

RELIGION 100 — INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION

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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. In particular, you will investigate the sacred texts and religions of Judaism, Christianity, and one other religion. The first two sections of the course, about Judaism and Christianity, are structured in the same way. After a brief introduction, we will examine in detail some sacred texts from the tradition. Then we will discuss its basic history and beliefs. In class discussions, we will only cover selected major subjects and events; you will learn the basic overview from your readings of Michael Molloy's *Experiencing the World's Religions*. Finally, we will examine a topic important in the history of the religious tradition, which will include reading a historically significant text: for Judaism, *Night*, by Elie Wiesel; for Christianity, *Why We Can't Wait*, by Martin Luther King, Jr. For more information on all three of these texts, see "Required Texts" below.

The third section of the course is structured in a significantly different way. You will choose another world religion—among those treated in Molloy's book—to investigate. You will work in a group of 6-9 students to learn about that faith tradition, create a web page about that tradition, and present that tradition and web page to the other members of the class.

We thus will have a number of interesting topics to investigate and discuss, and you will have some freedom to choose one religion that you will study. Although we will try to follow the schedule (see below), this syllabus and this course are not set in stone. This class, in some ways, is an experiment, so as we progress through the semester, I encourage you to give me your feedback about the course (as I will do for you), and the class can negotiate possible adjustments to improve the course as we go along.

This syllabus, along with other course materials, will be posted on this class's LearnLink page.

II. Required Texts

Experiencing the World's Religions, by Michael Molloy. This text also comes with a CD-ROM that will reinforce and enhance what you will read in the assigned chapters. Working through the CD-ROM materials will be an excellent way to ensure that you have learned the important material in each chapter we cover.

Night, by Elie Wiesel. This text, which relates Wiesel's experiences as a young boy at both Auschwitz and Buchenwald, will serve as the primary text for our discussions of the Holocaust, which we will examine in the context of Judaism and Jewish/Christian relations.

Why We Can't Wait, by Martin Luther King, Jr. This text, which includes Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," will be the focus of our discussions about the Civil Rights movement, which we will examine within the context of Christianity and liberation movements within Christianity.

The Bible (Revised Standard Version): <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/rsv/browse.html>. Since you already have three texts to purchase, and the RSV Bible is on-line, I will **not** require that you purchase a copy of the Bible. You will, however, be reading significant sections of the Bible and talking about those texts in class. If you wish to purchase a Bible, the Oxford College bookstore has copies of the best academic translation available (NRSV).

Other on-line resources: I have begun to collect the links of Internet resources that will be of help to you as we study Judaism, Christianity, and other World Religions. The list can be found on the home page of the Oxford College Pierce Program in Religion (click on "Links to Online Religion Resources"): <http://www.emory.edu/OXFORD/pierceprogram/Pierce.html>.

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, to recognize the similarities and differences among those three major religions, and to 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 *Why We Can't Wait*) in the context of Christian belief.

Third Religion, Web Page, and Class Presentation: After completing the third section of this course, you should be able to discuss the beliefs, practices, and sacred texts of another major world religion, describe your contributions to your group's web page on that religion, discuss the

elements of that web page and the issues covered in the textbook's treatment of that religion, and be able to create a web page on LearnLink. After you choose a third major religion to study, I will post on LearnLink a specific set of goals specific to each religion (i.e., what you need to know about that religion).

IV. Course Requirements

- A. **Tests** (300 points): There will be three major tests during the semester (tentatively: February 23, April 6, and April 23). 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). The third exam will focus primarily on the world religion that you worked on during that time period but will also include elements from your classmates' presentations on other world religions. 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. **Final Examination** (100 points): The cumulative, take-home final exam is due on LearnLink by Friday, May 4, at 12:00 p.m.
- C. **Site Visit Reports and Evaluations** (75 points): One of the overarching goals of this course is for you to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of traditions that are different from your own. One of the best ways in which to accomplish this goal is to experience worship experiences or services of other religious traditions. You will be required to attend two such services, write a short paper about your experiences, read and evaluate another class member's experiences on a site visit, and then discuss your experiences together with that class member. For your site visit, please select sites that will introduce you to traditions unfamiliar to you. Details of possible religious sites to visit, as well as guidelines for your visit, report, and evaluation, will all be posted on LearnLink. I also will place a "Site Visit Rides" conference on LearnLink that will allow class members to find and share rides more easily. It is helpful to go to on a site visit with a friend who is a member of that religious tradition. If you would prefer to go with a group of people, we can arrange that as well.
- D. **Group Project, Web Page, and Class Presentation** (75 points): Although you will be working in a group on this project, I will also assess your individual contributions. For example, I will evaluate your specific contributions to the group's web pages, as well as your in-class contributions to the project and its presentation to the class.
- E. **Study/Reading Guides** (50 points): An essential element of studying religions such as Judaism and Christianity is to read their sacred texts carefully. We will read selected sacred texts in detail, and I will often ask you to complete study/reading guides before coming to class. This will enhance our class discussions of these texts. The study guides should be completed and posted on LearnLink (at the latest) by 2:00 a.m. of the morning before we meet to discuss that study/reading guide.
- F. **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 three *unexcused* absences without academic penalty. As an incentive to attend all the class sessions, however, I will add five points for each “cut” that you don’t use (e.g., if you have no unexcused absences, I will add 15 points to your total number of points). If you have more than three unexcused absences, five points will be subtracted from your point total *for each absence*. For an absence to be counted as an excused absence (i.e., illness and visit to a physician, religious observances, participation in a college-sponsored activity, death in the family), I must be notified in advance.

Your grades will be assigned as follows: 540+ total points = A, 480-539 = B; 420-479 = C; 360-419 = D; below 360 = F. “Borderline” grades will be determined on the basis of class attendance and participation (including study guides, etc.).

V. *Appointments*

My office hours are M/W/F 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. If you cannot meet with me during the posted hours, please see me after class, and we will arrange a mutually convenient time. Don’t forget, I am (almost!) always available via e-mail and LearnLink.

VI. *Course Philosophy*

This course is intended for anyone who is interested in studying Judaism, Christianity, and other world religions. 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, must 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 part of that honesty is the ability to trust each other. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code (pages 49-51 in the Oxford College Catalog), which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work” (p. 49). The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so I (and you) am obligated to report any violations. 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.

VII. Course Schedule

Introduction to Religion: Read Molloy, Chapter 1

January 17: Introduction
January 19: Understanding Religion

Judaism: Begin reading Molloy, Chapter 8

January 22: Judaism: Introduction

January 24 Selected Sacred Texts:
Do "The Creation Stories" reading guide

January 26: Selected Sacred Texts

Read:

Adam/Eve (Genesis 3:1-24)

Cain/Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)

Noah (Genesis 6:5 – 9:17)

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-10)

January 29: Introduction to web page creation (**Jim Brown; Computer lab**)

January 31: Selected Sacred Texts

Read: Exodus 3:1-22

Exodus 19:3-8

Exodus 20:1-17

Amos 5:11-24

Hosea 11:1-9

Micah 6:1-8

Do "The Law and Covenant" reading guide before class

February 2: Selected Sacred Texts

Read: Jonah

Do "Jonah" reading guide before class

February 5: Judaism – history and beliefs (**Lecturer: Rabbi Edward Rosenthal**)

February 7: Judaism – history and beliefs:

No assignment: In class, the Dead Sea Scrolls (Computer lab)

February 9: Judaism – history and beliefs

No assignment; class will include a visit to the library;

I will also give the practice web page assignments in class

February 12: The Holocaust and Judaism – **Start Elie Wiesel’s *Night***
(Video on the Holocaust)

February 14: The Holocaust and Judaism -- **Finish Elie Wiesel's *Night* before class**

February 15: *Reflections on the Holocaust*, Mr. Benjamin Hirsh. Oxford Chapel, 7:00 pm

February 16: The Holocaust and Judaism

In class I will talk about:

Job 1-3;

Job 4:7 and 6:26-28

Job 8:4-7 and 9:13-23

Job 11:1-6 and 12:1-6

Job 38:1-41 and 40:1-5

Job 40:6-14 and 42:1-6

February 19: Creation of practice web page (**Computer lab**)

February 21: Judaism – Review and discussion

February 23: First Exam

Christianity: Begin reading Molloy, Chapter 9

February 26: Christianity – Introduction

Finish web page on Judaism as necessary (cite sources; fix links)

From Jesus to Christ video

February 28: Selected Sacred Texts

Finish From Jesus to Christ video

Start Parable of the Mustard Seed

Read articles at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/reallyknow.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/bornliveddied.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/ministry.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/parables.html>

March 2: Selected Sacred Texts; selection of third religious tradition

Finish Parable of the Mustard Seed

March 5: Selected Sacred Texts

The Parables of Jesus: The Good Samaritan as Parable

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (handout)

- March 7: Selected Sacred Texts
The Parables of Jesus: The Good Samaritan as Parable
- March 9: Video on Holocaust; Site Report I due
- March 12-16 – Spring Break
- March 19: Christianity – history and beliefs
Begin Reading Guide "Christianity: Through the Lens of the New Testament"
- March 21: Christianity – history and beliefs
**Have Reading Guide ("Christianity: Through the Lens of the New Testament")
finished before class**
- March 23: Site Report I discussion and critique
Bring a printed copy of your Site Report Visit #1 to class.
- March 26: Group Work on World Religion 3 for web page project
Before leaving class, your group will turn in its plan for how the web page on your religion will be set up. This will include a summary of the tentative subjects, outline, structure, and assignments.
- March 28: Christianity – history and beliefs
Finish reading Molloy, chapter 9
- March 30: Civil Rights and Christianity – Read Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.'s *Why We Can't Wait*
Video on Civil Rights movement
- April 2: Civil Rights and Christianity (Guest Lecturer: Rev. Darryl Barrow)
- April 4: Civil Rights and Christianity; review for second exam
Lecture: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Christianity
- April 6: Second Exam
- Third Religious Tradition: Read Molloy, Chapter 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 10**
- April 9: Computer lab day
Groups work on web pages
- April 11: Computer lab day
Groups finish work on web pages
- April 13: Religion and Society

Meet in regular classroom

Bring to class a copy of an article from a newspaper or news journal that concerns contemporary events and the study of Religion. Be prepared to talk about your interest in the article and your opinion of the topic/event.

April 16: Class presentations of Religion web pages

We will go in the order of Molloy's book:

- 1. Hinduism**
- 2. Buddhism**

April 18: Class presentations of Religion web pages

- 1. Jainism and Sikhism**
- 2. Taoism and Confucianism**

April 20: Class presentations of Religion web pages

- 1. Shinto**
- 2. Islam**

The Religious Search in the Modern World, Molloy, Chapter 11

April 23: Religion and Society; Site Report II due

April 25: Site Report II discussion and critique

April 27: Third Exam

April 30: Course evaluation; discussion of take-home final exam

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

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