

RELIGION 200: Religion and Contemporary Experience – spring, 2003

INSTRUCTOR: Hoyt Oliver. OFFICE: Humanities 204

TEXTS: Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (DOF); Cone, God of the Oppressed (GOTO); Armstrong, The Battle for God (BFG); Christ & Plaskow, Womanspirit Rising (WR); McDaniel, With Roots and Wings (RAW)

REQUIREMENTS: Four tests and one term paper, each counting 20% of credit.

Attendance is expected. Each unexcused absence over 2 deducts 2 points from average.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Th, Jan 16 Getting acquainted; introductory discussion
Tu, Jan 21 DOF, Chs. I & II
Th, Jan 23 DOF, Chs. III & IV
Tu, Jan 28 DOF, Chs. V, VI, Conclusion

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Th, Jan 30 GOTO, Parts I, II, III
Tu, Feb 4 GOTO, Parts IV, V, VI
Th, Feb 6 Film, "Say Amen, Somebody"
Tu, Feb 11 GOTO, Parts VII, VIII
Th, Feb 13 GOTO, Parts IX, X
Tu, Feb 18 **Test # 1**

FUNDAMENTALISM

Th, Feb 20 BFG, Chs. 1,2,3
Tu, Feb 25 BFG, Chs. 4,5,6
Th, Feb 27 BFG, Chs. 7,8
Tu, Mar 4 BFG, Chs. 9,10
Th, Mar 6 **Test # 2** *(no, you may not miss this test to leave early for spring break!)*
Mon, Mar 10 – Fri, Mar 14: spring break, no classes

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Tu, Mar 18 WR, I: Saiving, Ruether, Daly – **Term paper theses, outlines due**
Th, Mar 20 WR, II: Collins, Tribble, Fiorenza, McLaughlin, Pagels
Tu, Mar 25 WR, III: Fiorenza, Collins, Morton
Th, Mar 27 WR, IV: Plaskow, Daly, Washbourn, Starhawk
Tu, Apr 1 **Test # 3** *(no, this is **not** an April Fool prank)*

ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

Th, Apr 3 RAW, Introduction, Chs. 1 & 2
Tu, Apr 8 RAW, Chs 3 & 4
Th, Apr 10 RAW, Chs 5 & 6
Tu, Apr 15 RAW, Chs 7 & 8 – **Term papers due. Penalty for lateness.**
Th, Apr 17 RAW, Chs 9 & 10
Tu, Apr 22 class presentations on papers
Th, Apr 24 class presentations on papers
Tu, Apr 28 class presentations on papers
Wed, May 7, 9:00 – 12:00 a.m. – **Test # 4**

TERM PAPER GUIDE: RELIGION 200

The term paper for Religion 200 is to be an exploration of some **current topic** in religion and contemporary experience. (That is, not an historical or literary exploration.)

Topic may be chosen on some aspect of one of the several areas we cover together in class, or from an area not included in this term's syllabus. (For example: this term, we are not exploring together the religious issues of genetic manipulation.)

Papers must be focused on a central theme to be explored, and should have a clear thesis. No "reports," or general descriptions; there should be a point of view and a question to be explored. (For example: "Allowing women and married men to be ordained as Roman Catholic priests would alleviate the problem of priestly child molestation" is a topic that could well be discussed. "Homosexuality Is a Sin" is not an appropriate paper topic.)

Papers must show extensive reading and thinking. For Religion 200, much of the information you will need to write on a contemporary theme may well be found, not in books, but in journals, magazines, newspapers, and internet sources.

All sources used in paper must be properly credited and documented. Plagiarism is an Honor Code offense. You may use any acceptable form of referencing, but keep it consistent. (e.g. MLA, footnotes, endnotes, etc.) Consult Library resources for questions of proper documentation.

How long must the paper be? Sigh – some anxious or compulsive class member always wants to know that!! **Answer:** Long enough to do justice to the topic you select! Your instructor is of the opinion that an adequate job on this assignment can't be done in fewer than ten or twelve pages, and he won't read anything over forty pages – so somewhere between those limits!

Papers must be turned in on date due; there is a two-point penalty for each day late, including weekend days.

As you are thinking about your paper topic, you may schedule office visits with instructor to talk it over. Have some ideas in mind; instructor will not give you topics, but will explore topics in which you are interested.

“GOALS” FOR RELIGION COURSES
Hoyt Oliver, Oxford College of Emory University

Our esteemed Dean Greene has pointed out to me that, for purposes of accreditation, documentation, accountability, and other academic measurement procedures, all our course syllabi need to include “goals” for the course. Okay, that’s possible. **But** I must set a context by saying that all the spiritual paths with which I am familiar tell me that when I try to achieve salvation, or moksha, or enlightenment by my own efforts and willpower, I haven’t a hope of success! You all are most welcome to set for yourselves lesser goals, such as gaining information, getting a grade of “B,” learning religious practices, satisfying a uniform requirement, and the like – and if you do the course work, you’ll probably achieve that kind of goal.

Krishna says it better than I can, speaking to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita:

“Foolish men talk of religion
in cheap, sentimental words,
leaning on the scriptures: ‘God
speaks here, and speaks here alone.’

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You have a right to your actions,
But never to your actions’ fruits.
Act for the action’s sake.
And do not be attached to inaction.

Self-possessed, act
Without any thought of results,
Open to success or failure.
This equanimity is yoga.

Action is far inferior
To the yoga of insight, Arjuna.
Pitiful are those who, acting,
Are attached to their action’s fruits.

The wise man lets go of all
Results, whether good or bad,
And is focused on the action alone.
Yoga is skill in actions.” (Translation by Stephen Mitchell)

All that said, here are some “results” I hope will happen for you in my religion classes:

- You will be enabled to question the religion of your upbringing, and come back to it with deeper insight.
There is no such thing as second-hand faith.
If I’m uptight about religion it isn’t faith, it’s addiction.
- You will encounter other world-views and religions, and need to ask questions such as,
“Is there any one ‘right’ faith?” “Are all religions talking about the same truth?”
Wer eine religion kennt, kennt keine. (Max Mueller)
If I know only one religion, I know none.
- You will experience the intellectual frustration and delight of having to make connections between religious belief-systems and other word-games such as science, history, art – and arrive at some sense of wholeness/holiness.
Religion is to spirituality as technology is to science
There’s a God-shaped (w)hole in my universe!
- You will learn a huge vocabulary of technical jargon in religions from which you can spout terms to impress your friends and relatives and show them that your tuition may be well-spent:
- *satori—OM—transcendence—immanence—eschatology—prajnaparamita—ontology—incarnation—avatar—theodicy—bhakti—ruach—pneuma—Tao—ad infinitum! And, have fun!*

