

RELIGION 200: RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE FALL, 2004

INSTRUCTOR: Hoyt Oliver. Office: Humanities 204. Tel.: 784-8369

TEXTS: Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor (O'C); Seyed Hossein Nasr, The Heart of Islam (Hol); Robert Wuthnow, After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s (AH); Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth (DoE); Matthew Fox, One River, Many Wells (OR)

REQUIREMENTS: 3 tests (45%); 5 essays (25%); 1 term paper (30%)

Attendance is expected. Each unexcused absence over 3 deducts 2 points from final average

All work is to be done in accord with the Honor Code of Oxford College.

PERSPECTIVE I: "FIGHTING RELIGION"

- Wed Aug 25 Introductory session
Fri Aug 27 O'C: "The Enduring Chill" and "Revelation"
Mon Aug 30 O'C: The Violent Bear It Away, chs 1-7
Wed Sep 1 O'C: The Violent Bear It Away, chs 8-12
Fri Sep 3 Essay 1: "O'Connor's Portrayal of Religion/Spirituality" – class discussion

PERSPECTIVE II: "ISLAM – THE STRAIGHT PATH"

- Wed Sep 8 Film on Islam
Fri Sep 10 Hol: Preface, chs One and Two
Mon Sep 13 Hol: Chs Three and Four
Wed Sep 15 Hol: Chs Five and Six
Fri Sep 17 Hol: Ch Seven and Epilogue
Mon Sep 20 Essay 2: "Islam in Today's Political Scene: How to Understand?" – class discussion
Wed Sep 22 **TEST # 1**

PERSPECTIVE III: "RELIGIOUS, OR 'SPIRITUAL'? UPTIGHT OR LOOSE?"

- Fri Sep 24 AH: Chs 1,2,3
Mon Sep 27 AH: Chs 4,5
Wed Sep 29 AH: Chs 6,7
Fri Oct 1 Essay 3: "Oxford Students: Religious or Spiritual? – Two Interviews" – class discussion

PERSPECTIVE IV: "EARTH SPIRITUALITY: THE UNIVERSE STORY"

- Mon Oct 4 Film, "Evolving Soul"
Wed Oct 6 DoE: Introduction, Chs 1,2,3
Fri Oct 8 DoE: Chs 4,5,6
Mon Oct 11 Midsemester break – no class
Wed Oct 13 DoE: Chs 7,9 – **Term paper proposals due**
Fri Oct 15 DoE: Chs 10,12
Mon Oct 18 DoE: Chs 15, 16
Wed Oct 20 Guest speaker on Earth Spirituality
Fri Oct 22 Essay 4: "Awakening to the Earth: How Can Healing Happen?" – class discussion
Mon Oct 25 **TEST # 2**

PERSPECTIVE V: "VISIONING THE WHOLE: DEEP ECUMENISM"

- Wed Oct 27 Film, "Soul of the Universe"
Fri Oct 29 OR: Introduction, Chs 1 & 2 – **Term paper synopsis, outline, bibliography due**
Mon Nov 1 OR: Chs 3,4
Wed Nov 3 OR: Chs 5,6
Fri Nov 5 OR: Chs 7,8,9
Mon Nov 8 OR: Chs 10, 11
Wed Nov 10 OR: Chs 12, 13
Fri Nov 12 OR: Chs 14, 15
Mon Nov 15 OR: Chs 16, 17
Wed Nov 17 OR: Chs 18, Epilogue
Fri Nov 19 Essay 5: "How I'm Wondering: Response to Spiritual Perspectives" – class discussion
Mon Nov 22 **TERM PAPERS DUE, AT CLASS TIME**
Wed Nov 24, Fri Nov 26 Thanksgiving break

Mon, Nov 29 – Mon Dec 8: Class presentations, discussions of term papers

Tuesday, Dec. 14, 2-5: **TEST # 3**

SUGGESTIONS ON STUDYING FOR RELIGION COURSES

Hoyt Oliver, Oxford College of Emory University

I've been addicted to education all my life, so what I'm passing on to you all comes mostly out of experience; I'm not bothering to back it up with references to all the brilliant scholarly studies on learning. My grandmother was my first grade teacher; she'd gotten me hooked on reading by the time I was four, and I haven't been able to escape learning since. Anyway, it's fun to follow the Golden Rule of Teaching: "Do Unto Others As Was Done Unto You!" Here's some suggestions that have worked pretty well for me:

ON STUDYING TEXTBOOKS:

1. When you first get a book for a course, take a little time for a preview. Look at the table of contents to see where you're going. Then speed-read through the book, putting your mind in neutral, just flipping the pages as fast as suits you and letting key headings, terms, charts, pictures, etc. register without stopping to think. Depending on the book, the subject matter, and your already-existing familiarity with the field, this could take from three minutes to an hour.
2. Read the portion assigned on the course syllabus BEFORE the date it's to be discussed in class, BUT DON'T UNDERLINE ANYTHING ON FIRST READING. You don't yet know what are the key points.
3. After class discussion, or at a later time, go back for a more intentional study of the material. Underline or highlight, make marginal notes, whatever helps you. BUT DON'T LEAVE OUT STEP 4:
4. WRITE OUT FOR YOURSELF A CHART of the chapter or other unit you're studying. Put it in organized "picture" form, with clear sections, very short phrases summing up content, diagrams that capture the structure. There are several reasons to do this: a) you're having to be intentional, making the effort to identify the structure of the material; b) you're an active learner, using your hands as well as your eyes and ears; c) since you've made the effort to chart, chances are that when you come to be tested on the material if you recall a part of it, the whole picture will come back to you.
5. KEEP A SECTION OF YOUR NOTES FOR KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS. In religion courses, you're likely to have to learn a large technical vocabulary of philosophical concepts and terms in foreign languages such as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Chinese. Identify these terms, from boldface or italicized words in texts, terms presented in class, glossaries in textbooks, indexes, etc. Try writing out short, brilliant explanations of the terms.

ON STUDYING IN GENERAL, AND ON STUDYING FOR EXAMS:

1. Establish for yourself a disciplined, orderly schedule for studying, so that there's no question that at a certain time on a certain day, you'll be in your study-place doing just studying. (I myself don't follow this advice much.)
2. It's much better to come back to the same material two or three times in short sessions than to go past your attention-endurance-limit in long sessions.
3. KEEP UP WITH YOUR COURSES ALL ALONG, DON'T PUT OFF STUDYING AND TRY TO CRAM BEFORE SCHEDULED EXAMS! (I have little sympathy for students who try to stay up studying the night before a test, and then gripe because the electricity or the fire alarm went off.) It's much more relaxing and stress-reducing to do your studying regularly, review well in advance of a test, then the day or evening before an exam, quit studying and do something relaxing to you. (When I was an Oxford student, I used to camp out in the woods during finals with no textbooks, just coming in for tests.)
4. If you find it helpful to study together with fellow class members, STUDY TOGETHER EARLY, NOT ON THE NIGHT BEFORE A TEST. Save your final review to do on your own. One reason for this is that, if you're studying together and somebody asks about some information, when you give them an answer

your mind goes, "Whew! I knew that one!" and LETS GO OF IT! So you need to come back to recharge the brain-cells by yourself after studying together.

Study suggestions for religion courses: page two

5. In Oliver courses, students get their exam papers back. There may be old tests floating around the campus for the course you're taking. I don't mind if you look at old exams, but BEWARE: IN MY RELIGION COURSES, THE QUESTIONS MIGHT BE THE SAME, BUT THE RIGHT ANSWERS COULD CHANGE EVERY SEMESTER!

ON WRITING PAPERS:

1. A major term paper assignment in a course should take weeks, not hours or days, to do. Start thinking and exploring right away, and give it time to emerge. My image of working on a paper or a lecture is a **funnel** – wide at the top, then narrowing down to the spout where it finally pours out. Start big, just exploring, and make lots of notes on scratch paper, and coming back to it often; keep on finding out relevant materials and jotting down ideas that pop into your head, without any clear decision yet on where you'll end up.
2. When you have that large mess of stuff to work with, look at it and see what pattern starts to emerge. Make tentative charts, grouping together related ideas in possible sections. Play with tentative outlines until you see what are the really important points you want to include.
3. There's a difference between **reports** and **term (research) papers**. Reports are like the assignment in Religion 100, where you learn about a religious group, visit a worship service, talk with people, then do a **descriptive report** on what you have learned. In a **research paper**, such as the major assignment for Religion 332 or Religion 200, there needs to be a **central thesis** which is discussed in an **analytical**, not a descriptive, way in the paper. In preparing research papers, you should work hard to focus on the central point you're trying to make. You should be able to state it in a sentence or two, and it should appear clearly in the first paragraph of your paper.
4. **You must give proper reference credit within your papers to every source of information used, in such a form that the reader can see clearly what are your own thoughts and what you have used from other sources.** This means making reference notes for information used indirectly or summarized, not just words quoted verbatim from your sources. You may use any of several standard forms of referencing: parenthetical, footnotes, endnotes, etc, just so your style is consistent. Papers should contain a page of Works Cited with proper bibliographic information. Consult with Library staff about guides to referencing styles.
5. You may receive help from the Writing Center with your written assignments. Use this resource!
6. Sorry, but I will no longer accept papers written in Urdu. I don't know that language very well.
7. Papers are to be turned in on the date specified in syllabus. There will be points-off penalties for every day turned in late (including weekends).

“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.’

.....

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!*

