

Religious Studies 114: Religion and Culture

Fall 2003

**MWF 10:10 – 11:00 a.m.
Gambrell 006**

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State/public university

Intro-elective; lecture-discussion

3hrs/week over 14 weeks

Now capped at 40 (once hit 110); teaching it again this fall 2003--teach it every year

Pedagogical Reflections: For this variant intro that has appeal for upperclassmen trolling for an elective, I believe in (a) a topical approach illustrating the role that religion plays variously in historical, cultural events and issues of moment, and (b) the personal journal assignment component to push students further into self-exploration and discovery generally. I'm always mostly pleased with the personal journal results--see the page of guidelines. Freedom to teach what I want (as a religion-and-culture specialist) makes this course always personally enjoyable for me--I love the work. It continues to elicit in me the enthusiasm of my classroom persona. For years I have taught Camus's *The Plague* in a segment, with adequate success. This year I am substituting the Qu'ran excerpts (Dover) and Islam generally, as a non-specialist but with a little teaching experience in the Middle East.

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Introduction to the study of the pervasive mutual influence of modern (Western) culture and religion upon each other--focussing on the three religions "of the Book." Format: discussion of a succession of topics selected for broad interest and application. Theory of "revealed" religion, the Holocaust/Shoah, the influence of the Puritans in America, "fundamentalisms" both Christian and Islamic, creation science, the qualities and kinds of "love" defined in our culture, Freud's view of religion.

Emphasis not on mastery of facts (though facts always help) or on the writing of formal research papers, but rather on thoughtful assimilation and evaluation of the varied course material. The personal journal assignment is important. Testing by choice of essay questions. You will be evaluated on your ability to analyze texts or issues, to think and judge for yourself, and to organize effective essay answers. Contribution or non-contribution to class discussion will have a non-quantifiable impact upon the final grade.

REQUIRED READING:

This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, Tadeusz Borowski
The Crucible, Arthur Miller
The Koran (Dover Thrift Edition--cheap)
The Future of an Illusion, Sigmund Freud
Tristan and Iseult, ed., Joseph Bedier.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and reading of assignments expected.

Five-week JOURNAL – to be kept, as faithfully as possible, as an exercise in personal growth/self-exploration. Make an effort to write entries daily for five successive weeks, the earlier begun the better. High Pass/Pass/Low Pass/Fail. Due no later than November 3, but turn it in earlier. Possible contents and formats to be discussed in class. (30% of grade)

MID-TERM – October 10 (25% of grade)

Two QUIZZES – September 27 (on *The Crucible*), October 20 (turn in a take home Internet assignment describing three interesting sites for getting info about Islam– (7% of grade each)

FINAL EXAM – December 12 (30% of grade)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Readings are to be completed for discussion on the days indicated. Regular attendance expected. Keep up. Contribute to class.

August 22 Introduction, journal assignment

25 Journal assignment promoted, Holocaust issues

27 Holocaust issues

29 “

Sept. 1 Labor Day -- **no class**

3 *This Way for the Gas*

5 Video: “Memory of the Camps” (British Army film, 1945)

8 **Class cancelled**

10 Holocaust issues, *This Way for the Gas*

12 Puritanism in America

- 15 *The Crucible*
 17 “
 19 “
- 22 Fundamentalism: definitions, history
 24 “
 26 Case Study #1: Creation Science, Argument for/from Design
- 29 Video: Trial in Arkansas, 1980
- October 1 Case Study #2: rift in the SBC
 3 Video: W.A. Criswell, Paige Patterson, 1st Church Dallas
- 6 Video: Bill Moyers on the rift
 8 Review (and, if interested, a recent snake-handling video)
- 10 **Mid-Term**
- 13 **Fall Break**
 15 Introduction to Islam
 17 *The Koran (Qu'ran)*, selections
- 20 “
 22 DVD: *The Messenger*
 24 *The Koran* selections
- 27 Video: the Hajj
 29 Video: Leila Ahmed on opportunities of women in Islam
 31 *The Koran*, other issues
- Nov. 3 Video: “Sigmund Freud” (A&E Biography) **Journals due no later than**
 5 *The Future of an Illusion*
 7 “
- 10 “
 12 “
 14 “
- 17 Romantic and Courtly Love Wisdom
 19 “
 21 *Tristan and Iseult*
- 24 **Class cancelled** (Thanksgiving week)
- Dec. 1 *Tristan und Iseult*
 3 Biblical Christian Love Wisdom
 5 “

12 Final Exam (9:00 a.m.)

Note: The course has an online site at Blackboard, reachable through the login screen: <http://blackboard.sc.edu>. To log in and proceed to your “My USC” screen you will need a userid and password. At the “My USC” screen click on the number: title of this course. Initially, I have put this syllabus up (under “course documents”), along with a link to my personal pages, and the site will develop as interest and need dictate.

JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT

Keep it as faithfully as you can, daily, for five straight weeks. I want you to believe in the assignment as a useful, potentially revelatory experiment. The earlier begun in the semester the better. Start today.

Average at least a page a day. Make up for bad days with extra good days.

Date entries as you go.

Write for yourself alone. This is tricky. Although I will read it when you turn it in (and I alone), try not to write it with me in mind. The more personal and private you can make it, the more it will benefit you—that’s how journals work Trust me as much as you can—I, too believe in privacy, and I keep a journal. This is an exercise in personal growth through self-consolidation, self-exploration.

Show what a diverse and interesting person you are by addressing numerous topics. Write on anything. Do show that you do take some things seriously. Do try to get at and to reveal the unique individual. Do show—anyway you like--that you value the interior life as the basis for the public person. Make the journal entirely your own. It’s not a “diary.”

Grade scale: High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, Fail. “Fail” results only when you write hardly anything at all or do not turn in a journal.

When you are empty of topics or irritated—write about irritation, why not?—try these:

Dreams (occasionally a student with excellent recall will keep a “dream journal”)

Your own poetry, photography, fiction sketches, drawings, doodles

Comments on issues raised in class

Personal religious or non-religious background—the stage of transition in which you find yourself at present

Best moment or moments in nature—what happened?

Has your education so far been worth the time and money put into it?

Battle between the sexes: how do you see it? (Caution: try not to dwell exclusively on the ups and downs of your relationships du jour.)

Explore a strong feeling, e.g., fear, desire, confusion,...

Memories that stick—why do they stick and what do they mean?

Death in the family. Death, period. How would you personify death?

How do you view your body? As a temple? As an instrument? How exactly?

(The ancient poet Milarepa wrote: “The body is better than a wishing gem.”)

Commonplace Book entries: quote something you like and say something about it

Prayer. In what circumstances do you find prayer valid? Write one.

Unsolvable moral issues: euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment, ...

Your take on feminism. A useful trend? A masculinist rejoinder?

What have you learned from daytime television soap operas?

Parents, grand-parents, family—how are you getting on?