

Insights and Reflections:
World Religion Discussion Board Compilation

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Course Introduction

Topic:

Although REL 110 is not a required course for any program at CVCC, most students enroll in this course as a Humanities/Fine Arts elective. Yet, there are more than 30 different courses that meet that requirement, including ART, COM, DRA, ENG, FRE, HUM, MUS, PHI, and SPA. In addition, three other religion courses are available. Here's the question: Why World Religions? Other than it's the only online REL course CVCC offers, why did you choose this class and what do you hope to gain from our study?

My Response:

I grew up attending church. As a child, I was taught about all the different stories from the Bible. I learn about Jesus and God at a young age, and that was really all I knew. I did not know the different religious groups around me. Though I had some cousins who practiced ancestor worship it never crossed my mind to ask the question, “why do they believe and hold onto such practices?”. Years have gone by and I feel like it is time to learn about the other major religious groups around me.

Another reason I choose World Religions is that I wanted to gain a better understanding of all the different religions around me. The world is full of different people from different cultures. Some of these cultures hold onto different beliefs. If I was able to comprehend why they believe in what they do, it would help me to work alongside them. Though we may have different views, understanding their religion will help me to see why they reason and comprehend things the way they do.

I hope to gain a lot of knowledge and understanding of other religions during our study. I feel that this class will cover a lot of material pertaining to religion. That pretest we took at the beginning really surprise me of how little I know about other religions. The world is full of people who hold onto many different beliefs. Having knowledge and understanding will help me build relationships and friendships with those with different religious beliefs.

Chapter 1: Understanding Religion

Topic:

Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French mathematician and philosopher, once said that every person has a "God-shaped void" that can only be filled by a relationship with God. Do you agree or disagree? Why is religion needed--or IS religion needed?

My Response:

As a believer in Jesus Christ and as a Christian I believe this statement is correct. It has been my experience that everyone has an empty void in their heart. At times, individuals will give themselves over to drugs, sex, and some form of pleasure to fill this void. Others will invest all their time and energy into their career, money-making, recreational activities to fill this void. Little do they realize that all these things will leave them empty.

I once end up in a rehab center because I thought that adult entertainment, money, social media, video games would satisfy me. I gave myself over to all my heart's desire, only to be left empty. During my stay at Pure Life Ministries, I was taught that only God can fill this emptiness in my heart that I was longing for. I also learned that He loves me and wants to save me from all the things I gave myself over to. I was retaught that Jesus died for my sin and that I can be forgiven of my sin if I turn away from it and ask for God to forgive my sin, and believe in His promise of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. It has been five years now since I have been free from these things. Every day I walk with God, love others, and turn away from sin. It is my testimony that the only way to fill this "God-shaped void" is to truly have a relationship with God.

I do not believe that religion is needed. Someone once told me, “Religion is man’s attempt to avoid the creator God”. How is this possible? I believe that human being has this issue called “sin”. Sin separates us from a loving God. Human beings who do not want to deal with their sin create religion. Religious ceremonies and rituals occupy the individuals so that they do not have to come face to face with their sins. This is how man avoids the creator God, and this is my religion is not needed but a relationship with God is needed.

I want to also add this: because God is a good and just Judge, he must punish sin. Much like a good judge at a county courthouse who judges someone to committed rape and murder, if this judge allows this person to get away with their crime, that will make him a bad and unjust judge. Can we image someone committing murder to one of our family members and the judge at the courthouse excuses their action? That would be unjust. To be a good and just God, He must judge sin. He must hand down a verdict to everyone who commits “sin”. Though He will do this, THE GOOD NEWS is that there is someone who would take the blame for you, His son Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price for our sin so that we can have a relationship with God.

If you would like to know more about how to have a relationship with God you can email me at jvang400@students.cvcc.edu

Chapter 2: Indigenous Religions

Topic:

Since indigenous religions developed all across the world in very diverse cultures that had absolutely no contact with one another, how do you think so many indigenous religions came to have so many elements and beliefs in common? (Hint: It wasn't through the Internet or airline travel!)

My Response:

Indigenous religions came to have so many elements and beliefs in common because of stories that were retold over and over throughout the generations. These stories may have had a long last effect on the hearer. Since there was no written account of the beginning of indigenous religions, to reinforce these tales, dances and rituals were performed. To not lose the religion, a great deal of time and effort was probably poured into teaching their children. One summer when I was younger my father spend the entire summer teaching my siblings and me the Hmong language and culture. It was intense. He literally beat it into us. If we did not learn a certain number of letters and words by the end of the week, he would hit our bottom with a metal fly swapper. Within a few months, I learned my language and culture. I would not be surprise if these parents use these same teaching techniques with their children.

As people moved to different areas throughout the world, they also carry with their beliefs and stories associated with indigenous religion. No one really stays together forever. Eventually, circumstances will occur. Some people will be forced to move to another location. Culture may change and society may change, but religion will not unless one allows it. There may be slight changes in the story to help the audience to better comprehend. Different examples

may be added but the original story stays the same. This is one of the reasons why indigenous religions still have so many elements and beliefs in common.

Lastly, the creation of artifacts and arts allowed the indigenous religion to have similar elements and common beliefs. Having something visual in front of a person may be better than hearing a story. Objects such as masks, drums, statues, rattles are religious expressions and held profound meanings. As the textbook state it, “They are filled with meaning and remind practitioners of the specifics of the oral tradition”. This form of artistic religious expression does not rely on the written word. The art associated with it tells of their history and story. And this is probably how the indigenous religion came to have so many elements and common beliefs.

Chapter 3: Hinduism

Topic:

Drawing upon your present knowledge of the life and teaching of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (or maybe even performing a bit of outside research on Dr. King), discuss the parallels between Hinduism's satyagraha and Dr. King's methods of protest in the 1960s.

If you're convinced there's a common thread, and since it's obvious that Hinduism came first, what do you think about a Baptist minister drawing principle from the Hindu religion?

My Response:

Hinduism's satyagraha and Dr. King's methods of protest in the 1960s are very parallel. In 1930, Gandhi lead a two-hundred miles march called the Salt March. The march began from where he resided to the ocean. Many people followed him and stood up to the British's tax on all salt eaten in India. On March 25th, 1965, thirty-five years later, Dr. King also lead a similar march. Dr. King with his followers marched fifty-four miles from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery, Alabama. This march lasted five days. Both Gandhi and Dr. King wanted to stand up to injustice and have their voice heard throughout the world. What made their civil disobedience so successful was that violence was not associated with it. They did not burn down houses and business buildings along the way. Neither did their followers acted violently towards bystanders. Both Hinduism's satyagraha and Dr. King's methods of protest carried a peaceful and powerful message. Not long after these peaceful protests their country changed in a histrionically way, and for the good.

In a real way, both Hinduism's satyagraha and Dr. King's methods had a similar foundation. The textbook describes Gandhi's encounter with Jesus of the Bible like this: "he was particularly moved by Jesus's call to forgiveness and nonviolence, which he found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) in the New Testament. It is fascinating to see the role that the New Testament played in influencing Gandhi's insistence on the importance of nonviolence". As a church minister, Dr. King was taught about the person Jesus and about His teaching of forgiveness and nonviolence. Both Gandhi and Dr. King's peaceful protest methods were strongly founded by the principles of Jesus' teaching.

Much of Gandhi's examples of peaceful protests and civil disobedience were utilized during the Civil Rights Movement by Dr. King. Some may question whether it was right or incorrect to draw principles from the Hindu religion. Though both men's beliefs and religions are different, Gandhi's examples prove that the teaching of Jesus regarding forgiveness and nonviolence worked. It should also be noted that there is only a twenty-five to the thirty-year gap between Gandhi's and Dr. King's peaceful protests. Anyone wanting to lead a similar human rights movement will draw the same ideas and methods from a previous leader, even if it was from a different religion. At the core, the foundation for Hinduism's satyagraha is built on Jesus's teaching. With this, Dr. King could use some of the ideas of satyagraha without ever having to conform to the Hindu religion and without ever compromising his own belief in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4: Buddhism

Topic:

Buddhism has sometimes been accused of being too passive and of overemphasizing detachment from the world. Do you think that these are fair criticisms? If you had the power to enact them, what suggestions of change would you have for Buddhism to make it more relevant for 21st century western culture?

My Response:

Buddhism is one of the world's oldest and most significant religions. Buddhism had originated in India. However, it is now gaining followers in the West. They believe that human life is a cycle of suffering and rebirth. It is about spiritual development that one encounters through learning and practiced. These criticisms about Buddhism being too passive and overemphasizing detachment from the world can be viewed either way.

I don't think these criticisms about Buddhism is fair. Sometimes perceptions can be deceiving. Some people may form opinions or jump quickly to conclusions of what Buddhism is or should be. We may need to do research to understand their teachings. We don't have to practice what they teach, but we can learn to understand their religion and to be respectful of it. This applies to all religions and not just Buddhism.

I don't believe I have any suggestions of change for Buddhism to be more relevant for the 21st century western culture. As I had stated earlier, Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions so it has been around for a very long time. People who practice or knows about Buddhism for a long time is already familiar with the religion and practices. If we are not familiar with specific religions and practices, we need to be respectful and perhaps do some

research to learn more and ask questions to understand. We live in a diverse world and we are surrounded by many religions and practices.

Chapter 5: Jainism & Sikhism

Topic:

The two religions of this chapter, Jainism and Sikhism, have common roots in Hinduism, but arrive at very different conclusions on many beliefs and issues. For instance, Jains are polytheistic and are dedicated devotees of ahimsa, while Sikhs are monotheistic and take great pride in their military tradition. How could the same religious roots produce such divergent positions? Can you think of any modern-day comparisons (within or outside the religious world) that might help make sense of the shared origins of these two religions?

My Response:

It is interesting that both Jainism and Sikhism have common roots in Hinduism. However, they also have different conclusions on many beliefs and issues. As stated in our textbook, “Jainism rejects belief in a Creator and sees the universe simply as natural forces in motion.” On the other hand, Sikhism believes in one God who guides and protects them. They believe everyone is equal before God. Overall, both of these religions see “the importance of the individual’s struggle to purify the self, to act morally, and to do good to others.”

Although Jainism and Sikhism have common roots in Hinduism, their views are different on how they view the world and their relation to it. This could be the case due to how they were raised growing up. For example, Jainism are usually strictly vegetarians and they will fast from food as needed. They believe in nonviolence. For Sikhism, they “embrace a devout monotheism and accepts meat eating and military defense.” They believe the usage of weapons as a form of self-defense. Most parents start to teach their children at a young age about traditional beliefs

with hopes that their children will learn and practice these things as they get older. Sometimes this may not always be the case because we live in such a diverse world that has different religions, beliefs, and practices.

Christianity is split between three branches: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. Many groups of Christianity have different views, traditions, and worship. For example, not all Christians worship the same in church. Some churches may only sing hymns while other churches have informal worship which includes clapping, shouting, and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them. Regardless of their differences, the center of their faith is around the life and teachings of Jesus.

Chapter 6: Daoism and Confucianism

Topic:

Daoist themes sometimes strike a responsive note today, even in the very technologically-driven lives many lead in the modern-day United States. Could Daoist principles be incorporated into modern society, even without mass conversions to Daoism as a religion? Offer some examples. Do you personally see value in that goal?

My Response:

As stated in our textbook, the origins of Daoism are mysterious. It is a philosophical and spiritual tradition of Chinese origin which emphasizes living in harmony. The Daoist sees things differently. It includes ideas and practices that are also represented in the Daodejing and Zhuangzi. In order for someone to experience the Dao, he or she must leave behind his or her desires for individual things. This includes the cost of possessions or the size of an item. It has strongly influenced the culture and religious life of China and other East Asian countries.

I think Daoist principles could be incorporated into modern society, even if it was without mass conversions to Daoism as a religion. It emphasizes doing what is natural and “going with the flow.” This is also called wu wei. We often hear people say to each other to “go with the flow” whether it is work-related experiences or personal life experiences. Sometimes we allow what is happening to make a decision for us without really understanding it. Technology plays a major role as well. We live in a society where technology is everywhere. For example, we have our cell phones, laptops, iPads, TVs, etc. There are actually people who cannot live without their devices or technology. This could cause them to have withdrawals. We have to remind ourselves that there is more to living a simple life than being glued to technology.

I see a value in that goal because it teaches us to live in the moment. When we live in the moment, we can enjoy the small moments with our loved ones and cherish those times together. There are some people who are consumed in their careers and are successful, but they neglect to spend time with their loved ones. Sometimes people may not realize that they are neglecting their loved ones. Therefore, it is so important to have someone keep you accountable when these things do happen.

Chapter 7: Shinto

Topic:

Shinto is, at its heart, a nature religion. As a matter of fact, many religions of the world place great value on nature and view it as a gift from the divine (whoever or whatever that might be). As a logical extension, does that mean all religious people should be environmentalists? But note that Japan is one of the most heavily industrialized nations of the world. Shouldn't all religious people be protectors of nature in every way possible?

My Response:

It is interesting to know that there are many religions of the world who place great value on nature and view it as a gift from the divine. All these faiths around the world share a common ethic based on harmony with nature. This shows a close relationship between religion and the environment. This could also be because they believe that humans are responsible for their lives and surroundings. Some may believe that humans are stewards of the environment.

I do not think that all religious people should be environmentalists unless they choose to be one. Although many religions share a common value with nature, it is important to understand that there is a gap on how their practices are perceived. Here are some examples listed. Christianity teaches that all creations are created by a loving God and people may not destroy it. Buddhist teaches that people are responsible for their actions and they go through a cycle of rebirths before reaching nirvana. Hinduism believes the forces of nature and the interconnectedness with life.

Japan continues to be the most heavily industrialized nations of the world because of its history and large companies. They may have access to many resources and well-educated industrious workforces. It is really up to people if they choose to be protectors of nature. There are some people who care about nature and do what they can to help the environment. However, there are some people who may disagree with this concept.

Chapter 8: Judaism

Topic:

From the time of events recorded in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) all the way to the modern day, Jews have been persecuted and oppressed. Why? Of all the peoples of the world, both in history and today, what is there about Jews and their faith that has inspired such hatred and horrible treatment at so many points in history?

My Response:

I believe one of the reasons why the Jews have been persecuted and oppressed throughout history is so that God's glory can be displayed. It is almost like bad things happening to good people. When we see this, it seems unfair and unjust. However, the amazing thing about God is that He can take the bad and turn it for good (See Genesis 50:20). Romans 8:28 in the Bible states, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them". The Jews are God's chosen people according to the Bible. From the book of Genesis to the book of Joshua, those that stood against the nation of the Jews were destroyed. Afterward, all surrounding nations would see the mighty work of God and fear the Jews and their God (See Joshua 2:8). God allowed persecution and oppression towards his people so that His glory and mighty work can be displayed through the Jews. When evil is overcome through good, the world benefits from it.

Jews disobeyed God's commands and God's curses fell upon them as a nation, just as He promised (See Deuteronomy 28:16 – 19). These curses were how God disciplined his people. It was not meant to destroy them. Like a good father who disciplined his out-of-control child, God did the same to set His people straight. He used other nations to persecute and oppress the Jews.

The outcome of this was so that they would see the reality of their wrongdoing and turn back to God. This may seem harsh, but one must understand that from the start, the Jews were God's chosen people for the messiah (Jesus) to come through. Jesus' purpose was to redeem mankind from their sin and restore them back into a relationship with God. Because of that, the Jews had to live to the standards God has set for them. If they do not, they might end up destroying themselves or corrupt the world God is trying to save through them. Jesus would never have been able to be born through their descends if the Jew no longer existed. One last note I would like to make is that later on in the Old Testament, even after going through God's discipline system, the Jews end up sacrificing their own children in fire (Jeremiah 32:35) (This is worse than child-pornography. Children who should be the product of love between a husband and wife are now the product of lust) and practiced cannibalism (2 King 6:26-27). To eliminate this corruption, God almost entirely wiped out his own people through other nations.

Geologically, the country of Israel connected three continents together, which meant great trade system and economic growth, and other countries knew of this and wanted it as well. In fact, every nation that did conquer the Jews prosper in some way; however, that nation would end up in desolation (Genesis 12:3). God made a promise to the Jews that if they remained faithful to Him and do not turn to other gods, He will bless them. Part of this blessing was the land they are residing in presently. Their entire faith and history are established within the boundaries of the land of the Jews (Israel). From the beginning of time to today, nations after nations had tried to grab a foothold of the land. This was one of the reasons why the Jews faced persecution and oppression throughout history.

Chapter 9: Christianity

Topic:

Let's go a different direction with this week's discussion. Our textbook, written and published in the U.S., devotes far more space to Christianity than any other religion. Yet, most (but not all) students who use this textbook begin the course knowing more about Christianity than all other religions combined. What do you suppose is the author's reasoning? Could it be sales-related? Wouldn't it make more sense, and be more "fair," to spend equal amounts of time on each of the "top ten" religions? (By the way, just as an aside, author Michael Malloy lives and teaches in Hawaii. Tough life, isn't it?!)

My Response:

The author's reasoning for writing and publishing in the textbook more about Christianity than any other religion could be because of different reasons. First of all, Christianity is one of the world's largest religions. It is most widely practiced religion in the world. The history behind Christianity is very important as to why the religion practice what they practice. Secondly, most people identify themselves as Christians or they may have grown up in a Christian household. However, this may not be the case for some people. Even though some people do not identify themselves as Christians or did not grow up in a Christian household, they may still know of people who are Christians. This can be an opportunity for them to have some understanding of the religion compare to the other religions as outlined in the textbook. Finally, I think it would be interesting to know if the author identified himself as a Christian. If so, he may have had a personal preference to devote more time educating people about Christianity because he was a believer himself.

I do not believe it is sales-related. The author may have made a personal decision to devote more time writing about Christianity. He could have been a believer himself and he knew more about the religion. As a believer, you want to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people. This could be a reason why he focused more on Christianity.

Although it may be fair to spend equal amounts of time on each of the “top ten” religions, it may not have been possible for the author to do so. Some religions are not well-known compare to other religions. There are some religions who may have less or more beliefs and practices. For this reason, it would not make sense to spend the exact amount of time on all the religions. Overall, it is interesting how Christianity is not one of the first religions outlined at the beginning of the textbook since it is one of the last few chapters that we are learning this semester.