

# Religion 101

## **Religions of the World**

[Draft: June 12, 2009]

Fall 2009  
MW 10:35-11:30  
HBC Kittredge Auditorium

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Office Hours: MF 3-4 or by appointment

This course will provide a general introductory survey of the diversity of beliefs, practices, and institutions generally understood within the framework of “religion.” We will survey their basic teachings, views of reality, and engagement with cultural, social, economic, and political forces throughout world history. A strong emphasis will be placed on the role of religion in the lived experience of contemporary peoples. We will concentrate mainly on the evolution of large-scale institutionalized religions that have accompanied the phenomenon of urbanization and the evolution of literacy since the first millennia B.C.E. A short section toward the end of the course will consider the localized religions of traditionally non-literate peoples in generally small, non-urban settings and the syncretism between these “indigenous” religions and larger faith traditions in the contemporary world.

This course will take a social-scientific approach to the study of religion: *collectively*, we will explore the richness and beauty of religious traditions without presuming to either affirm or deny any religious truth claims. *Individually*, however, you are encouraged to reflect on each of the religions we study in terms of your beliefs, values, and experiences, religious or otherwise.

### Course Texts

The following text is required reading for the course. It is available for purchase from the university bookstore:

Fisher, Mary Pat. 2008. *Living Religions*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Pearson / Prentice-Hall.

In addition, several course readings will be available on Blackboard [BB]. These additional readings will explore aspects of contemporary religious culture through perspectives from modern literature, anthropology, philosophy, and journalistic writing.

### Course Assignments and Requirements

#### 1. Section Grade (25%).

You are required to enroll in one once-weekly discussion (recitation) section. This portion of your grade will reflect the quality and quantity of your active participation in these sections. Students who make valuable contributions during the lecture portion of the course may also have their section grades raised.

Because active participation requires your presence, attendance will also be taken during section. Students missing three or more sections will receive a failing grade in section. Students missing six or more sections will receive a failing grade in the course.

Students who are consistently late or who engage in distracting behavior during lecture might find their section grade lowered. Conversely, students who ask thoughtful questions during lecture will have their section grade raised.

## 2. Reflections (20%).

For each full week of the course (a total of eight), you should submit a short informal reflection (100-200 words) on the subject matter of the week. You should e-mail your reflection to your TA no later than 2 pm on the Thursday of the week assigned. **Late reflections will be accepted up to one week following the deadline for half credit only.** You should also bring a printed or handwritten copy of your reflection with you to section for your reference as it may be used in discussion.

During the Wednesday of each week, a short reflection question will be distributed during class. You should write your reflections in response to those questions. Reflection questions will focus on the blackboard reading for each week but they will also include elements from lectures on Monday and Wednesday, and the textbook reading assignment. Because of this, it is important to maintain good attendance during lecture and keep up with the assigned reading. *If you encounter a problem in meeting these requirements for any reason, you should speak to the instructor or to your TA as soon as possible.*

3. One short (five-page) midterm paper (25%) relating course readings, lectures, films, and discussions due October 28.

4. One short (five-page) final paper (30%) relating course readings, lectures, films, and discussions due during the final examination period (date and time to be determined by the university registrar).

Please note that there are no in-class examinations for the course. You will not be asked to memorize and regurgitate terminology. You will be expected to *think through* and use key terms and concepts *very precisely* in your written assignments.

## University Requirements and Recommendations

***Academic Integrity:*** The Syracuse Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that ***it is their responsibility*** to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information, see Academic Integrity Office,  
<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

***Students with Disabilities/Special Needs:*** Syracuse University's Office of Disability Services

(ODS) authorizes special accommodations for students with disabilities. Students who believe they may need academic accommodations due to a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services at 804 University Ave., Room 309, 443-4498 or 443-1371. Any such students should see the instructor during office hours or make an appointment as soon as possible to discuss their needs.

For more information see Office of Disability Services,  
<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>.

## Course Readings and Assignments

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

M. Aug. 31

Course overview

W. Sept. 2

Fisher, *Living Religions*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-31.

Lopez, Donald. 2000. "How the Buddha Got -Ismed." *Tricycle: the Buddhist Review*. 10(1) (online version) [BB].

M. Sept. 7 – No class – Labor Day.

### **II. INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGIONS**

#### **A. The Abrahamic Faiths**

##### **1. Judaism**

###### **a. History and people**

W. Sept. 9

Fisher, Ch. 8, pp. 235-56.

###### **b. Doctrine, thought, and contemporary practice**

M. Sept. 14

Fisher, Ch. 8, pp. 256-91.

W. Sept. 16

Heilman, Samuel. 1994 [1984]. "The Gate Behind the Wall." In *Religious Autobiographies*, Gary Comstock (ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Pp. 212-31 [BB].

#### **Reflection #1 due on Thursday, Sept. 17.**

M. Sept. 21 – No class – Eid Ul-Fitr

##### **2. Christianity**

###### **a. Texts, teachings, and the early church**

W. Sept. 23

Fisher, Ch. 9, pp. 295-313.

M. Sept. 28 – No Class – Yom Kippur

W. Sept. 30

Fisher, Ch. 9, pp. 313-30.

## **b. Latter church history and contemporary trends**

M. Oct. 5

Fisher, Ch. 9, pp. 330-75; Ch. 12, pp. 472-74.

W. Oct. 7

Brown, Robert McAfee. 1984. "Jesus' Story: From Head Trips to Foot Trips." In *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press. Pp. 105-18 [BB].

**Reflection #2 due on Thursday, Oct. 8.**

## **3. Islam**

### **a. Teachings and practices**

M. Oct. 12

Fisher, Ch. 10, pp. 376-398.

W. Oct. 14

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 783-90 [BB].

**Reflection #3 due on Thursday, Oct. 15.**

### **b. Divisions, history, and contemporary issues.**

M. Oct. 19

Fisher, Ch. 10, pp. 399-433.

W. Oct. 21

Abdo, Geneive. 2006. "Heeding the Call." In *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 165-186 [BB].

**Reflection #4 due on Thursday, Feb. 26.**

## **B. Monistic Traditions of Asia**

### **1. Hinduism**

#### **a. Origins and Scriptures**

M. Oct. 26

Fisher, Ch. 3, pp. 72-96.

W. Oct. 28

No assigned readings.

**Midterm paper due.**

**b. Devotional practices**

M. Nov. 2

Fisher, Ch. 3, pp. 97-119.

W. Nov. 4

Narayanan, Vasudha. 2006. "Sacred Land, Sacred Service: Hindu Adaptations to the American Landscape." In *A Nation of Religions*, Stephen Prothero, ed. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. Pp. 139-59 [BB].

**Reflection #5 due on Thursday, Nov. 5**

M. Nov. 9

No Class – American Academy of Religion Meeting

**2. Buddhism**

**a. The Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha**

W. Nov. 11

Fisher, Ch. 5, pp. 134-47.

M. Nov. 16

Fisher, Ch. 5, pp. 147-69.

W. Nov. 18

Thich Nhat Hanh. 2008. "Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go: Practices Based on the Teachings of Master Linji." In *The Best Buddhist Writing 2008*. Boston: Shambhala Press. Pp. 54-68 [BB].

**Reflection #6 due on Thursday, Nov. 19.**

**b. Contemporary innovations.**

M. Nov. 23

Fisher, Ch. 5, pp. 169-81.

W. Nov. 25 – No class – Thanksgiving break

F. Nov. 27 – No sections – Thanksgiving break

**3. Confucianism, Daoism, and Popular Religion in East Asia**

M. Nov. 30

Fisher, Ch. 6, pp. 182-211.

W. Dec. 2

Van Voorst, Robert E. 2008. "Confucianism" and "Taoism." In *Anthology of World Scriptures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Pp. 147-54; 167-74 [BB].

**Reflection #7 due on Thursday, Dec. 3.**

### **III. INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS**

#### M. Dec. 7

Fisher, Ch. 2, pp. 32-69.

#### W. Dec. 9

Somé, Malidoma Patrice. 2008 [1994]. "Of Water and Spirit: An African Boy's Initiation." In *An Anthology of Living Religions*. Mary Pat Fisher and Lee W. Bailey, eds. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson / Prentice-Hall. Pp. 38-44 [BB].

**Reflection #8 due on Thursday, Dec. 10.**

#### M. Dec. 14

Course Wrap-up and Review.

**FINAL PAPER: Due during at the conclusion of the designated final examination period.**