Introduction to Religious Studies  
Religious Studies 10100

MW 1:30-2:50  
Swift 208

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Office Hours: Monday 12:30-1:30 or by appointment

This course is intended to be an introduction to some of the central concerns, problems, methodologies, and materials that pertain to the academic study of religion. Students will be exposed to a set of primary and secondary sources grouped around three groups of three broad themes: Belief, Reason, Experience; Text, Scripture, Canon; and Time, Space, Ritual.

Preparation in advance of class reading assignments and participation in class discussion is extremely important. For each class period you will be required to write a paragraph or so of reflections on the day’s readings which you will post on our classroom bulletin board through https://chalk.uchicago.edu/. These postings will not be graded, but timely and thoughtful completion of them will count towards your participation mark. Your reflections can be any combination of: (1) an idea or theme that struck you, and why; (2) a question you had about the reading that would be suitable for class discussion, (3) a point of clarification about something in the text or (4) a substantive response to a posting made by another student. You are invited and encouraged to post to this board as often as you wish and to use it as a forum of debate and discussion. You are also permitted to post to the board anonymously, as long as you do not use the board to flame other students in any way, or to behave in a disrespectful manner. If you wish an anonymous posting to count as one of your twice-weekly required postings, send me a private e-mail letting me know you were the author. I would like to use the topics raised on the board as a springboard for our classroom discussions, so please post in advance of the class period in which we will be discussing a given reading. These posting will form part of your class participation grade which will be worth as a whole 30% of your final grade.

You will also be required to write three assignments for this course. The first will be due on October 28 and should be 5-6 pages in length. It is intended as a capstone to our examination of our first theme, Belief, Reason, and Experience. You will be asked to write a paper using the sources we considered in class. The second assignment is a 2 page review of an internet web site devoted to the subject of religion, and it will be due on November 6. The third assignment will be due on December 4 and should be 5-7 pages in length. It is intended as a capstone to our examination of our third theme, Text, Scripture, and Canon.

Books are on reserve at the Regenstein Library. The following book is on order at the Seminary Coop Bookstore:


Other books used often:
Cunningham and Kelsay, The Sacred Quest, 3rd edition [=SQ]
Philosophy of Religions: Selected Readings

Course Outline

Sept. 30 Introduction

Oct. 2 Belief, Reason, and Experience  

Oct. 9  
*Philosophy of Religions: Selected Readings*, pp. 65-98 “faith and reason” (Aquinas, Ibn Rushd, Pascal)  
Ibn Rushd:  Read the Introduction found here:  
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1190averroes.asp  
Aquinas: Read Ch. 3,4,5,6 http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles1.htm#2  
Pascal’s Wager.  Read section 233 of Pensees III only:  
http://www.classicallibrary.org/pascal/pensees/pensees03.htm

Oct. 14  
*Philosophy of Religions: Selected Readings*, pp. 65-98 “faith and reason” (Clifford, James, and Kierkegaard). Other sources for James and Clifford:  
William Clifford.  Read section 1, The Duty of Inquiry:  
http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/w_k_clifford/ethics_of_belief.html  
William James: Read all.  You can skip the first two and the very last paragraphs: http://educ.jmu.edu/~omearawm/ph101willtobelieve.html

Oct. 16  

Oct. 21  
Part I, *Philosophy of Religions*, pp. 10–41 “religious experience” (James, Alston, Proudfoot)

Oct. 23  
**Text, Scripture, Canon**  
“Writing,” *CTRS; SQ*, ch. 4; John 1, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*

Oct. 28  
First Assignment due

Oct. 30  
Exodus 1-3 text and commentary *New Oxford Annotated Bible*; Origen, *Homilies on Exodus*, no. 1; handout on the Glossa Ordinaria; Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu, pp. 318-341  
FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE

Nov. 4  
*Upanishads*, pp. 27-39; *Analects* and *Book of Mencius*, pp. 176-193, both in *Ways of Religion*  
Quran surahs 1, 2:1-20, 22:1-29, 56:1-56; all available via  
http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/quran/

Nov. 6  
Conze, Trans. *Buddhist Scriptures* “The Five Precepts,” “The Advantages of Meditation,” “The Questions of King Milinda ---2a The Chariot, 2b Personal Identity and Rebirth, 2c Personal Identity and karma, 4a Problems of Nirvana, 4b Nature of Nirvana” available via:  
http://www.lojajinarajadasa.com/7.3.g.BuddhistScriptures.html  
*Tao te Ching* 1,2,8,19,22,24,29,33,35,40,43,46-49, 57,76,81 Select your translator:  
SECOND PAPER DUE

Nov. 11  
**Time, Space, Ritual**  
“Territory,” *CTRS*

Nov. 13  
TBA
Assignment #1: DUE OCT. 30
The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to take an argument or theme of interest to you that emerged in the readings and discussion of the first third of the course and to develop it in greater detail in a five to six page paper. Your paper should include a clear statement at the outset of what theme or problem you plan to address and which source or sources you plan to investigate to help you resolve the issue you have chosen to address. Then, you should provide a close analysis of your source or sources to show that you understand the arguments being put forward. Finally, you should make some evaluation of their approach to the theme or problem they discuss. Papers that contrast two different sources taken from different parts of the first unit will be especially appreciated.

Assignment #2: DUE NOV. 6
The internet is a great place to go if you want to learn about something you know nothing about, including religion. The problem is, if you know little or nothing about a subject, how do you evaluate the usefulness and accuracy of the information you find out about it? The purpose of this exercise is to get you to examine a web site dedicated to some aspect of religion and to review it for its accuracy, clarity, and utility. You will be required to write a two-page summary of your findings which should consider such questions as: What is the specific topic this site addresses? What is the purpose of the site? Who is responsible for the site (hint: try curtailing the address in segments to track the site back to its source)? Does the site tell you anything more than you could find out in an encyclopedia? Is the source of the site authoritative, or is the site of dubious value for research purposes? If so, would it be useful for some other kind of user, or is it simply misleading? To what other sites does this site link, and what does that tell you about the site? What kinds of information do you find at the site and how is it organized? You may choose to print some pages of the site as illustrative material. You might find the following web site useful as an overview of how to evaluate a web site:
http://artscience.nku.edu/departments/english/writinginstruction/writingresources/evaluate.html

Assignment #3: DUE DEC. 4
For this assignment I would like you to choose a public religious service in a contemporary tradition to observe and discuss in a 5-7 page paper. I recommend that you select a tradition different from your own, but you may choose not to. In either case, the position you will adopt for the paper is that of the open-minded, academic outsider and your goal is to describe what you see, not to evaluate its merits. You will need to attend this service on several different occasions to write this paper, and you will need to remain respectful of the worshipers. If you would like me to arrange for permission for you to observe a tradition not your own, please ask. Among the things to observe and discuss are:
The building and its furnishings
The people: how do they enter, where do they sit
The ministers/leaders of the worshipers
Interaction between people and ministers
Words: what kind, language, how said or read, repetitions; are they scripted or spontaneous; what kind of texts are used, where do they come from
Music: types, voice, instruments, performers, people, how performed
How color is used; what special clothing is worn
Movements: processions, postures, gestures
Water, food, drink
Smell, incense
Mystery, symbolism