or auxiliary aids.

This class abides by Skidmore College's Academic Integrity policy. Cheating, plagiarism, and other types of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in penalties ranging from failure on the assignment to expulsion from the University.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

*Reading on e-reserve (Blackboard)

IGWR = Illustrated Guide to World Religions. *Unless otherwise noted, sidebars and boxes are not required*

I. SUFFERING, DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

Why do bad things happen to good people? All religions respond in some way to death and suffering; they frequently provide ways for people to cope with tragedy, explanations for it, and descriptions of what happens after death. The particular ways of framing or identifying the 'problem' vary, however, as do the solutions. As you read, think about the following questions: (1) How does this religion's view of the problem of death and suffering relate to its solution(s) to these problems? (In other words, what does the religion have to say about the *causes* of suffering, and how does this relate to what it says about the *cure* for suffering? (2) What roles do gods and goddesses play in all of this: do they cause all suffering or specific types, do they alleviate it, or....? (3) What role do human beings play: do they cause all suffering or specific types, are they innately good or evil or both, and to what extent are they responsible for alleviating suffering in this world?

1.	9/6 (Th)	Introductions, review of syllabus, etc.
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BUDDHISM

2.	9/11 (Tu)	IGWR, Eckel, "Buddhism," 164-71, 173 "Mahayana Buddhism" sidebar, 174 "Tantric" sidebar, 176-79 (up to "While Buddhist")
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	9/13	An interlude of theory: *Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions"
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3.	9/18	IGWR, Eckel, "Buddhism," 184-97
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	9/20	primary source reading: *Murcott, from <i>First Buddhist Women</i> ; quiz #1
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JUDAISM

4.	9/25	IGWR, Ehrlich, "Judaism," 16-24 (incl. "Sephardim" box), 26, 28-31 (incl. "Mishnah" box), 34, 38-51
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	9/27	primary source reading: <i>Job</i> 1-2:10, 3:1-26, 10:1-22, 38:1-42:6, 42:10-17 (JPS, NJPS, RSV or NRSV only) http://rosetta.reltech.org/ECanon/search.php?qry=Job&vrs=NRSV
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JAPANESE RELIGIONS

5.	10/2	IGWR, Littleton, "Japanese Traditions," 238-46, 248-49, 251 "Lotus Sutra" box only, 252-55, 266-67 (incl. "Lands of the Dead" box);
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	10/4	*Lock, <i>Twice Dead</i> , 1-16, 152-60, 209-31
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6.	10/9	quiz #2 ; IGWR, Littleton, "Japanese," 256-64 (incl. "Return of the Dead"
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		sidebar p. 264), 268-71; http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.pdf , esp. “wish 2” (p. 6 of the pdf file) (rec: http://www.abanet.org/aging/toolkit/tool7.pdf)
CHRISTIANITY		
	10/11	IGWR, Hale, “Christianity,” 54-63 (incl. “East-West Schism” box & “Protestant Denominations” sidebar), 68-85
7.	10/16	quiz #3 ; *Bynum, “Material Continuity” & *John 11:1-44 (RSV or NRSV only) http://rosetta.reltech.org/ECanon/search.php?qry=john+11%3A1-44&vrs=NRSV&txt=
II. PILGRIMAGE AND PLACE		
As you do the reading for these weeks, think about (1) what types of spaces are important for a religion (cities? rivers?) and why; (2) what people do in and to such spaces; (3) the social and political implications of designating a particular site as sacred. To what extent do sacred places serve to unite communities, and to what extent are they sources of conflict, either within a community or between communities?		
CHINESE RELIGIONS		
	10/18	IGWR, Oldstone-Moore, “Chinese Traditions,” 200-11, 214-19
8.	10/23	Midterm (covering Buddhism through Christianity)
	10/25	IGWR, Oldstone-Moore, “Chinese Traditions” 220-35
9.	10/30	*March, “An Appreciation”; spend 20 minutes online, browsing feng shui websites. How have American perceptions of feng shui changed since March’s 1968 article? quiz #4 (entertaining link: http://www.qi-whiz.com/node/1246)
ISLAM		
	11/1	IGWR, Gordon, “Islam,” 90-95, 97 “Shii” sidebar, 100-119
10.	11/6	Coleman & Elsner, “The Centre in the Desert” & “Images of the Orient”; primary source reading: *Wolfe, ed. “Jalal Al-e Ahmad” and “Malcolm X” excerpts from <i>One Thousand Roads to Mecca</i> .
HINDUISM		
	11/8	IGWR, Narayan, “Hinduism,” 126-130 (stop after 1 st paragraph), 134 (incl. sidebar & box), 135-43 (incl. “Bhagavad-gita” box)
11.	11/13	IGWR, Narayan, “Hinduism,” 144-61; quiz #5 (virtual ritual [click on name of deity, then on lamp, etc.]: http://www.eprarthana.com/virtual/vpooja.asp)
	11/15	Coleman & Elsner, 30-33 (“Viewer and Viewed”) and 136-169
12.	11/20	primary source reading: *the descent of the Ganges
PILGRIMAGE IN BUDDHISM, JUDAISM, & CHRISTIANITY (by way of review for final)		
13.	11/27	theory reading: Coleman & Elsner, 196-220; quiz #6
	11/29	Coleman & Elsner, 170-95
14.	12/4	Coleman & Elsner, 34-51 “Exile and Return” and “The Sacred Site”
	12/6	Coleman & Elsner, 94-135 “Pilgrim and the Sword” through “Living Saints”
15.	12/11	quiz #7