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REL. 101: Introduction to Religion

Aim of the Course

This course explores the religious dimension of human existence. We begin by attempting to understand the general patterns of experience and expression that constitute the religious world. Our "theoretical guide" for this adventure is historian of religions Mircea Eliade, and our "practical guide" is Black Elk, medicine man of the Oglala Sioux. From there we move on to survey five of the world's major religious traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We conclude by wrestling with the problem of suffering, one of humanity's most enduring and baffling problems, drawing on resources from the Hindu and Jewish traditions.

Class Meeting Times

Class meetings will be held on Monday through Friday, from 1:00 to 3:00 P.M.

Course Requirements

1. *Class participation (20% of final grade)*. There are two components to this requirement, each constituting approximately 10% of your final grade.

(a) Your oral contributions to our class discussions.

(b) Completion of written responses to study questions, which will be distributed on a regular basis. The purpose of requiring you to make written responses to study questions is to help you prepare to participate intelligently in class discussion. *These written responses to study questions will be collected from time to time, without prior notice.* Therefore, you should always bring your completed study questions (along with whichever texts we are focusing on at the time) with you to class. Late submissions of study questions will not be accepted.

Additionally, regular attendance at class meetings is required. *More than one absence from class will progressively lower this portion of your grade.*

2. *Two tests (25% each, for a total of 50%)*, which will take place on the second Tuesday and third Wednesday of the term. The format of the tests is short essay.

3. *A Take-Home Final Exam (30%)*, which will be due by 1:00 PM on the fourth Wednesday of the term. An assignment handout will be distributed that Monday.

Required Texts

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*.
2. John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*.
3. Robert Ballou, ed., *The Portable World Bible*.
4. Barbara Miller, trans., *The Bhagavad-Gita*.
5. Elie Wiesel, *Night*.
6. A Bible (Preferred translation: New Revised Standard Version).

Academic Honesty

Consult the COMPASS for the College's policy on academic honesty and dishonesty.

Students with Special Needs

Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a documented learning disability and will need any accommodation in this course, you must request the accommodation(s) from the instructor no later than the third day of the term. Additional information about the policies and procedures for accommodation of learning disabilities is available at http://cornellcollege.edu/academic_affairs/disabilities/.

Course Calendar

Note: The reading assignments listed in this course calendar are to be completed PRIOR to that day's meeting of the class.

WEEK 1

Monday: Getting oriented.

I. Understanding the Religious World, Theoretically and Practically

Tuesday: Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred.

- (a) Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Introduction and Chapter 1.
- (b) Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, Chapters 1-2.

Wednesday: Sacred Time and Myths.

- (a) Eliade, Chapter 2.
- (b) Neihardt, Chapter 3.

Thursday: The Sacredness of Nature and Cosmic Religion.

- (a) Eliade, Chapter 3.
- (b) Neihardt, Chapters 4-6.

Friday: Human Existence and Sanctified Life.

- (a) Eliade, Chapter 4.
- (b) Neihardt, Chapters 7-8.

WEEK 2

Monday: Completion of the Black Elk Test Case.

Neihardt, Chapters 9-25 (also read Author's Postscript).
In-class viewing of the film, *Crow Dog's Paradise*.

Tuesday: TEST 1, 1:00 P.M.

II. A Brief Introduction to Five Major World Religions

Wednesday: Hinduism.

Ballou, *The Portable World Bible*, pp. 17-58, 69-91.

Thursday: Buddhism.

Ballou, pp. 95-143, 155-159 (pp. 144-154 optional).

Friday: Judaism.

(a) Ballou, pp. 219-227.

(b) Genesis 1-4, 6-9, 12, 15-17, 21-22; Exodus 1-14, 19-20, 24 (Bible).

WEEK 3

Monday: Christianity.

(a) Ballou, pp. 228-234.

(b) Luke 1-24; Acts 1-2 (Bible).

Tuesday: Islam.

Ballou, pp. 437-479.

Wednesday: TEST 2, 1:00 P.M.

III. The Problem of Human Suffering

Thursday: The Suffering of the Individual: A Hindu Perspective.

Miller, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, chapters 1-12, 18 (Suggestion: read through Miller's glossary of key terms BEFORE reading the *Gita*, and consult it frequently as you study the text).

Friday: The Suffering of the Individual: A Jewish Perspective.

Job 1-14, 29-42 (Bible).

WEEK 4

Monday: The Suffering of the Community: The Holocaust.

Wiesel, *Night* (Suggestion: read the book in a single sitting).

Tuesday: No class--work on take-home final.

Wednesday: FINAL EXAM DUE, 1:00 P.M.

A List of Reference Resources Available in the Library

World Religions (Ref 200 B679wo)

Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols. (Ref 200.3 En19)

Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion (Ref 200.3 H234)

A New Dictionary of Religions (Ref 200.3 N42)

Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion, 2 vols. (Ref 200.82 En19)

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (Ref 203 Ox2)

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 12 vols. (Ref 203 Sch1)

A Companion to the Bible (Ref 220.3 A15c)

Harper's Bible Dictionary (Ref 220.3 H231)

Oxford Companion to the Bible (Ref 220.3 Ox2)

New Oxford Annotated Bible, 3rd ed. (Ref 220.5204320 N42h)

Harper's Bible Commentary (Ref 220.7 H234)

Oxford Bible Atlas (Ref 220.9 M451o)

Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 2 vols. (Ref 270.103 En19)

Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions (Ref 291 Ab58)
Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Hinduism (Ref 291.095 En19)
Religions of the World, 4 vols. (Ref 291.291 R279)
Dictionary of Buddhism (Ref 294.303 D56)
Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism (Ref 294.303 P871c)
Zen Dictionary (294.3927 W85d)
Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism (Ref 294.503 K697c)
Popular Dictionary of Hinduism (Ref 294.503 W495p)
The Jewish Encyclopedia, 12 vols. (Ref 296 J55)
Encyclopedia of Judaism (Ref 296.03 En19)
The Jewish Religion: A Companion (Ref 296.03 J153j)
Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (Ref 296.03 Ox2)
The Muslim Almanac (Ref 297 M974)
The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam (Ref 297.03 G464c)
A Popular Dictionary of Islam (Ref 297.03 N389p)
The Encyclopedia of Islam (Ref 956 En19)
Encyclopedia of Native American Religions (Ref 299.703 H616e)

[Back to Courses](#)