Introduction to the Comparative Study of Religion
Religious Studies 101 Spring 2013

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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 explored and analyzed. In the spring term of 2013, special attention will be devoted to the modern encounter with other faiths.

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 E-RES 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. Please bring the pertinent books and collective xerox handouts to class.

For some classes designated “Discussion Forum,” each student must bring the reading(s) and written discussion points. During these sessions, every member of class is expected to come prepared to share responsibility for 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: 1/31
   3. Exploration in the Philosophy of Religion. Examination of a critical belief or fundamental sacred idea. Due: 4/8
   4. Religious Encounter. An account of a religion not your own, reported using an analytical perspective from the course. Due: 5/2
3. MAP Assignment Due 2/13
4. Comprehensive Final Exam during the exam period
Schema for Course Grading

1. Papers I/2  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]
Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha. NY: New Directions, 1966

Course E-RES Readings

Recommended Reading:

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. 1/23: First Class: Attendance, Questionnaires, Course Overview

2. 1/28: 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
Peter Berger "Religion as Social Construction of Meaning" [E-RES]
Mircea Eliade "Cosmos and Chaos" [E-RES]
3. 1/30: Discussion Forum Topic: “Terms of Cross-Cultural Study”
   Required Reading:
   Lutheran Church "Guidelines for Inclusive Language" [E-RES]
   Gerald Berreman "A Naive View of Normative Theory" [E-RES]
   The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion, 1-26

Further Reading:
World Religions Today, Chapter 1

1/31, 6 PM: 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 Bohannan

"Give me but one spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth." -- Archimedes

4. 2/4 Prehistory I: Neolithic Evidence; Totemism
   Required Reading:
   Tom Brown, "Hunting Ethics" [E-RES]
   Todd T. Lewis, “Primal Religions” in World Religions Today, 2nd ed. [E-RES]

5. 2/6: Animism Film: "Dead Birds"
   Required Reading:
   Robert Gardner and Karl Heider "Ghosts" and "Irish Fairy and Folk Tales" [E-RES]

6. 2/11: Religion in Tribal Societies and the Shaman
   Required Reading:
   Piers Vitebsky, SHAMANISM. University of Oklahoma Press, 2001

7. 2/13: The Axial Age and the Development of “Great Traditions”
   Required Reading:
   The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion, 27-103

MAP ASSIGNMENT DUE

III. 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. 2/18: Religion and the Psyche; "Techniques of the Sacred"
   Required Reading:
   Abraham Maslow, Religions, Values, & Peak Experiences, 1-39
   “Cases of Religious Experience,” [E-RES]
9. 2/20: Discussion Forum Topic: "Psychology on Religious Experience"

Required Reading:
Religions, Values, & Peak Experiences, 54-68; 91-102
C.G. Jung "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" and Sigmund Freud "The Future of an Illusion" [E-RES]

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. 2/25: Human Collectivities and Religious Specialists
Required Reading:
Hermann Hesse Siddhartha

11. 2/27: Discussion Forum Topic: “Prophets and Sages”
Required Reading:
Hermann Hesse Siddhartha [finished]
Prophets from the Bible [E-RES]
The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion, 188-217

Further Reading: World Religions Today, 279-289;

Spring Break!

12. 3/11: Discussion Forum Topic: Dilemmas of Religious Institutions
Required Reading:
Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor" [E-RES]

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. 3/13: Symbols of Faith & Devotion ** In-class Presentations **
PAPER #2 Due

14. 3/18: Sacred Space and Religious Architecture
Required Viewing: “Cathedral”
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. Chuangtzu also heard their views and delighted in them." -- Taoist text

15. 3/20: The Reality of Myth
   Required Reading:
   Religious Worlds, 69-92
   "Creation Myths" [E-RES]

16. 3/25: The Spectrum of the World’s Religious Views; Skepticism
   Required Reading: Further Reading:
   Religious Worlds, 121-140; 141-158        World Religions Today, 50-55; 150
   "Theology and Falsification" [E-RES]

17. 3/27: Mysticism: Western=Islam; Video: "Sufism"
   Required Reading: Further Reading:

4/1: No Class, Easter Break

   Required Reading: Further Reading:
   The Four Books            World Religions Today, 444-447; 282-285

19. 4/8: Discussion Forum Topic: Death in World Religions
   Required Reading:
   "Death and the Self" and Selections [E-RES]
   The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion, 135-156

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. 4/10: Ritual and Magic; The Ecology of Ritual
   Required Reading: Further Reading:
21.4/15: Festivals and Pilgrimage; Video: "Mecca the Forbidden City"
Required Reading:
McKim Marriot "The Feast of Love" and "Fulfilling the Hajj" [E-RES]
Further Reading: World Religions Today, Chapter 4

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)

22. 4/17: The Enlightenment & Modern Religious Traditions; Religion and Colonialism; Humanism and Romanticism; Fundamentalism"
Required Reading: Further Reading
"Modernity” and Poetry Selections [E-RES] World Religions Today, Chapter 1
Karl Marx "Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy" [E-RES]
Recommended Viewing: "The Mission"

23. 4/22: Discussion Forum Topics: Nationalism and Civil Religion
Required Reading:
Robert Bellah, "American Civil Religion" [E-RES]
Recommended Viewing: "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"

24. 4/24: 21st Century's Pivotal Encounter I: Confucian East Asia
Required Reading:
T.R. Reid, Confucius Lives Next Door
Further Reading: World Religions Today, 430-438; 441-4; 447-449; 455-465; 505-9

25. 4/29: Case Studies: Reporting on the Encounter
26. 5/1: Case Studies: Reporting on the Encounter II
Required Reading:
Religious Worlds, 161-170

5/2, 6 PM: Paper #4 Due

27. 5/6: 21st Century's Pivotal Encounter II: Islam
The Future of Religion; Reflections on Comparative Religion
Required Reading:

EXAM PERIOD: COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAMINATION