

## ***Religion 100 (WRT): Introduction to Religion (Fall 2011)***

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### ***I. Course Description***

Religion 100 is an exploration of diverse ways of being religious in thought, action, community, and experience, as displayed in two or three traditions and cultures. This course will introduce you to three major religions of the world (if you wish to study several world religions, you should take Rel 150). In this class, we will investigate the religions and selected sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. The first two components (Judaism and Christianity) of the course are structured the same way: We will begin by examining the religion's basic history and beliefs. In class discussions, we will only be able to cover selected major subjects and events; you will glean other aspects from your readings of Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions*. Then we will examine some sacred texts from the tradition, because few if any religions can be understood without an encounter with their sacred texts (such "texts" can be either oral or written). Finally, we will examine an ethical topic within that religious tradition (i.e., how to be religious in "action"). In particular, we will discuss how two historically-significant figures from the 20<sup>th</sup> century responded to the existence of evil within society: (a) for Judaism, Elie Wiesel and his book, *Night*; (b) for Christianity, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the book, *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*. The third section of the course on Hinduism is more exploratory. Instead of following the format above, students will work on an IT project—including a wiki page—and will present their findings to the class.

### ***II. Texts***

**Recommended:** *Experiencing the World's Religions*, by Michael Molloy. This text is an academic, non-sectarian approach to the study of the world's major religions. We will only cover the Introduction (Chapter 1) and the chapters on Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Selections of this book will be available via Blackboard, subject to copyright limitations.

*Night*, by Elie Wiesel. This text, which relates Wiesel's experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, will serve as the primary text for our discussions of the Holocaust and ethical responses to such an evil.

*I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, by Martin Luther King, Jr. This text, which includes Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," and "I have a Dream" speech, will be the focus



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of our discussions about the Civil Rights movement—a religious response to the presence of evil within society—which we will examine within the context of Christianity, liberation movements within Christianity, and connections with the philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi.

*The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*. “The Song of the Lord” is a mere 700 lines of the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, but it is one of the world's great scriptures. This text portrays the warrior Arjuna's battlefield conversation with the divine Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) and includes much of the essence of Hindu philosophy and wisdom.

The Bible (New Revised Standard Version): <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>. Since there are several texts for this class, I will not require you to purchase a Bible. We will, however, be reading significant sections of the Bible, and you will need to bring extensive sections to class for our discussions (you can borrow an NRSV Bible or print out pages from the above website). If you wish to purchase a Bible, the Oxford College bookstore has copies of the best academic translation available: The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* in the NRSV.

### III. Goals of the Course

The course is structured in three major parts. There are specific goals for each section of the course (listed below), but the overarching goals are for you to increase your awareness of the important elements of three major religions, recognize the similarities and differences among them, and understand better their sacred texts and world views. Specifically,

**Judaism:** After completing the section on Judaism, you should be able to discuss major developments in the four general periods of Jewish history, describe the three parts of the Hebrew Bible, interpret selected texts from the Hebrew Bible, describe Jewish religious practices, explain the characteristics of the major divisions within Judaism, discuss the history of persecution that culminated in the Holocaust (including the account in Elie Wiesel's *Night*), and discuss challenges that Judaism faces in the modern world.

**Christianity:** After completing the section on Christianity, you should be able to summarize the life and teachings of Jesus in the context of his times, describe the structure and basic content of the New Testament, interpret selected texts from the New Testament, explain basic Christian doctrines and practices, discuss the growth of Christianity, and discuss the Civil Rights movement as articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (in selected chapters of *I Have a Dream*) in the context of Christian belief.

**Hinduism:** After completing the section on Hinduism, you should be able to describe the origins of Hinduism; discuss major concepts and beliefs; discuss social aspects such as caste and stages of life; explain the practices and goals of the four religious paths; describe features of devotional Hinduism; recall the names and characteristics of Hinduism's most popular Gods; and discuss the ethical and spiritual issues raised by Mohandas Gandhi. These goals are accomplished to a large extent through a research and IT project (i.e., creation of a wiki page).

### IV. Course Requirements



- A. **Tests** (300 points): There will be three major tests during the semester (tentatively: September 29, November 1, and December 9. Each test will be non-cumulative and will cover all our activities during that time period (e.g., lectures, readings, study guides, and other activities). Tests will contain both objective and essay questions. Make-up tests will only be given for excused absences, and you should notify me *in advance*.
- B. **Site Visit Reports and Evaluations** (60 points): An overarching goal of this course is for you to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of traditions different from your own. One of the best ways in which to accomplish this goal is to attend worship experiences of other traditions. You will attend two such services, write a short paper about your experiences, read another class member's experiences on a site visit, and then discuss your experiences with each other. Please select sites to visit that will introduce you to traditions unfamiliar to you (e.g., if you are most familiar with the Christian tradition, you should visit a Jewish Synagogue and a Hindu Temple; if you wish to visit a site from another religious tradition, please speak with me in advance). Details of possible religious sites to visit, as well as guidelines for your visit, report, and evaluation, will all be posted on Blackboard. It would be helpful to go on a site visit with a friend who is a member of that religious tradition. Site visit reports are due online before class on October 13 and December 6.
- C. **Participation/Reading Guides** (40 points): I just learned that all but one of my mp4 lectures have been lost forever, so the number of reading guides you will need to do before class is dependent on how many of those mp4s I can redo during the semester (we'll discuss this in class). The point total for these guides is deceptively small, but please note carefully that these assignments will be covered extensively on the tests. These study/reading guides are important, because an essential element of studying religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism is to read their sacred texts carefully. This will enhance our class discussions and improve your text grades.
- D. **Research and IT Project** (100 points): You will research and produce in writing information and conclusions about an aspect of Hinduism, work collaboratively to create a means of sharing that research via information technology, and present that information to the class.
- E. **Class Attendance and Participation:** Class attendance and participation are essential to the learning process and to your grade. You are expected to attend each class session, to be on time, and to be prepared to interact with the subject matter and your fellow classmates. You will be allowed two absences without academic penalty. If you have more than two absences, eight points will be subtracted from your point total *for each absence*.

Your grades will be assigned as follows: 463+ total points = A; 448-462 = A-; 438-447 = B+; 408-437 = B; 398-407 = B-; 388-397 = C+; 358-387 = C; 347-357 = C-; 338-346 = D+; 298-337 = D; 297 and below = F. "Borderline" grades will be determined on the basis of class attendance and participation (including study guides, etc.).

## V. Appointments



My office hours are Tuesday 2:30-4:30 p.m. If you cannot meet with me during the posted hours, please see me after class, and we will arrange a mutually convenient time. E-mail is usually the quickest way to reach me.

## **VI. Course Philosophy**

This course is intended for anyone who is interested in studying Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. No prior knowledge or commitment to any particular religious tradition is required or expected, nor is any particular religious stance encouraged (or discouraged), other than what is outlined below. Since we will engage in the academic study of these religions, we all must be open to the contemporary methods of the scholarly study of these religions—their sacred texts, beliefs, history, and other contexts.

I simply ask you to approach this class with an open mind. No matter what your beliefs, religion, and/or philosophy, this openness must include a willingness to explore religions, beliefs, and understandings other than the ones with which you might be familiar. And all of us, no matter what our personal beliefs, should cultivate an appreciation of and respect for traditions, beliefs, and philosophies that are different from our own.

As is to be expected in a college classroom, all of us have divergent beliefs, and I expect you, like me, not to try to force your personal beliefs on others in this class. You will be encouraged to state your opinions and to dialogue with others, but everyone's views will be respected.

An essential element of our semester together is the ability to trust each other. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the "responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work." Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I will trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly. The Honor Code may be found at:

[http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current\\_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/](http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/)

## **VII. Tentative Course Schedule (subject to revision if circumstances warrant)**

### **Introduction to Religion:**

August 25: Introduction: Understanding Religion

**(1) Read Molloy, Chapter 1; (2) Listen to/watch first (mp4) lecture; (3) Read Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2, do the reading guide, and post your answers to your Blackboard blog.**

### **Judaism: Begin Reading Molloy, Chapter 8**

August 30: Judaism: Introduction

Selected Sacred Text: Genesis 1-2 (reading guide due before class)

September 1: History and Beliefs

Selected Sacred Text: Genesis 3-11 (first half of reading guide due before class)

September 6: History and Beliefs

Selected Sacred Text: Genesis 3-11 (second half of reading guide due before class)

September 8: History and Beliefs



September 13: Selected Sacred Texts: Law and Covenant Reading Guide (due before class)  
 History and Beliefs  
 Selected Sacred Texts: Jonah Reading Guide (due before class)  
 September 15: The Holocaust and Judaism; Elie Wiesel's *Night* (read beforehand)  
 September 22: The Holocaust and Judaism;  
 September 27: Catch-up day, if necessary; initial discussions of research project on Hinduism  
**September 29: Test I: Judaism**

### **Christianity: Begin Reading Molloy, Chapter 9**

October 4: Christianity: Introduction; discussion of procedure for research and IT project  
 October 6: History and Beliefs  
 Selected Sacred Texts (Nature of the Gospels due before class)  
 October 11: Fall Break  
 October 13: History and Beliefs  
 Selected Sacred Texts ("Acts/Pentecost/Council" due before class)  
 October 18: History and Beliefs  
 First Site Visit Report Discussion and Critique  
 Selected Sacred Texts (Doctrines and Rituals due before class)  
 October 20: History and Beliefs  
 Selected Sacred Texts  
 Further work on research and IT project  
 October 25: Civil Rights and Christianity; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (Assigned chapters)  
 October 27: Civil Rights and Christianity; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Assigned chapters)  
**November 1: Test 2: Christianity**

### **Hinduism: Begin Reading Molloy, Chapter 3**

November 3: Hinduism: Introduction  
 November 8: Research and IT Projects  
 November 10: Research and IT Projects  
 November 17: Research and IT Projects  
 November 22: Group work on *The Bhagavad-Gita* (Assigned chapters)  
 November 24: Thanksgiving Break  
 November 29: Research and IT Projects  
 December 1: Discussion: *The Bhagavad-Gita* (Assigned chapters)  
 December 6: Site Visit 2 Critique and Discussion  
 Course evaluation  
 Final version of IT project due

**Final exam (December 9, 2:00 p.m.): Test 3: Hinduism**

*And yet, though we strain against the deadening grip of daily necessity,  
 I sense there is this mystery.*

*“Und doch, obwohl ein jeder von sich strebt”*  
**Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Letters to God**

