

Comparative Religion (Rel 120)
Benedict College
Columbia, South Carolina
Spring 2020

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Office Hours: M-W 11am-12am, 1pm-3pm; T-Th 1pm-2:30pm or by appointment
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Course Description

It is both right and wrong to refer to this course as an introduction to religion. It is right insofar as it serves for many students as the initial exposure to the academic study of the world's major religions. It is wrong inasmuch as most students have already been exposed to the practice of religion as a social phenomenon. To be sure, this practice of religion has meant for most of us in the Western Hemisphere the Christian faith instilling in us its mixed blessings of the call to human salvation on the one hand but clear biases regarding non-Christian religions and those who adhere to them on the other. This course seeks to minimize those biases by providing the student with a more informed knowledge of the major religions of the world in three contexts: 1) Primitive or Basic Context; 2) Indian Context; and 3) Middle East Context. Further, this course examines the presuppositions of each context showing their similarities and differences. In this sense, the course is most aptly titled Comparative Religion. The student will be encouraged to develop a genuine appreciation for the basic tenets of each of the religions such that she does not feel that her faith is being compromised.

Learning Outcomes

This course will enable the student to:

- 1) develop a knowledge of the major theories of the origin of religion in the Western tradition;
- 2) articulate the major presuppositions of each of the contexts out of which the religions emerged; and
- 3) identify the founders, leaders, major developments and basic tenets of the religions covered.

Course Requirements

Six Examinations (20% each - lowest exam score dropped)

Exams

Proficiency in the learning outcomes will be determined by objective exams, i.e., they will consist of multiple choice questions along with two extra credit questions to be determined by the instructor. The exam material will be taken primarily from class lectures and discussions with the remaining material taken from the textbook. Students are required to take all exams on the days designated by the instructor. **Make-up exams will be given only in cases of emergency (to be determined by the instructor). If a student wishes to take a make-up exam, he/she must consult with the instructor before the scheduled exam.** Only in rare instances will the instructor permit a make-up exam if consulted after the scheduled exam. Students have up to the next class meeting after the scheduled exam to take the make-up. No make-ups will be given

after that! Students not taking either the scheduled or make-up exam will be given a numeric grade of zero for that exam. Students are also required to be on time and ready to take the exams before they are administered. Students entering the lecture hall after the exam has been administered will **NOT** be allowed to sit for the exam and will be given a numeric grade of zero for that exam! Students will also be required to turn off all electronic devices during exams. If an electronic device goes off during an exam, a deduction of fifty points will be applied to the student's grade.

Grade Scale

- A 100-90
- B 89-80
- C 79-70
- D 69-60
- F 50-below

Cheating

Cheating on exams or other assignments will not be tolerated. It will result in your immediate dismissal from this class and a failing grade for the course. These measures will be taken in addition to whatever action(s) Benedict College deems appropriate.

Attendance

Given that the majority of the exam material will come from class lectures and discussions, regular attendance is imperative for student success. **Therefore, students will be allowed three unexcused absences. After the third unexcused absence, a point will be deducted from the student's final average for each subsequent absence!** When in class, students are expected to take lecture notes and participate in class discussions. Students doing neither of these and constantly disrupting the general decorum of the classroom may be dismissed from the classroom by the instructor.

Electronic Devices

Other than a laptop or recording device for lectures, electronic devices are strictly prohibited in the classroom. **In particular, cell phones and listening devices are prohibited from use during class!** They are to be put on silent before entering the classroom and not used for the duration of the class. If a student is expecting an urgent phone call, he/she is to inform me at the beginning of class. Students in violation will be disciplined or dismissed from the class.

Course Text

Mary Pat Fisher, Robin Reinhart, *Living Religions*. 10/e. Boston: Pearson Publishing, 2017.

Course Outline

Week One (1/13-1/17): Course Introduction and Syllabus

1/13 Course Introduction

1/15 Course Syllabus

Week Two (1/20-1/24): Theories of the Origin of Religion

1/20 King Day (NO CLASSES)

1/22 Polytheistic Theories of the Origin of Religion

Week Three (1/27-1/31): Theories of the Origin of Religion con't

1/27 Monotheistic Theories of the Origin of Religion

1/29 Atheistic Theories of the Origin of Religion

Week Four (2/3-2/7): Examination One

2/3 Examination One

2/5 Return Examination One

Week Five (2/10-2/14): Basic Religions/African Religions

2/10 Characteristics of Basic Religions

2/12 African Religions/Practical Characteristics

Week Six (2/17-2/21): Native American Religions con't

2/17 President's Day (NO CLASSES)

2/19 Controversial Puberty Rite (Circumcision)

Week Seven (2/24-2/28): Examination Two

2/24 Examination Two

2/26 Return Exam Two/Preparation for Assessment Exam

Week Eight (3/2-3/6): Midterm/Assessment Exam

3/2 Preparation for Assessment Exam

3/4 Examination Three (Midterm/Assessment Exam)

Thursday, February 27-Thursday, March 5 Midterm Exams

Week Nine (3/9-3/13): Spring Break (NO CLASSES)

Week Ten (3/16-3/20): Religions of India

3/16 Characteristics of Indian Religions

3/18 Caste System/Indian Reform Movement

Thursday, March 19 Spring Convocation

Week Eleven (3/23-3/27): Examination Four

3/23 Major Indian Reformers

3/25 Examination Four

Week Twelve (3/30-4/3): Middle East Religions
3/30 Return Examination Four
4/1 Characteristics of Middle East Religions

Week Thirteen (4/6-4/10): Islam
4/6 Islam: Origins
4/8 The Five Pillars of Islam
Friday, April 10, Easter Holiday (NO CLASSES)

Week Fourteen (4/13-4/17): Examination Five/Major Arms of Christian Faith
4/13 Examination Five
4/15 Return Examination Five/Greek (Eastern) Orthodoxy – The Church’s First Major Split

Week Fifteen (4/20-4/24): Major Arms of Christian Faith con’t
4/20 Protestant Reformation/Background
4/22 Protestant Reformation/The Church’s Second Major Split

Week Sixteen (4/27-5/1): Course Wrap-up
4/27 Examination Six

*****Senior Examinations***** Friday, April 24; Monday-Tuesday, April 27-28

*****Common Final Examinations***** Thursday-Friday, April 30-May 1

*****Final Examinations***** Saturday, May 2; Monday-Thursday, May 4-7

*****Commencement***** Saturday, May 9

Although this is the stated outline, it is subject to change as dictated by either time availability or unforeseen circumstances.