

REL 130A: Introduction to Religions  
TR 8:20a-9:50a OL 215

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office hours: TR 10:30a-12:30a and by appointment

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What is religion? A source of social power? The practice of certain rituals around the year? The account of the ultimate truths of the universe? A relationship with the god(s)? An expression of deeper psychological dilemmas? The opium of the people or a source of ethics? In this course we will engage these and other questions by surveying the origins, basic practices, beliefs and scriptures of the major religious traditions of the world (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam). In addition to this, we will explore some classical theories of religion developed by modern intellectuals (Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Mircea Eliade, Clifford Geertz and others). This twofold focus is meant to provide an introductory survey to the academic study of religion.

### Course Objectives

- To gain an adequate sense of conceptual and historical diversity as well as common themes in the study of religion.
- To develop a basic vocabulary for thinking about major questions in the study of religion and to relate these questions to ones that are of contemporary relevance.
- To expand the ability to engage with and write about unfamiliar texts, i.e., to discern arguments, to perceive crucial distinctions, and to find a point of entry that is of particular interest to you.

### Required Texts

- Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge, and Change*. Fifth Edition. NY: McGraw-Hill, 2010.
- James Fieser and John Powers, *Scriptures of the World's Religions*. Fourth Edition. NY: McGraw-Hill, 2011.
- Daniel L. Pals. *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- The rest of the readings will be available electronically, labeled (E) in the course schedule.

### Course Requirements

- Attendance and participation (5% of the final grade). You are expected to attend class having read the material assigned for each meeting. More than two unjustified absences will result in a reduction of your final grade by half a grade.
- Quizzes (10%). The quizzes will not be announced but you can expect perhaps 10-12 quizzes during the semester. Out of these I will consider the best 8 for your final grade
- Reading responses (10%). At least once a week you will provide a brief reflection, a series of questions or reactions on the readings assigned for class (not a summary!). You will post this brief exercise on Moodle the day prior to class.
- Movie review (15%). During the semester we will watch a number of documentaries that explore how each of the traditions that we will study are lived by their practitioners in specific contexts. I will provide more specific guidelines for the review prior to the projection of the documentaries.
- Three exams (2 midterms and a final) (20% each). The exams will be offered in class and will consist of a short answer part and an essay question. The final will be offered on the day assigned by the registrar. For each of the exams a study guide I will provide a study guide.

### Late and Missed Work

- You are responsible for meeting the deadlines regarding the reading responses, the movie review, and taking the exams as scheduled. Late assignments will be accepted without penalty only in the case of medical and family emergencies. Please inform the instructor about such circumstances, through email or during office hours, as soon as possible. The penalty for late work will be 5% of the final grade of that specific assignment per day.

### Academic Honesty

- **Plagiarism Defined:** Plagiarism is turning in or passing off someone else's work as your own. Sometimes, the line between borrowing and stealing is unclear. In an intellectual community, ideas are passed around freely. Most intellectual inquiry could not take place without borrowing from the work of others. Responsible, honest writers indicate their debts to others by clearly citing material that they have borrowed. Irresponsible or dishonest writers often fail to cite their borrowings and thus become guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarized work is easy to recognize because it does not clearly indicate borrowing. It is full of facts, observations, and ideas the writer could not have developed on his or her own and is written in a different style. Experienced writers rely almost as much as plagiarizers on other writers; they know that their ideas are generated in the context of the ideas of others. As a matter of honor, they indicate their debts to other writers and by doing so they more clearly indicate their own original contributions. Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether or not to cite a source. But if you know how to use and cite sources and if you are careful to note borrowings when you are writing your paper, you will never have a problem with plagiarism (for this and other aids regarding what constitutes plagiarism see: <http://www.depauw.edu/admin/arc/W-center/plag.asp>)

### Grade Standards

A, A- Achievement of exceptionally high merit

B+, B, B- Achievement at a level superior to the basic level

C+, C, C- Basic achievement

D+, D, D- Minimum achievement that warrants credit

F Failure: the achievement fails to meet course requirements. The student receives no credit.

\*\* Along with your graded exams and movie review you will receive a grading rubric explaining your score; I will hand a copy of this rubric in class prior to these assignments. \*\*

### American with Disabilities Act

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and University administered activities and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Amendments (ADAAA). Any student who feels she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Coordinator of Academic Success and Student Disability Services, for further information on how to receive accommodations and support. Academic Success and Student Disability Services is located in Harrison Hall, 302 A, 765-658-6267. It is the responsibility of the student to share the letter of accommodation faculty and staff members. Accommodations will not be implemented until the faculty or staff member has received the official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive. It is the responsibility of the student to discuss implementation of accommodations with each faculty and staff member receiving the letter.

**Ground Rules:**

- Lectures will begin promptly at the assigned time. Please try to be on time.
- Please bring your readings to class.
- Cell phones should be in “silent” mode during class. No texting is allowed.
- Laptops, tablets and e-readers are allowed in class for the purpose of taking notes and accessing the readings that are available electronically. Please do not disrupt class by chatting or visiting websites that are not related to our group discussion.

**Schedule of Classes:**

**Week 1 Introduction**

August 25-Introductory remarks- Selections from *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religions* (provided by the instructor)

**Week 2**

August 30-J. Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” (E)

September 1-(Durkheim)-Pals 99-107; 117-42.

**Week 3 Hinduism**

September 6-Molloy 75-95; Fieser and Powers 11-34.

September 8\* - Molloy 95-120; Fieser and Powers 35-50.

\*Fatherhood may make me miss this class meeting. I will keep you all updated.

**Week 4**

September 13- Altar of Fire (film); “Hindus Find a Ganges in Queens, to Park Ranger’s Dismay” (E)

September 15-(Freud) Pals 71-97.

**Week 5 Buddhism**

September 20-Molloy 125-42; Fieser and Powers 88-106.

September 22- Molloy 142-69; Fieser and Powers 107-22.

**Week 6**

September 27- Molloy 170-84; Fieser and Powers 122-7. Wheel of Time (documentary)

September 29- Exam 1

**Week 7 Daoism and Confucianism**

October 4-(Weber)-Pals 237-70.

October 6- -Molloy 213-34; Fieser and Powers 191-209.

**Week 8**

October 11- Molloy 234-58; Fieser and Powers 127; 162-77.

October 13- (Eliade) Pals 271-302.

**Week 9**

October 18 No Class- Fall Break

October 20 No Class-Fall Break

**Week 10 Judaism**

October 25-Molloy 289-313; Fieser and Powers 280-311.

October 27- Molloy 314-38; Fieser and Powers 312-39.

**Week 11**

November 1- A Life Apart (documentary)

November 3-(Marx) Pals 143-70.

**Week 12 Christianity**

November 8-( Molloy 343-63; Fieser and Powers 349-75.

November 10- Molloy 363-83; Fieser and Powers 388-400.

**Week 13**

November 15- Molloy 383-417; Fieser and Powers 401-20.

November 17- Jesus Camp (documentary); Into Great Silence (documentary)

**Week 14 Islam**

November 22-(Geertz)-Pals 341-72.

November 24-No Class-Happy Thanksgiving y'all!

**Week 15**

November 29-Molloy 423-443; Fieser and Powers 433-55.

December 1-Molloy 443-459; Fieser and Powers 456-76. The Hajj (documentary)

**Week 16**

December 6- Molloy 459-84; Fieser and Powers 477-81.

December 8- Religulous (movie)

**Final Exam**

December 16 1:00p-4:00p