Comparative Religions

Course Syllabus: Philosophy 370 (Call# 1752)
Duke 117
Spring 2008
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mrobbins@apu.edu

Course Description.
This course entails a study of the great ancient religious systems of the world, including ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Greece and Rome. It reviews some of the various ancient religions that have endured into the present world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Taoism, and Christianity, Islam, Native American Religions and Neopaganism.

Course Goals.
• To explore world religions we will “look at how we look:” from the henotheism of antiquity to Hellenic Euhemerism to interpretatio Graeca of the Greeks to the view of religions as “pre-logical science” to the subconscious in the cogitations of Freud to the sociology of Durkheim to the cosmology quests of Eliade to the post-modern aversion to comparison at all;
• To summarize briefly the origins, doctrines, Scriptures, and rituals of major living religions;
• To explore the world of homo religiosus - ‘religious man’.
• To understand & compare religious cosmologies and mythologies;
• To profile religious heroes and founders such as Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Muhammad, Zarathustra, Confucius; Gotama Buddha, Mahavira and Handsome Lake, and reflect on why their movements took the shape that they did.
• To compare how major living religions answer basically the same questions from social ethics to theodicy to the nature of the transcendent to the existence (or not) of an invisible world.
• To try and perceive similarities or relationships between religious universals, such as Torah, Wisdom, Maat, Tao, Dike, Gnosis, Truth, etc.
Student Learning Focus

• The student will demonstrate independent study ability and discipline;
• The student will demonstrate reading, comprehension, and critical analysis ability;
• The student will review and restate fundamental characteristics of the world’s major religions;
• The student will be competent to discuss how most religions deal with common problems such as suffering;
• The student will be able to discuss the founders and/or the historical and philosophical origins of these religions;
• The student will be able to discuss each religion’s cultural roots, but universal appeal;
• The student will better understand their own religious faith in a global context.

Students with Disabilities

Students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with an advisor in the Learning Enrichment Center as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

Academic Integrity Policy

The mission of APU includes cultivating in each student not only the academic skills that are required for a university degree, but also the characteristics of academic integrity that are integral to a sound Christian education. It is therefore part of the mission of the university to nurture in each student a sense of moral responsibility consistent with the biblical teachings of honesty and accountability. Furthermore, a breach of academic integrity is viewed not merely as a private matter between the student and an instructor but rather as an act which is fundamentally inconsistent with the purpose & mission of the entire university. A complete copy of the Academic Integrity Policy is available in the Office of Student Life, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs, and online.

- Expectations for this course and consequences for violations are consistent with those outlined in the academic integrity policy.
- Students found guilty of plagiarism or of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Provost and the Dean of Students, and a memorandum of the plagiarism event will be placed in the students permanent file in the Provost’s office.
### Required Texts


*Coursepack* by C. Michael Robbins

### Recommended Texts


*Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism*, by Philip Alexander.


*Native Religions of North America: The power of Visions and Fertility*, by Åke Hultkrantz, 1987


### Reserved Readings (E-Readings)


“Introduction” and “The World at War” (Chapter One) from *Satan and the Problem of Evil* by Gregory A. Boyd, 2001.

“Globalization, Religion and Evangelicalism” in *Crux* (June 2002) Vol XXXVIII No.2 by Donald M. Lewis.


### Course-pack Readings


Reading Notebook, Lecture Notebook, Grading Scale, Absences, Book Reports, Late Work.

The Reading Notebook is for readings only. Please use a spiral notebook, or if you type notes, bind them before handing them in. Notes must be in the order in which readings are assigned. Notes must be cogent, readable, organized, and in some sort of expanded outline form. All major points from the readings must be retrievable from the notes. All readings must be clearly titled and subtitled, all references to readings must include page number. Each reading must be followed by your own “Reflection” on the material. Reflections on this material are critical to your grade (if you want an “A” or “B”). Consider the reading and reflecting as a sort of spiritual journey that you are documenting and giving some literary form. Your grade will reflect the degree of completion of these things and the depth of perception of your reflections. Typing preferred but not required.

Due: Week 8 & 14.

The Lecture Notebook is for lecture notes only. Please use a spiral notebook large enough for the semester’s notes. It is not optional and will be submitted for a grade. Notes must be dated, properly titled, cogent and detailed. Typing not required. An outline of lecture talking points will be put on the board at the beginning of each class. Please copy these points as they are written, and fill in further material as it is then discussed during lecture and discussion. Due week 14.

Absences: Lectures represent the synthesis part of this course. Consequently attendance is critical, as the treatment of the materials is climacteric and strategic.

Excused absences:
• for sickness (doctor’s note required).
• absences permitted due to sports, drama, music & other extra-curricular activities for which you must provide a dated & signed excuse slip from the supervising coach / teacher, or an email from them to me.
• an e-mail to me on the day of absence.

Book Report: On Black Elk Speaks, or one of the books on the Recommended list.
Length: 4-6 pages.
Mechanics: 1” margins on all 4 sides; Font: Size 12, Times New Roman; 1 ½ space lines.
Format: Introduction, Summary, Reflection/interaction/critique. Please turn in a final copy, not a rough draft (i.e. do your own proof-reading).
Due: (last day of class).
Copy: Please give me a copy, as I will not hand them back.

Van Voorst Anthology of World Scriptures
1. Short summary/reflection on EACH individual reading in each chapter.
**Course Requirements.**
1. Weekly Readings/Reflections Notebook (80% of grade).
2. Book report. (10% of grade).
3. Lecture Notebook / Attendance. (10% of grade).

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<th>Brief Notes on Recommended Texts</th>
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<td>This is a rather odd bit of history writing. In reading it one learns not only quite a lot about American history but also Native American spirituality.</td>
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<td>A classic in religious philosophy. Otto treats here the sacred or numinious in religion; the sense of the terror of the Divine, the otherness of the Holy. It is a contemplation of the emotional &amp; non-rational in religion, whereby we are caught up in awe &amp; reverence as we experience a mysterium tremendum et fascinosum. Advanced, but worth the time.</td>
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<td>Finegan leads the student through Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Zoroastrian, Canaanite, Greek, Roman, Gnostic, Mandaean and Manichaean religions, devoting roughly 20-30 pages to each. An excellent introduction to these religious systems from antiquity. The book has 20 pages of excellent bibliography. Highly recommended.</td>
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<td>Brief introductions to the Mystery Religions of the Greco-Roman period, along with an anthology of sacred texts of the mysteries. Highly Recommended.</td>
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<td>An excellent historical discussion of the world dominance of Persia with constant reference to the role of Persia in the history of Israel. Highly recommended.</td>
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<td>An excellent discussion of Islam, including chapters on Muhammad, the Quran, the historical roots of Islam, ancient relations between Islam, Christianity and Judaism, mysticism, philosophy, and the Islamic Empire. Excellent introduction to Islam, and a good supplement to Smith.</td>
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<td>Most of the religions that we examine in this class lie between 1200 BCE and the Modern Period. This text by the renowned master of Ancient Mesopotamia discloses Sumerian theology of the 4th-2nd millennia BCE. For those who are intrigued by and drawn to the rich religious traditions of Mesopotamia, and are curious regarding the theological parallels between the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Hebrew Scriptures, this would be a good read. Highly recommended.</td>
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<td><strong>Satan and the Problem of Evil</strong> by Gregory Boyd, 2001. Pages: 357 (plus Appendices)</td>
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<td>Our class has in many ways highlighted the distinctiveness of cosmological dualism, This book by Boyd, part of which is required reading for the course, is a creative thought-provoking treatise on the dualism of Christianity as a solution to the problem of evil. Highly recommended.</td>
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Riley’s book is a new and ingenious study of the relation of Christianity to the many religious streams of tradition that preceded it and contributed to it. His study goes far towards explaining how Christianity was understood and practiced by early Christians. Very simply put, the book is like a course in Ancient Religion 101, and was described by his wife Susan as “everything you need to know about everything.” Highly recommended.

A collection of essays by specialists on the lives and legacies of these religious founders. Not easy reading, but very thought provoking and rewarding. For advanced readers. The Chapters are between 100-120 pages, and I would accept a review of any two of the chapters sufficient for this assignment.

Syllabus
Abbreviations:
Books:
AWS=Anthology of World Scriptures (370 pp);
WR=The World’s Religions (391pp);
BES=Black Elk Speaks (274 pp);
Reserve Readings:
RR1: “In Comparison a Magic Dwells” (19pp)
RR2: “Methodologies, Comparisons and Truth” (10pp)
RR3: “Religious Evolution” (26pp)
RR4: “Journey to the East: Pantheistic Monism” (19pp)
RR5: “Introduction” and “The World at War” (37pp)
RR6: “Circles and the Cross: Reflections on Neo-paganism, Postmodernity, and Celtic Christianity” (15pp)
RR7: “Global Theology: John Hick” (22pp)
Coursepack Readings:
ENR: “Encountering Navaho Religion” (27pp)
SR: “The Sermon on the River” (36pp)

Total Required Reading: @ 1400 pages, or 110 pages / week.

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Student Information Sheet

Name: (please print)

Phone #: (Residence) (Work)

email:

Major:

I am a Sr.____ Jr.____ Soph.____ Fresh.____

What classes in Bible, Religion, and Philosophy have you taken?

What would you like me to know about you?

What religions are you familiar with?