

Re 103: Religion & Culture

Fall, 2011

Professor: Marla Segol

Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-4:20, Ladd 106

Office Hours: Monday, 11:30-12:30; Wednesday, 1-2, Ladd 215

Or by appointment

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, focusing on Judaism, Hinduism, and Christianity. We will look at sacred texts and secondary sources to get an idea about the 'parts' that any religion has, and about how they work together. We'll also look at these sources to get a sense of the ways in which religions orient people, in their worldviews, in the way they organize their communities and the spaces in which they reside, in the way they express themselves, in their feelings, and in their actions. It is, therefore, an introduction to the study of religions using a comparative method.

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, such as sacred symbols, scripture, ritual, community, and institution.
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?
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.

Getting in touch:

Come to my office hours, or e-mail me at msegol@skidmore.edu

Required Texts:

1. Diana Eck: Darsan
2. New Oxford Annotated Bible
3. Sheiman, Bruce: An Atheist Defends Religion
4. Coursepack

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance. Attendance is required. You will lose points after three absences, and if you miss seven or more classes, you will fail.

2. Reading. You are required to do ALL of the reading for this course. You will be accountable for it in a variety of ways throughout the term, including informed class participation, reading questions, and contribution to class discussion.

3. Class participation: (10 points) Class participation is a must. I will lecture for less than half of each class, while the remainder of most meetings will consist of structured class discussion. You will be graded on your informed participation.

4. Reflection Papers: I've assigned 6 reflection papers at 8 points apiece, plus two points added when they are all handed in (**50%** total).

5. Site visit assignment (50%)

READINGS

Week 1:

Wed, 9/7 Intro

Week 2: The beginning

Mon, 9/12 Sheiman: intro plus pp 1-15

Wed, 9/14

1. Enuma Elish: Tiamath (CP-1)
2. Hebrew Bible (henceforth HB): Genesis 1- 2:3

Reading question: How are these two narratives similar and different?

Week 3: People

Mon, 9/19

3. Purusha (the Purusha-Sukta) (CP-2)
4. Crucifixion: Sacrifice of Jesus: New Testament (henceforth, NT) Matthew 26: 1-29; Galatians 3:1-29, & Second Corinthians 5:11-18

Reading question: Compare these to one another and to Genesis 1 and the Tiamath narrative.

Wed, 9/21

1. Epic of Gilgamesh: The Coming of Enki-du (CP-3)
2. HB: Genesis 2:4 -4:2
3. JZ Smith, from *Map Is Not Territory*, pp. 299-309 (CP-4)

Reading Question: What sorts of stories are these? And what do they do?

Reflection Paper 1: Due Mon, 9/26 How do the stories of the creation of the world also speak about social order? Use the readings of 9/12-9/26 to answer this question.

Week 4, People, continued

Mon, 9/26

1. David Kinsley, *Hinduism*. Caste: Ordering Society. (CP-5)
2. NT, Ephesians 5:21-32 Corinthians, Ephesians: 5:22; Galatians 3:15-29

Wed, 9/28

1. Durkheim, from Paden, *Introducing Religion*, pp. 99-116 (CP-6)
2. Sheiman, Ch 2: Religion is Caring for Community

Reading Question: Do these writings say the same thing, or different things? What are the similarities and differences?

Week 5 People and God

Mon, 10/3

1. HB: Moses on the Mountain, Exodus 19-25; Ezekiel, 1-2
2. From *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto, Chs. 2 and 4, pp 5-7 and 13-24 (CP-7)

Reflection Paper 2: Due Wednesday, 10/5

We have read three theorists on power in religion: Durkheim, Sheiman, and Otto. In each of these, where does the power come from, and what is its best or most important use?

Answer the above question and then choose one of these theorists to analyze the readings of 9/21 and 9/28.

Wed, 10/5

1. Judaism: Abraham and the Idols (CP-8)
2. Christianity: John of Damascus, *On Icons* (CP-9)

Week 5: People and God: Seeing, believing

Mon, 10/10

1. John of Damascus, continued.
2. Mircea Eliade: from *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 21-47 (CP-10)

Wed, 10/12

1. Watch: *Icon*, and discuss using Otto and Eliade

Reflection Paper 3: Due Monday, 10/17

How does the sacred present itself in the sources we've read and viewed from 10/5-10/12? Use Eliade and Sheiman to conceptualize this.

Week 6: People and God: Seeing, continued.

Mon, 10/17

1. From Morgan, *Visual Piety*, Ch. 4 "Reading the Face of Jesus," pp. 124-143; 150-1 (CP-11)

Wed, 10/19

1. Watch: 330 Million Gods

2. Read: *Darsan: Seeing the Sacred*, pp. 3-31

Week 7: People and God: Seeing, cont.

Mon, 10/24

1. From Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, Chapter 4, "Religion as a Cultural System" pp. 89-125 (CP-12)

Wed, 10/26

1. *Darsan: Seeing the Sacred*. Reading: Eck, pp. 23-58
2. Krishna: Divine Play, Hindu myths (CP-13).

Reflection Paper 4: Due Wed, 10/26

Use Geertz and Eliade to describe the function of sacred images in these sources (10/5, 10/10, 10/12, 10/19)? This is to say: make an argument about whether they are acting as Geertz says sacred symbols do, or as Eliade does, or both.

Week 8: Seeking, Seeing

Mon, 10/31

1. Mira Bai: Poems of Devotion. Readings: Bhakti poems (CP-14),
2. Excerpted from Haberman: Journey through the Twelve Forests (CP-15)

Wed, 11/2

1. Song of Songs 1 and 5
2. NT: Revelations 3; (esp 3:20)
3. NT: John 7: esp 7:38

Reading question: Symbols, feelings, bodies, God. Let's talk about them. More specifically: what is actually happening in the Song of Songs? How do we know? What about in the NT material?

Week 9: Seeking

Mon, 11/7

1. Early Christian Writers on *Song of Songs* 5 (CP-16)
2. Rav Kook on Song of Songs: <http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHIR61.htm> (CP-17)

Reading question: how do these writers interpret the Song of Songs? Do you agree with their interpretations?

Reflection Paper 5: Due Mon, 11/7

What kind(s) of love do these texts discuss? What is its source, and what do the characters do with it? What should the reader do with these stories, according to the texts?

Wed, 11/9

1. HB on Pilgrimage: Deut 16: 1-17 and Psalm 84
2. Selection from *Pilgrimage of Egeria* (CP-18)
3. Grimes on Ritual (CP-19)

Reading question: why do people perform the ritual of pilgrimage? What does it accomplish, how does it feel, and what does it mean to them?

Week 10: Seeking

Mon, 11/14

1. Mary of Egypt (CP-20)

Reading question: How and why do people travel in this text and how is it made meaningful to them? Compare it to others?

Wed, 11/16

1. Babb: Divine Hierarchy, Food of the Gods, pp 31-68 (CP-21)

Mon, 11/21 NO CLASS due to the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

Thanksgiving Break 11/23-7

Week 11:

Food taboos

Monday, 11/28

1. HB Leviticus ch.11, plus 21:16-23 and 22:17-25
2. NT on the Eucharist: Mark 14:22-4; 1 Corinthians, 11:23-34.
3. From Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (CP-22)

Wed, 11/30

1. Good to Eat? By Marvin Harris (CP-23)
2. Marvin Harris, India's Sacred Cow (CP-24)

Reading question: Which of these writers makes more sense, Harris or Douglas, and why? How do these attitudes toward food taboos reflect ideas about religion?

Week 12: Redefining Religion

Mon, 12/5

1. Lincoln, from *Holy Terrors*, pp 1-18, appendices, A and B (CP-25)
2. HB: Leviticus 10 and 15

Reflection Paper 6: Due Mon, 12/5

Discuss Lincoln's definition of religion: What is Lincoln's definition of religion? How does it relate to previous theorists we have read? What do you think of his definition?

Wed, 12/8

1. Sheiman, Ch.6: Religion, Fundamentalism, and Violence, pp 116-41; epilogue, 221-6
2. Sam Harris, End of Faith, pp 11-23; 38-49(CP22)

Reading question: Bringing it home. Think about these sources' understanding of religion and how it works. How do they accord with yours?

Visitation Assignment is due Wed, 12/14

Guidelines to follow

Assignment Guidelines:

Reflection Paper Guidelines:

1. Papers should be 4-6 paragraphs long. They should be double-spaced, and in 12-point font with one-inch margins. This should be about two pages in length.
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 got this idea.
4. Citations: The following items must be cited:
 - a. language 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. 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.
7. Failure to cite your sources properly is **plagiarism** and will be treated as such.