

RELIGION 150: Sacred Scriptures of World Religions – Fall, 2003

Instructor: Hoyt Oliver. Office, Humanities 204. Phone: 784-8369

Texts: Novak, ed., *The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions*; class handouts; several films

Requirements: 3 tests and one term paper, each counting 25% of credit. Term paper is to be on a theme from the scriptures of a world religion different from your own.

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

All work for this course is to be carried out under the Honor Code.

Use the Religion 150 Learnlink conference. Use the Web.

Use the Oxford Library resources, including databases for study of religions.

I. HINDUISM

WW, CHAPTER ONE

Th, Aug 28

Tu, Sep 2

Th, Sep 4

Tu, Sep 9

II. BUDDHISM

WW, CHAPTER TWO

Th, Sep 11

Tu, Sep 16

Th, Sep 18

Tu, Sep 23

Th, Sep 25 **Test # 1**

III. CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM

WW, CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR

Tu, Sep 30

Th, Oct 2

Tu, Oct 7

Th, Oct 9 **Term paper theses, draft outlines, and bibliographies due**

IV. JUDAISM

WW, CHAPTER FIVE

Tu, Oct 14 mid-semester break

Th, Oct 16

Tu, Oct 21

Th, Oct 23

Tu, Oct 28 **Test # 2**

V. CHRISTIANITY

WW, CHAPTER SIX

Th, Oct 30

Tu, Nov 4

Th, Nov 6

Tu, Nov 11

VI. ISLAM

WW, CHAPTER SEVEN

Th, Nov 13

Tu, Nov 18

Th, Nov 20

Tu, Nov 25 **Term Papers due at class time** (2-point penalty for each day late, including weekend)

Th, Nov 27 Thanksgiving break – no class

VII. PRIMAL RELIGIONS

WW, CHAPTER EIGHT

Tu, Dec 2

Th, Dec 4

Tu, Dec 9

At time of final exam : Test # 3

GUIDE FOR TERM PAPERS: RELIGION 150

1. The term research paper for Religion 150 is to be on ***a theme from the scriptures of a religious tradition different from your own.*** A) Your paper must draw directly from the scriptures themselves. B) It must be focused on a specific theme, not a general description. (Examples: “Was Paul a Mystic? ‘Life in the Spirit’ in His Letters”; “Why is *Bhakti* the Best Way of Liberation? Krishna’s Advice in the Bhagavad Gita”)
2. An alternative is to do a **comparative** paper on a theme from two or more religious traditions; here you may include your own faith as one selection, if you wish. (Example: “The Holy One: A Comparison of the Christian Saint and the Theravadan Buddhist Arhant”)
3. **You must give proper reference credit to all sources used in paper.** Regarding citations from the Scriptures themselves, you may include in your note to the first reference the information about the translation, and thereafter use just a short form of reference. (Example: Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press, 1998; and, thereafter, just Book, Chapter, Verse- as ‘Matt.6:22-28’)
4. You may use any standard, acceptable form of referencing, but keep it consistent. (i.e., MLA, footnotes, endnotes, etc.) Consult with Library or Writing Center for help with proper referencing, if you need it.
5. The instructor will not suggest paper themes to you, but will be willing to help you with developing your ideas into a paper. Arrange an office hour appointment.
6. ***How long does the paper have to be?*** Sigh! Some anxious or compulsive student is sure to ask that question!! The answer is: Long enough to do justice to your subject! The instructor thinks that you need at least 12 pages to cover a topic, and he won’t read over 40 pages, so somewhere in between will work!
7. Criteria for evaluation of papers will include:
 - Appropriate choosing of theme, and discussing it clearly
 - Adequate, deep, comprehensive attention to the relevant scriptures
 - Use of secondary (scholarly) commentaries from Library sources
 - Clear writing: appropriate referencing, organization, use of language

“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!*

