

# RELIGION AND CULTURE

## Religion 103 (03)

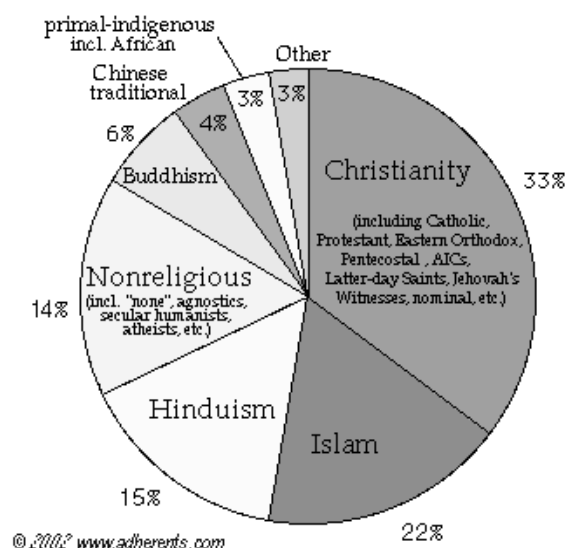
Skidmore College – Spring 2008

9:10-11:00 TTh – Ladd 206

Prof. Katherine Ulrich (kulrich@skidmore.edu)

Ladd Hall 212 (x 5404)

Office Hours: T, Th 11:15-12:15 & by appointment



## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion and Culture 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 two broad themes: (1) Religious Bodies and (2) Pilgrimage and Place. Religious traditions covered include Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. 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 the body and sacred place are understood, challenged, or shaped 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) Coogan, Michael, ed. *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*. Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN 019521997X (\$20)
- (2) Carter, John Ross and Mahinda Palihawadana. *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*. Oxford World Classics, 2000. ISBN 0192836137 (\$10)
- (3) Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Qur'an*. (\$23)
- (4) Coleman, Simon and John Elsner. *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*. Harvard University Press, 1997. ISBN 0674667662 (\$26.50)
- (5) Articles on electronic reserve via WebCT

## 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%)**. Both are take-home essay exams and are designed to test your ability to synthesize and analyze course material, particularly as it relates to the overarching themes of the semester.
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 college 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 College’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.

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion (they will likely surface in some form on exams, too)**

As you do the pilgrimage readings for this course, think about (1) the reasons a particular place comes to be considered sacred: historical events that happened there? a natural feature? the presence of a divine or saintly being? What are the possible political and environmental implications of your answer? (2) what is the most important feature of pilgrimage – the place itself, the stories told about it, the people, or movements in/to/around the site? (Another way of asking this question: if you take away an element (eg, the Temple in Jerusalem [place]), does the pilgrimage cease to be important for the tradition? (3) to what extent does a pilgrimage or pilgrimage place serve to unite people (pilgrims from different periods or places or social classes or even religions), and to what extent does it serve as a source of conflict or demonstrate the *lack* of unity of people? (4) how does pilgrimage impact the pilgrim’s body: by demanding certain physical movements (walking or crawling to/in/around the site, ritual gestures)? by demanding a certain diet, clothing, or habitation? how arduous is the pilgrimage, and what relationship do the difficulties (blisters, hot sun, freezing wind...) experienced by the pilgrim have to the rewards (spiritual, social, or other) of the trip?

As you do the readings from the *IGWR*, think about (1) Which is more important to members of the religion: their *practices* (ritual, pilgrimage, and so on) or *beliefs*? What are the most common practices and most widely held beliefs? and (2) What are the most important names, values, and places for the religion?

As you do the theory readings, think about (1) what is the basic argument the author is making and (2) whether other evidence from class readings, discussions, lectures, or films supports or challenges this argument.

As you do the scripture readings, think about (1) the questions given after the reading (below); (2) the same questions as for *IGWR*.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

\*Reading on e-reserve (WebCT)      *IGWR* = Illustrated Guide to World Religions.

| <b>I. Hinduism</b>                    |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                                     | 1/22 T | Introductions, review of syllabus, etc.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                       | 1/24 R | <i>IGWR</i> , Narayan, "Hinduism," 126-130 (stop after 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph), 134, 135-43                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2                                     | 1/29 T | <i>IGWR</i> , Narayan, "Hinduism," 144-61<br>rec: perform a virtual ritual [click on name of deity, then on lamp, etc.]:<br><a href="http://www.eprarthana.com/virtual/vpooja.asp">http://www.eprarthana.com/virtual/vpooja.asp</a>                                                                                               |
|                                       | 1/31 R | <b>Quiz #1</b><br>scripture reading: Ramayana excerpts #1 & 2. {Think about (1) what qualities are emphasized in the depiction of Rama and Sita, and how other figures contrast with them; (2) what the story of the descent of the Ganges reveals about reasons for the pilgrimage there.} In-class film: <i>Ramayana</i> (1 hr) |
| 3                                     | 2/5 T  | theory reading: *Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                       | 2/7 R  | Hindu pilgrimage: Coleman & Elsner 7-9, 30-33, 136-55                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 4                                     | 2/12 T | Hindu pilgrimage: *Gold, "Sinking Flowers"; in class film: <i>Ganges, River to Heaven</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>II. Judaism &amp; Christianity</b> |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                                       | 2/14 R | <b>Quiz #2</b><br>Jewish pilgrimage: Coleman & Elsner, 34-51 "Exile and Return" and "The Sacred Site" <b>and</b> read/skim <i>IGWR</i> , Ehrlich, "Judaism," 16-24, 26, 28-31, 34, 38-51.                                                                                                                                         |
| 5                                     | 2/19 T | theory readings: *Friedland and Hecht, "Bodies of Nations" and *Lincoln, "Conflict"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                       | 2/21 R | Christian pilgrimage: Coleman & Elsner, 78-88 (stop b/f 'Impelled'), 94-131 <b>and</b> read/skim <i>IGWR</i> , Hale, "Christianity," 54-63, 68-85                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 6                                     | 2/26 T | theory reading: *Turner                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                       | 2/28 R | <b>Quiz #3</b><br>scripture reading: *Peters, <i>Jerusalem</i> selections {Think about what the readings reveal about attitudes of Jews, Christians, and Muslims towards Jerusalem}                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>III. Buddhism</b>                  |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 7                                     | 3/4 T  | <b>Exam due;</b> <i>IGWR</i> , Eckel, "Buddhism," 164-75, 178-79 (& finish that last paragraph, p. 180), 184-85, 192-93. {In-class film on Buddhism, TBA}                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                       | 3/6 R  | <i>IGWR</i> , Eckel, "Buddhism," 176-77, 180-83, 190-91, 194-97                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 8                                     | 3/18 T | scripture reading: <i>Dhammapada</i> , ODD numbered verses only. {Think about what Buddhist values are emphasized in the scripture}                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                       | 3/20 R | <b>Quiz #4</b><br>theory reading: *Lopez, "Belief"; and Buddhist pilgrimage reading: <i>IGWR</i> , Eckel, "Buddhism," 186-89                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 9                                     | 3/25 T | <i>IGWR</i> , Littleton, "Japanese Traditions," 238-41, 246, 248-49, 251 "Lotus Sutra" box only, 252-55, 256 sidebar only, 266-67; in-class film: <i>Principles and Practices of Zen</i>                                                                                                                                          |
|                                       | 3/27 R | Buddhist pilgrimage reading: Coleman & Elsner, 170-95                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 10                                    | 4/1 T  | TBA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>IV. Islam</b>                      |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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|-----|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | 4/3 R  | <b>Quiz #5</b><br>IGWR, Gordon, “Islam,” 90-123                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 11  | 4/8 T  | scripture reading: <i>Quran</i> , suras only (commentary is recommended) & listen to 2 tracks on the CD (your pick). {Think about what Islamic values are emphasized in the scripture.}<br>Note: Today is the ‘W’ deadline.                                                                                                             |
|     | 4/10 R | Coleman & Elsner, “The Centre in the Desert” & “Images of the Orient”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 12  | 4/15   | primary source reading: *Wolfe, ed, <i>One Thousand Roads to Mecca</i> ; in-class film, <i>Inside Mecca</i> (How do the pilgrimage experiences of Khalil, Fidelma, and Ibrahim in the film, the pilgrims’ experiences in the Coleman & Elsner chapter, and the experiences from the Wolfe volume compare and contrast with each other?) |
|     | 4/17   | <b>Quiz #6</b><br>theory reading: Coleman & Elsner, 196-220                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 13  | 4/22   | theory reading: *Asad                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|     | 4/24   | theory reading: *Bell, <i>Ritual</i> selections                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 14. | 4/29   | <b>Quiz #7</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |