

PHL267, Comparative Religions

02.30-03.45 PM, Tuesday/Thursday

Fall 2017

Judson University, Elgin, Illinois

Instructor: Mark A. Torgerson, Ph.D.

Office: Lindner Tower, third floor, #323

Office hours: 11.00 AM-12.00 PM, on Monday and Wednesday, 01.00-02.15 PM on Tuesday or Thursday, or by appointment

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Course description

Religion is a fundamental expression of human existence. Values and social choices are usually based on religious beliefs. Multiple major world religions exist in our world today and are becoming more prevalent in our North American context. In an effort to become more aware of the priorities and actions of others we will explore the significance of religion, a wide range of religious belief systems and consider the impact of religion on our contemporary culture in this course.

Course objectives

1. Articulate the significance of religion in relation to human existence. The student will be able to describe a range of understandings related to purpose and meaning that people attach to religious practice.
2. Differentiate between religious traditions based on primary and secondary sources. The student will examine the historical context, beliefs, and rituals of multiple belief systems (including indigenous traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).
3. Identify and discuss potential implications of various religious traditions for living in contemporary society. Central to this objective is being able to respond to this question for each religion explored: "To embrace [insert the world religion] as a *way of life* would entail...".
4. Examine and revise the student's own religious understanding. The student will clarify her/his own religious understanding and attain the ability to share informed conversations concerning religion with those who affirm another tradition.

Required texts

Fisher, Mary Pat, and Lee W. Bailey, eds. *An Anthology of Living Religions*. Third edition. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2012. ISBN 978-0-205-24680-9

Fisher, Mary Pat, and Robin Rinehart. *Living Religions*. Tenth edition. Boston: Pearson, 2017. ISBN 978-0-13-416897-5

Course Assignments

1. *Daily forum reflections on reading assignments (no late submissions for daily forums):*

Reflections on world religion overviews: the initial readings concerning world religions are found in the *Living Religions* text by Fisher and Rinehart. The textbook presents a type of overview of the religious tradition, an “outsider” understanding so to speak. In our e-Learn course site forum, respond to the text in this way (a 250-300 word response):

- **Read** the textbook description of the religion
- **Imagine** yourself an adherent to this tradition. How would you *describe* your religion to someone unfamiliar with it (include central beliefs and practices)?
- What do you *wonder* about this tradition?

Reflections on primary sacred texts: excerpts from sacred texts have been assembled in your text *An Anthology of Living Religions* ed. by Mary Pat Fisher and Lee W. Bailey. The primary readings present a type of “insider” view of the religion in that they are written by followers of the tradition. In our e-Learn course site forum, respond to the primary readings in this way (compose a 250-300 word response):

- **Read** the excerpts from the sacred texts
- What is *emphasized* by the writings of this religion?
- What *new insights* have you learned about this tradition?

Reflections on contemporary life: reflections of living out religions in our contemporary world have been assembled in your text *An Anthology of Living Religions* ed. by Mary Pat Fisher and Lee W. Bailey. The readings present a type of “insider” view of the religion in that they are written by followers of the tradition. In our e-Learn course site forum, respond to the readings in this way (compose a 250-300 word response):

- **Read** the excerpts from the texts
- What is *emphasized* in light of our contemporary world?
- What will you keep in mind as you approach adherents of this religion today in light of what you learned?

2. *World religion highlights:* each student will create a summary document of two pages (single spaced) for each world religions. Include the following content:

- Founding figure(s) for the religion (if any)
- Approximate time of origin
- Primary geographical locations in the world for the faith today

- Approximate number of adherents (worldwide). Size in comparison with other world religions (numerical value).
- Primary visual symbol(s) used by this religion (include hand drawings or images of the symbols you note); at least three. Include a description of the significance/meaning of each symbol.
- Primary sacred writings (list of collection/book titles and brief explanation of the contents of each collection/book)
- Primary religious beliefs (at least six; explain them briefly)
- Major festivals/celebrations (at least five; include dates and significance)

Each student is required to prepare her/his outlines **in writing and submit them via the appropriate link on the e-Learn course website by the *last discussion date of the world religion***. *No late submissions* will be accepted.

3. *Film and religion viewing assignment:* each student will watch a film that references the beliefs of one of the following religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, or Shinto. Consider the ways in which the religion is referenced in the film. Identify and evaluate the representation of that religion in the film. Compose a reflection paper on the ways in which the religion was represented in the film. You may choose from the following films (you may choose an alternative too, but please seek approval of the title from the instructor):

Title (director, year), religion

- “The Burmese Harp” (Kon Ichikawa, 1956), Buddhism
- “The Cup”/ “Phörpa” (Khyentse Norbu, 1999), Tibetan Buddhism
- “Himalaya”/ “L’enfance d’un chef” (Eric Valli, 1999), Tibetan Buddhism
- “The Joy Luck Club” (Wayne Wang, 1993), Chinese religion
- “The Mahabharata” (Peter Brook, 1989; television mini-series), Hinduism
- “Princess Mononoke” (Hayao Miyazaki, 1997), Shinto
- “Spirited Away” (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001), Shinto
- “Spring, Summer, Winter, Fall, and Spring” (Ki-duk Kim, 2003), Zen Buddhism
- “The Sun” (Aleksandr Sokurov, 2005), Shinto
- “Yellow Earth”/ “Huang tu di” (Kaige Chen, 1985), Chinese religion

You may view films via DVDs from local libraries, through streaming sources (such as Netflix or Amazon), or from other internet sources, such as Youtube. In your paper, mention both the explicit and implicit ways in which you see the Eastern religion reflected in the film. How is your understanding of the religion enhanced through this depiction? You may consult reviews of the film or essays about the film and its religious content to help uncover some of the connections. You may choose to examine the same material as a colleague in the class. Discuss your observations with one another and help each other discover the ways in which religion is manifest in the work. While you may discuss your thoughts with others, please write an original paper in fulfillment of this assignment. The expected length of paper for this assignment is 1,000-1,200 words (type-written, twelve point font, standard margins, for 8½ by 11 inch paper, with proper spelling and grammar).

Paper due by class on or before 04 November 2017. *No late submissions* will be accepted.

4. *Graphic novel assignments:* each student will read about 100 pages of graphic novel material from a pre-determined list and reflect on the ways in which a primary world religion is referenced in the novel. You may choose from the following graphic novels that are on the reserve bookshelf in the library for this course—except as noted):

For Hinduism [on reserve in the library]

Spider-Man India by Jeevan J. Kang, Suresh Seetharaman and Sharad Devarajan (New York: Marvel Comics, 2005). [Read the whole book.]

For Judaism (choose one of the following to read) [all on reserve in the library]

A Contract with God by Will Eisner (New York: DC Comics, 1996, 2000). [Read the Introduction and Book One: A Contract with God.]

Maus: A Survivor's Tale by Art Spiegelman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997). [Read about 100 pages from Part One: "My Father Bleeds History" OR all of Part Two: "And Here My Troubles Began."]

The Rabbi's Cat by Joann Sfar (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005). [The whole book.]

For Christianity (choose one of the following to read) [all on reserve in the library]

Batman: Absolution by JM DeMatteis (New York: DC Comics, 2003). [The whole book.]

Daredevil—Born Again by Frank Miller (New York: Marvel Comics, 1997). [Read about 100 pages.]

The Kingdom by Mark Waid (New York: DC Comics, 1999). [Read about 100 pages.]

For Islam (PDF files on Blackboard; choose at least two of the following to read) [Posted on the course e-Learn site.]

The 99: Origins by Naif Al-Mutawa and Fabian Nicieza (New York: Teshkeel Comics, 2007).

The 99: Of Light and Dark, Issue 1, by Naif Al-Mutawa and Fabian Nicieza (New York: Teshkeel Comics, 2006).

The 99: No Pain No Gain, Issue 2, by Naif Al-Mutawa and Fabian Nicieza (New York: Teshkeel Comics, 2006).

The 99: Problem Solving, Issue 3, by Naif Al-Mutawa and Fabian Nicieza (New York: Teshkeel Comics, 2006).

Consider each dimension of the story (setting, plot, primary characters, etc., but do not describe this content in your paper). In what ways do you see beliefs, symbols and practices from a world religion present in the material? Record the obvious associations, but discern the deeper connections that might be present as well. How is your understanding of the religion enhanced through this depiction? You may choose to examine the same material

as a colleague in the class. Discuss your observations with one another and help each other discover the ways in which religion is manifest in the work. While you may discuss your thoughts with others, please write an original paper in fulfillment of this assignment. The expected length of paper for this assignment is 1,000-1,200 words (type-written, twelve point font, standard margins, for 8½ by 11 inch paper, with proper spelling and grammar). **Paper due by class on or before 05 December 2017.** *No late submissions* will be accepted.

5. *Off-campus visit reflection papers:* each student will compose a reflection paper following each off-campus visit to a religious site. Failure to attend on the day of an off-campus visit of a sacred site will result in a zero score for the reflection paper for that day. Include the following in your paper:

- Observations of the religious space (exterior and interior), its symbols, colors and organization
- Observations of the objects used for worship practices
- Observations of the rituals used in worship (as far as can be determined without necessarily participating in a worship event)
- Final impressions of the visit

Be sure to allow your readings in your textbooks to enhance your observations. The expected length of paper for this assignment is 500-650 words). The submission must be type-written, twelve point font, standard margins, for 8½ by 11 inch paper, with proper spelling and grammar. **Paper due via e-Learn by the assigned day after the off-campus visit.**

Hindu temple dates: visit—19 September 2017 (Tuesday); paper due—25 September (Monday)

Synagogue dates: visit—26 October (Thursday); paper due—01 November (Wednesday)

Baha'i temple dates: 04 November 2017 (Saturday); paper due—11 November (Saturday)

Mosque dates: visit—16 November 2017 (Thursday); paper due—22 November (Wednesday)

No late submissions of the reflections for the religious site visits will be accepted.

Preparation for Class and Evaluation of Student Work

Classroom correspondence: **ALL classroom correspondence with the instructor will be accomplished via our JUDSON UNIVERSITY e-mail accounts.** Please check your Judson e-mail account frequently.

Attendance at each class session is expected. You may be absent from no more than two class sessions during the semester without a valid excuse. Attendance is defined as being

present in class for the *entire* class period. All excused absences must be processed through the Student Development office or Health Center (no telephone calls or e-mailed notes to the professor). Upon verification of your circumstances the Student Development office or Health Center can contact all of your faculty to inform them of your need for an accommodation. **After two unexcused absences** there will be half a letter grade reduction from the final, overall class grade for each unexcused absence. **When four unexcused absences** have been accumulated, the student will be automatically withdrawn from the course (a grade of WF will be assigned, *withdrawal failure*).

On-time attendance is expected. On-time is defined as arriving at the beginning of our class time. Those who arrive more than seven minutes after class begins will be marked “tardy” for the class. **Three “tardies” will be the equivalent of a class absence** and will be calculated into the overall attendance pattern accordingly.

The *reading of materials before each class* meeting is expected. In order to make the best possible use of our class time for conversation, we will need to be prepared to discuss the material for the day before class. Come to class prepared to ask questions which occurred during your readings. Class participation will be factored into the student’s final grade.

Submission of classroom assignments will occur by uploading the material to class via the e-Learn course website on the due date assigned (by the beginning of class). **No e-mailed submissions of work** will be accepted. **No “make-up” or extra credit work is available in this course.** See the policy below for “late work.”

Your work will be graded according to the *quality of your written and oral contributions*. Evidence of depth in resource consultation, critical reflection, and application will be necessary in order to receive a passing grade on any assignment. Proper grammar, logic, and creativity factor into the evaluation of your work.

In general, here are my expectations for grading:

- “A” is reserved for exceptional work (far above and beyond the requested);
- “B” is assigned to work that is very good, yielding more than was asked;
- “C” is assigned to work that is adequate or that meets the minimum criteria requested of the assignment;
- “D” is inferior work, work that does not meet the necessary minimum requirements;
- “F” is assigned to work that is woefully inadequate in multiple ways.

The relative value of assignments in relation to the final grade is as follows:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Forum reading posts on e-Learn (100 points) | 33% |
| World religion outlines (80 points) | 27% |
| Graphic novel assignment (40 points) | 13% |
| Film and religion assignment (40 points) | 13% |
| Off-campus reflection papers (40 points) | 14% |

The grading scale to be used for determining a final course grade is as follows (in points, 300 maximum):

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| A 300-280 | C+ 239-231 |
| A- 279-270 | C 230-220 |
| B+ 269-261 | C- 219-210 |
| B 260-250 | D 209-180 |
| B- 249-240 | F below 180 |

Cheating/Plagiarism: Honesty in all matters is expected of committed Christians and is a valued principle at Judson University. Members of this community of learners-students, faculty, staff, and administrators-are expected to treat each other as trustworthy, honest, and honorable. Any form of academic dishonesty, which includes cheating, plagiarism, and falsification of documents, constitutes a serious breach of trust. No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated.

In the event of a cheating, plagiarism, or other dishonesty incident, the policies in the Judson University Student Handbook will be observed. All parties involved will be given 0 points for the affected assignment/exam and a letter will be sent to the Vice President of Student Development and the Provost. You will then have the opportunity to respond. Once the process is complete, the final penalty may include an F for the entire course.

Late work policy. Any assignment that is not ready for submission by the assigned due date specified will be considered “late.” No late work is accepted in this course. Extensions for time with respect to the submission of assignments will require verifiable, university-approved circumstances. Each student’s circumstances will be evaluated by the instructor on a case-by-case basis. All petitions for extensions must be in writing stating the specifics of the petition for additional time and must be *approved* by at least one day BEFORE the deadline for the assignment.

“Incomplete” course grade assignments. We will conform to the incomplete course grade policy in the student handbook. Only university-approved circumstances will be considered in relation to receiving a course grade designation of “incomplete.”

Americans with Disability Act Accommodations (ADAA). Judson University is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist students with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If you have a disability that may impact your performance, attendance, or grades in this class and are requesting accommodations, you must contact Gineen Vargas, ADAA Compliance Coordinator in the Student Success Center, located in the Lindner Tower, 2nd floor, at 847-628-1556.

The ADAA Compliance Coordinator is responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities. Accommodations will not be granted prior to receipt of a current licensed clinician report outlining the disability, possible limitations and reasonable accommodations in order to meet the needs of the post-secondary coursework. Accommodations are never provided retroactively – prior to finalization of the Letter of Accommodation. Gineen will be happy to meet with you to discuss your accommodations. All discussions will remain confidential. Further information is available by visiting the Student Success Center website https://myjudson.judsonu.edu/ICS/Student_Success_Center/

Class schedule (revised)

August 2017

- 22 Introductions and class syllabus
- 24 Religious Responses; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 1-32 (tenth edition); pp. 1-32 (ninth edition)
- 29 Religious Responses; READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 2-16, 24-36 (third edition); pp. 2-22, 30-34 (second edition)
- 31 Indigenous Sacred Ways; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 33-71 (tenth edition); pp. 33-70 (ninth edition)

September

- 05 Indigenous Sacred Ways; READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 39-60 (third edition); pp. 37-58 (second edition)
- 07 Hinduism; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 72-118 (tenth edition); pp. 71-120 (ninth edition)
- 12 Hinduism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 64-84; pp. 62-81 (second edition)
- 14 Hinduism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 84-92; pp. 82-90 (second edition). World religion outline for Hinduism due today.
- 19 Hinduism (con.); off-campus visit to Hindu Temple. **[Hindu temple visit reflection paper due 25 September 2017 via e-Learn.]**
- 21 Buddhism; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 136-186 (tenth edition); pp. 137-187 (ninth edition)

- 26 Buddhism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 114-131 (third edition); pp. 113-140 (second edition)
- 28 Buddhism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 131-140 (third edition); pp. 131-138 (second edition). World religion outline for Buddhism due today.

October

- 03 Daoism and Confucianism; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 187-221 (tenth edition); pp. 188-221 (ninth edition)
- 05 Daoism and Confucianism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 144-156; 160-165 (third edition); pp. 142-157; 165-173 (second edition)
- 10 Daoism and Confucianism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 156-160; 165-177 (third edition); pp. 157-162; 173-184 (second edition). World religion outlines for Daoism and Confucianism due today.
- 12 Shinto; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 222-241 (tenth edition); pp. 222-241 (ninth edition)
- 17 Judaism; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 250-304 (tenth edition); pp. 246-301 (ninth edition)
- 19 Judaism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 198-222 (third edition); pp. 187-211 (second edition)
- 24 Judaism (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 222-231 (third edition); pp. 212-219 (second edition). World religion outline for Judaism due today.
- 26 Judaism (con.); off-campus visit to a synagogue. **[Synagogue visit reflection paper due 01 November 2017 via e-Learn.]**
- 31 Christianity; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 305-373 (tenth edition); pp. 302-376 (ninth edition). **[Eastern religion and film paper due by class time today via e-Learn.]**

November

- 02 Christianity (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 235-270 (third edition); pp. 223-264. World religion outline for Christianity due today.
- 07 Islam; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 374-431 (tenth edition); pp. 377-433 (ninth edition)
- 09 *No class today*; required attendance on **Saturday, 11 November 2017**, Baha'i Temple visit (see below).
- 11 **Baha'i Temple visit** [on a SATURDAY]; meet at the front entrance of the Lindner Tower at 08.30 AM. We will carpool to 100 Linden Avenue, Wilmette, Illinois, 60091. READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 473-476 (tenth edition) or pp. 476-479 (ninth edition), AND, *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 343-344 (third edition); pp. 362-363 (second edition). [Upload reflections via the e-Learn website.] **[Baha'i temple visit reflection paper due 18 November 2017 via e-Learn.]**
- 14 Islam (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 275-300 (third edition); pp. 268-294 (second edition)
- 16 Islam (con.); off-campus visit to a mosque **[Mosque visit reflection paper due 21 November 2017 via e-Learn.]**
- 21 No class today; Professor Torgerson is participating in a national professional conference.
- 23 Thanksgiving Break; no class
- 28 Islam (con.); READ: *An Anthology of Living Religions*, pp. 300-313 (third edition); pp. 294-306 (second edition). World religion outline for Islam due today.
- 30 New Religious Movements; READ: *Living Religions*, pp. 456-493 (tenth edition); pp. 458-495 (ninth edition)

December

- 05 **[Eastern/Western religion and graphic novel paper due by today via e-Learn.]**
- 07 Final examination meeting, 10.30 AM-12.30 PM

Note: *Our class syllabus is not a contract and is open to revision by the instructor as necessary.*