

Introduction to the Comparative Study of Religion

Religious Studies 101

Fall 2023

Professor Todd T. Lewis

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1-2 PM || Wednesdays, 2-3 PM || and by appointment
425 SMITH HALL E-Mail: tlewis@holycross.edu

Course Description

An introductory survey of the phenomenon of religion in comparative perspective. The scope will extend from prehistory to the modern day; we will examine this universal human reality across the diversity of its global manifestations. The concept of "religious tradition" will be our chief organizational focus, with attention to the major case studies. Important analytical paradigms that have been useful for interpreting religious belief and praxis will be utilized, explored, and analyzed.

Course Design

The course is organized around a textbook that provides a sample of descriptive and analytical approaches to religion. This is supplemented by short course CANVAS readings, an ethnographic text, a novel, readings on Chinese mysticism, and lecture presentations. The term study plan will be to ask you to learn through a series of thematic case studies.

Lectures complement the readings and video assignments *but do not replace them*. Required Readings indicated in the syllabus should be completed before the designated class. For class, papers, and the final examination, they should be analyzed carefully. Standard reading assignments and lectures are central to our course of study and the exams; slides and films are also integral to developing a visually-informed understanding of religious tradition. Class participation includes bringing the pertinent books and collective photocopied handouts to class. Other policies on attendance, academic integrity, and accommodations are on the course Canvas web page.

For some classes designated "Discussion Forum," each student must bring the reading(s) and written discussion points, if requested. During these sessions, every member of class is expected to come prepared to share in adding to their class' learning experience. *Informed participation is figured into the term's grading.*

Course Requirements:

1. Class Attendance and Participation. Viewing Required Films
2. Four papers: (Separate Guidelines will be distributed for each)
 1. Religious Autobiography. A personal religious life history. *Due: 9/6*
 2. Research Paper. Analysis of a symbol from a world religion. *Due: 10/19*
 3. Exploration in the Philosophy of Religion. *Due: 11/11*
 4. Religious Encounter. Account of a religion not your own, using an analytical perspective from the course. *Due: 12/8*
3. MAP Assignment. *Due: 9/14*
4. Comprehensive Final Exam during the exam period

Schema for Course Grading

1. Papers I/II: 10/10	20
2. Paper III	15
3. Paper IV	20
5. Final Exam	30
6. Class Participation	15
	100 points

Required Course Books: *[all ordered at the Holy Cross Bookstore]*

Piers Vitebsky, *Shamanism*. Norman, OK.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*. NY: New Directions, 1966

John Lundquist, *The Temple*. Thames and Hudson, 2012.

Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007.

Howard Smith, *The Wisdom of the Taoists*. NY: New Directions, 1984.

Abraham Maslow. *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*. NY: Penguin, 1976.

T.R. Reid, *Confucius Lives Next Door*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Course CANVAS Readings [CCR]

Recommended Reading:

J. Esposito, D. Fasching, T. Lewis, *World Religions Today*. 7th ed. NY: Oxford University Press, 2021



Lecture Topics and Assignments

I. Foundations

"All genuine learning is active, not passive. It involves the use of the mind not just the memory. It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher." --Mortimer Adler

"There is no god in all the earth but in Israel." – Hebrew Bible, II Kings 5:15

☪ "Truth is one; the wise define it differently." – Hindu text

1. 8/29: First Class: Attendance, Questionnaires, Course Overview

2. 8/31: Introductory Perspectives on the Study of Religion; Ethnocentrism; The Vocabulary and Grammar of Religious Traditions

Required Reading:

Religious Worlds, 1-12; 15-33; 35-49; 50-65 [CCR]

Peter Berger "Religion as Social Construction of Meaning" [CCR]

Mircea Eliade "Cosmos and Chaos" [CCR]

3. 9/5: 🗣️ Discussion Forum 📖 Topic: "Terms of Cross-Cultural Study"

Required Reading:

Lutheran Church "Guidelines for Inclusive Language" Boyce Rensberger, *"Forget the Old Labels: Here's a New Way to Look at Race"*, Gerald Berreman, "A Naive View of Normative Theory" [MCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, Chapter 1

9/6, 12 Noon: PAPER #1 DUE

II. The History of Religions

"Humankind for 99% of its existence (300,000 years) has lived as a hunter-gatherer; until 10, 000 years ago, our species was just another animal." - Paul Bohannon
 "Give me but one spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth." -- Archimedes

4. 9/7 Prehistory I: Neolithic Evidence; Totemism

Required Reading:

Tom Brown, "Hunting Ethics" [MCR]

Further Reading:

Todd T. Lewis, "Indigenous Religions," chapter 2 in *World Religions Today*, [CCR]

5. 9/12: Religion in Tribal Societies and the Shaman

Required Reading:

Piers Vitebsky, *Shamanism*. Chapters 4-end

Richard Katz, "The !Kung Approach to Healing" [CCR]



6. 9/14: The Axial Age and the Development of "Great Traditions"

Required Reading:

Thomas Kirsch, "God Against the Gods" [CCR]

🗺️ MAP ASSIGNMENT DUE 🌐🌐🌐

7. 9/19: Animism Film: "Dead Birds"

Required Reading:

Robert Gardner and Karl Heider "Ghosts"

Piers Vitebsky, *Shamanism*. Chapters 1-3

III. The Psychology of Religion

"The reader is invited to direct his/her mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience... I speak of a 'numinous' state of mind.... irreducible to any other, that cannot be taught; it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes of the 'spirit' must be awakened." -- Rudolf Otto

8. 9/21: Religion and the Psyche; "Techniques of the Sacred"

Required Reading:

Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, & Peak Experiences*, 1-39

"Cases of Religious Experience, Near Death" [CCR]

9. 9/26: 🗣️ Discussion Forum 📖 Topic: "The Psychology on Religious Experience"

Required Reading:

Religions, Values, & Peak Experiences, 54-68; 91-102

C.G. Jung "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" [CCR]

Sigmund Freud "The Future of an Illusion" [CCR]

IV. Religion and Society

"There are times and situations in which human beings seek contact ... to have a center for their societies... They need to transcend themselves as individuals in collectivities which are arranged about a central repository of vital things." -- Edward Shils Tradition

10. 9/28: Inventory of Human Collectivities and Religious Specialists

Required Reading:

Hermann Hesse *Siddhartha* [start...]

11. 10/3: 🗣️ Discussion Forum 📖 Topic: "Prophets"

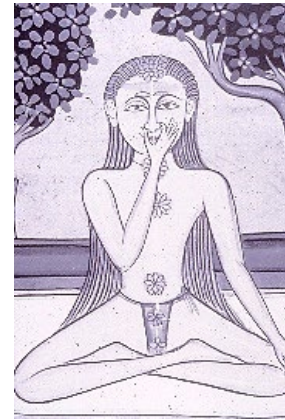
Required Reading:

Prophets from the Bible [CCR]

Muhammed from the Quran [CCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 84-91; 228-236



12. 10/5: 🗣️ Discussion Forum 📖 Topic: "Sages"

Required Reading:

Hermann Hesse *Siddhartha* [finished]

Fall Break 🏔️ 🏠 🌲 🍂 🏔️

V. The Art of Devotion: Sacred Space and Symbols of the Divine

"Humans everywhere program their inner senses with the care and genius with which they program their outer environment." -- Edmund Carpenter

13. 10/17: Sacred Space and Religious Architecture; Video: "Cathedral"

Required Reading

John Lundquist, *The Temple*. Thames and Hudson, 2012.

14. 10/19: Symbols of Faith & Devotion ** In-class Presentations **

PAPER #2 Due

VI. Cognitive Religion: Myths, Texts, and Belief Systems

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" --Shakespeare (Hamlet)

"Confused, boundless, and restlessly changing: Are we dead ? Are we alive ? Are we in union with heaven and earth ? Do our spirit and intelligence go somewhere? Are we troubled as to what our end might be or are we indifferent as to where we are going ? Creation wraps us around but provides no adequate resting place. Chuang Tzu also heard their views and delighted in them." -- Taoist text

15. 10/24 The Reality of Myth and the Universality of Magical Thinking

Required Reading:

Religious Worlds, 69-92

"Creation Myths" [CCR]; "Seven Rules of Magical Thinking" [CCR]

16. 10/26: The Spectrum of the World's Religious Views; The Universality of Skepticism

Required Reading:

Religious Worlds, 21-140; 141-158 [CCR]

"Theology and Falsification"; Richard Dawkins, "Viruses of the Mind", "Hell"; "How Critical Thinkers Lose their Faith" [CCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 18-23; 318-333

17. 10/31: Mysticism: Western [=Islam] and; Video: "Sufism"

Required Reading:

Poems of Rumi [CCR]

The Wisdom of the Taoists (first half)

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 236-251; 254-257; 499-509; 514-519

18. 11/2: Discussion Forum Topic: Asian (Chinese Daoism)

Required Reading:

The Wisdom of the Taoists (-end)

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 499-509; 514-519

19. 11/7: Discussion Forum Sage Tradition: Confucianism

Required Reading:

Daniel Gardner, trans. *The Four Books*

11/8: PAPER #3 Due



VII. Religion as Action: Ritual, Festival, Pilgrimage

"The heart has its reasons, for which the logical mind is too stupid -- or too proud -- to appreciate." -- Robert Solomon

"Tersely stated, Religion is preparation to receive Truth." -- Fred Underwood

20.11/9: Ritual and Magic;; The Ecology of Ritual

Required Reading:

Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 93-120 [CCR]

Marvin Harris "Mother Cow," [CCR]

21. 11/14: Festivals and Pilgrimage

Required Reading:

McKim Marriot "The Feast of Love" [CCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 358-371





22. 11/16: Video: "Mecca the Forbidden City"

Required Reading:

"Fulfilling the Hajj" [CCR]

11/22: Death and Death Ritualism

Required Reading:

"Death and the Self" and Selections [CCR]

VIII. Religion in the Modern Era

*"We have not ceased from exploration// And the end of all our exploring //
Will be to arrive where we started// And know the place for the first time."*

-- T.S. Eliot (*Four Quartets*)



23. 11/28: The Enlightenment & Modern Religious Traditions; Religion and Colonialism; Humanism and Romanticism; "Fundamentalism"

Required Reading:

"Modernity" and Poetry Selections [CCR]

Karl Marx "Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy" [CCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, Chapter 1; 603-616

Recommended Viewing: "The Mission"



24. 11/30: Discussion Forum Topics: Nationalism and Civil Religion

Required Reading:

Robert Bellah, "American Civil Religion" [CCR]

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 546-7; 583-584

Recommended Viewing: "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"

25. 12/5: 21st Century's Pivotal Encounter: Confucian East Asia

Required Reading:

T.R. Reid, *Confucius Lives Next Door*

Further Reading:

World Religions Today, 494-496; 548-551; 568-572

26. 12/7: LAST CLASS..... Case Studies: Reporting on the Encounter

Required Reading:

Religious Worlds, 161-170 [CCR]

12/11, 3 PM: Paper #4 Due

Reading Period: Review Session

EXAM PERIOD: COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAMINATION

