

**TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY:
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION
RELIGION 10533:635 – WORLD FAITHS, WORLD FICTIONS**

<http://personal.tcu.edu/~dmiddleton2/>

Fall 2002, 11:00 a. m. – 12:20 p. m.

Tuesday and Thursday, 205 TBH.

Dr. Darren J. N. Middleton, 228 Beasley Hall (257-6445): d.middleton2@tcu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:15am – 10: 50am; by appointment.

** Please note: the syllabus is subject to change at any point during the semester.*

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Institution: Texas Christian University, four-year private liberal arts university, associated with the Disciples of Christ [Christian Church].

Course Level and Type: First year Honors College seminar

Hours of Instruction: 36 hours, 3hrs/week over a 12 week term.

Enrollment and Year Last Taught: 15 (all first year Honors College seminars are restricted to 15 students), fall 2002.

Pedagogical Reflections:

After September 11, student interest in "World Religions" peaked. But, at the same time, I encountered many students, especially those from specific Christian backgrounds, struggling with thoughts of where to begin studying and understanding the complexities of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Here I wanted to examine and explore the major axial faiths through the prism of literature. Creative writing provides flesh and blood descriptions of religious beliefs and behaviors, and thus offers students a helpful portal onto the way devotees live their lives in the so-called real world. Each student studied five religions. Each religion was studied via a piece of creative writing that set the religion under study on "home soil," as it were -- so, we studied a novel about Hinduism in India and a novella about Islam in Iran. Then, at the end of each unit, I asked students to read one additional item, say, a poem, a memoir extract, something that examined the religion in diaspora, away from its home soil, so that students would be able to appreciate some of the challenges faced by "religious gatherings in diaspora." Thus, we studied a Ghanaian Christian woman poet using African imagery for Jesus, an American Buddhist memorist in China, etc. I should add that, through it all, I wanted students to amplify the knowledge gained from such creative writing by reading a standard academic textbook alongside the literature. I chose the Mary Pat Fisher book because, as it happens, the book features an accompanying website, which facilitates student learning through tests, quizzes, a glossary, and so on. Guest lecturers, movies, docent tours of relevant aspects of local museums, field trips, and even Indian cooking in my home served to accentuate learning. Computer journals offered students the chance to

personally respond to all of the above. The class was a great success. Students enjoyed the many and diverse readings, appreciated the approach, making the unfamiliar familiar through a familiar medium, and they valued the computer journals, perhaps more than I thought they would. Earthing some of lectures with concrete examples -- like the time I gave a powerpoint presentation on the Slave Castles of Elmina, West Africa, which I visited in 2000 -- worked to show how interconnected our world really is, that events that seem to occur far off and long ago are really close to home, perhaps in more ways than one.

Course Description

“The fierce power of imagination is a gift from God. Joined with the grandeur of the mind, the potency of inference, ethical depth, and the natural sense of the divine, imagination becomes an instrument for the holy spirit.”

--The Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish

Mysticism

Being human means asking questions about our existence: “Who am I? What causes me to be alive? How should we live? Who or what are we after death? What is the source of truth and reality? Is there a higher realm?”

Throughout history, certain individuals have helped women and men answer these and other life questions. From their teachings, the religions of the world have evolved. These teachings and these faith traditions have inspired people to search for and find purpose in their lives.

After the tragic events surrounding 9-11, Americans’ questions about their existence and interest in world faiths have intensified. Recognizing and building on these questions and interest, our course will examine and assess the major beliefs and practices of five world faiths through a careful, critical study of selected world fiction. While seminar discussion will be our primary method of learning, occasional lectures will outline the many and varied features of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. We will scrutinize, ponder, and appraise imaginative descriptions of each tradition. Noting the links between the ways religious people think and act, we will learn to identify and consider questions about the purpose of life in relation to their traditions.

There are five parts to our course, corresponding to the five traditions under study. Each part concludes by investigating an example of the religion in transition (undergoing change).

One of several Freshman Honors Seminars offered in the fall of 2002, Reli 10533:635 serves as an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of religion and the arts (literary and cinematic).

Course Objectives

Through two tests, electronic journals, a comprehensive class paper, a religious service attendance report, and class participation, you will be assessed on your ability to accomplish the following:

- 1: To comprehend and explain principal religious teachings (in each of the five world faiths) clearly and to trace a relationship between belief and practice.
- 2: To identify and explore questions about the purpose of life, and to consider such questions in relation to five world faiths.
- 3: To recognize and appraise the contribution of literature in the understanding of religious belief and behavior.

Texts

- 1: Fisher, Mary Pat. *Living Religions: A Brief Introduction*. A survey of today's religious world, focusing on historical developments, principal beliefs, and patterns of behavior.
- 2: Ketchin, Susan, editor. *The Christ-Haunted Landscape: Faith and Doubt in Southern Fiction*. An edited volume of American Southern short stories, addressing Christianity's varied and challenging nature in the Bible Belt's buckle.
- 3: Mishima, Yukio. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. A novel describing a Zen Buddhist monk's spiritual struggle, written by an outspoken Japanese novelist who committed ritual suicide.
- 4: Rachlin, Nahid. *Married to a Stranger*. A novel examining the connection between marriage, society, and Islam in pre-revolutionary Iran, authored by an Islamic Iranian woman.
- 5: Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *The Penitent*. A novella by a Nobel prize-winning American-Polish writer, about a modern Jew who abandons America for a fresh life in Jerusalem.
- 6: Suri, Manil. *The Death of Vishnu*. A novel focusing on Vishnu, a man who, while dying on the staircase landing of a Bombay apartment block, wonders if he might be his Hindu mythological namesake.

Movies

There are three movies relevant to our course; I hope that we can meet to view and discuss them.

- 1: *The Apostle*. A cinematic depiction of Texas Pentecostalism, concentrating on a gifted preacher who falls from grace and then travels along the rocky road to redemption.
- 2: *Mishima*. A docu-drama, focusing on the life and death (by ritual suicide) of Yukio Mishima, celebrated Japanese novelist of Zen Buddhist life and culture.
- 3: *The Quarrel*. A movie about two Holocaust survivors – a Yiddish novelist and a Rebbe – who reunite, pester God and each other with questions, and learn how “alienation” and “transcendence” mark two ways of looking at the world.

Course Requirements

- 1: *Attendance, Preparation, Participation*. Attendance is expected to do well. After three unexcused absences, a half letter grade will be deducted from your course grade for each additional unexcused absence. By definition, the only excused absence is one that is documented, due to illness, emergency or official university business. Have the day’s assignment read before class and be ready to participate actively in class discussion. Periodically, you may be asked to complete in class writing assignments or to lead the discussion. While these assignments will not be individually graded, they will help serve as a tool for determining the level of class preparation. If it looks as though you are not keeping up with the reading, unannounced pop quizzes may be introduced. Overall, preparation and participation counts toward 10% of the final grade.
- 2: *Electronic Journals*. Very generally, you are required to make one thoughtful entry per week. Entries should be completed by each Sunday evening. Aim to craft personal responses to any one or more of the following: the assigned readings, class lectures, seminar discussions, in-class video presentations, and movie screenings.

Notes for Logging on to the Electronic Journal

Go to <http://www2.tcu.edu/depts/discuss>

Click on Religion

Look for Reli 10533:635 World Faiths, World Fictions (Honors)

Add a message (at bottom)

Put in user name (your first name)

Put in password (one we agree on; more about this on the first day of class)

Note: name and password are case sensitive.

You can post anonymous (only I will know).

Any questions? E-mail d.middleton2@tcu.edu or call (x6445) me.

I plan to evaluate the electronic journal writing assignment on a pass/fail basis. To be completed on *Thursday, December 5*, this assignment counts toward 5% of the final grade.

- 3: *Comprehensive Class Paper*. Specific details appear at the end of this syllabus. This assignment is a *10 page paper* response to an assigned question. It is due on *Thursday, November 14*. The writing assignment counts toward 30% of the final grade.
- 4: *Two Tests*. All testing will be based on the reading assignments, class lectures, audio-visual material, and discussions. Both tests will have vocabulary, multiple choice, and essay sections. A study guide will be distributed prior to both tests. Scheduled for *Tuesday, October 15*, the first test counts toward 25% of the final grade. The second test, scheduled for *Tuesday, December 10*, is also worth 25%.
- 5: *A Short Report on your attendance at a Religious Service*. You are asked to find a religious group from a faith tradition different than your own. (If you are from a Christian tradition, I will accept a previously unexplored strand of Christianity only if consulted first.) Then write a 2-3 page (500-750 words, typed and doubled spaced) set of reflections on your visit. You must attend a major service or gathering event (off-campus). Let me know, in writing, the name and location of the group, and when you plan to visit, by *Thursday October 3*. You may go with a fellow student, but must write your own reflections. The paper will be due by *Thursday October 31*. It is required, and will count toward 5% of the final grade. While I want a record of your actual visiting experience, it might be helpful to attain some background information (via library or the www) beforehand. If appropriate, call ahead about your visit. Someone might meet you and answer questions before and during the service/event.

Here are some suggested questions to which you may respond:

What are some important beliefs or ideas about the Sacred/God (and its/his/her relation with humans) being communicated? What religious symbols or images of the Holy are visible? What is their significance (feel free to ask!)? How is the sacred space arranged? What is the sequence of events? What rituals are performed, individually and/or collectively? How are leader(s) dressed? What is his/her/their role? What is the size and nature of the congregation (sex, age, ethnicity, etc.) What is the role of the congregation in the service? How are particular roles, seating, segregated? (by age, race, gender, etc.) Why? What use, if any, is made of sacred scripture in this service? What use, if any, is made of secular literature in this service? What use, if any, is made of music or sound? How did you feel being a part of this setting? What was particularly new or unusual? What did you learn about this group? What did you learn about yourself?

Helpful Hints

Dress appropriately for the setting. If you do not know whether there is a dress code, call beforehand (e. g., women may have to cover their hair in certain settings). It is generally better to be a bit overdressed than underdressed.

If you do not understand what is happening, ask someone sitting nearby. Of course, you do not want to interrupt someone during a moment of silence or prayer. Use your good judgment. Follow the group – if it stands to sing, or kneels to pray, do likewise.

Arrive 10 minutes beforehand to give you time to become acclimated and observe preparations.

Do not rely on your memory to write your report. Bring a pen and some paper. If writing seems inappropriate, note details after you leave. Remember, however, the significance of being present in the worship.

If there is an offering, it is usually voluntary whether you make a contribution.

In turning in your paper, attach any worship bulletin you may receive.

Written Examinations: A Cautionary Note

No make-up examinations will be given, except for official university absences. See the TCU Bulletin, available on-line: <http://www.reg.tcu.edu>. Please notify me in advance if you plan to miss an examination because of an official university absence.

Academic Misconduct, Disabilities, Student Affairs

This class complies with TCU's stated guidelines on academic misconduct, et cetera. For a full explanation of these guidelines, see <http://www.studentaffairs.tcu.edu/handbook/academic.htm>

Grading

Attend./prep./participation	10%
Electronic Journals	5%
Religious Service Report	5%
Comprehensive Class Paper	30%
First Test	25%
Second Test	25%.

Letter Grades

- A = Excellent = 90-100%
- B = Superior = 80-89%
- C = Satisfactory = 70-79%
- D = Inferior = 60-69%
- F = Failing = 0-59%

Course Outline

- 29 August **First day remarks**
Instructions, syllabus, et cetera.
What is Religion?
- Part One:*
Hinduism: Eternal Dharma
- 3 September **The Real is One, though sages call it variously**
Mary Pat Fisher, 16-24; 46-50.
Manil Suri, 13-61; 299-301.
Video, "Origins of India's Hindu Civilizations."
- 5 September **Vishnu: co-creator and preserver of the world**
Mary Pat Fisher, 51-56.
Manil Suri, 62-104.
- 10 September **Wherever there is a decline of virtue and ascendancy of evil,**
Mary Pat Fisher, 57-65.
Manil Suri, 104-172.
Music CD: David Sylvian, "Song of Perfection" [devotional bhajan].
Selections from *Bhagavad Gita*.
- 12 September **Fall Convocation: no class**
- 17 September **I manifest myself in a body.**
Mary Pat Fisher, 65-69.
Manil Suri, 173-233.
Video, "Understanding Hindu Traditions."
- 19 September **Rama and Krishna: Vishnu's best-known Avatars**
(incarnations)
Manil Suri, 234-295.

24 September **Hinduism in transition: sari and San Francisco**
Mary Pat Fisher, 69-74.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, “Mrs. Dutta Writes A Letter”
(handout).

25 September: Kimball Art Museum – Docent-led Tour of the Asian Art
Collection, 2pm.

Part Two:
Judaism: Life Within the Fence of the Law

26 September ***Baal Tshuvah: one who returns***
Mary Pat Fisher, 136-145.
Isaac Bashevis Singer, 3-31.

29 September: Meet at Dr Middleton’s Home, Indian Cooking, 6:30pm.

1 October **Generations of Jews cried out from within me**
Mary Pat Fisher, 146-155.
Isaac Bashevis Singer, 32-94.

3 October **Journeying to Jerusalem**
Mary Pat Fisher, 155-165.
Isaac Bashevis Singer, 97-128.
Video, “For Out of Zion: The Making of a Torah.”

8 October **Prayer and/as protest**
Isaac Bashevis Singer, 129-164.
Guest Lecturer: Dr. David Nelson, Professor of Jewish Studies,
Brite Divinity School, TCU.
Evening Film: *The Quarrel*.

10 October **Judaism in transition: nature and New York**
Mary Pat Fisher, 165-171.
Cynthia Ozick, “The Pagan Rabbi” (handout).
Isaac Bashevis Singer, 167-170.

15 October **First Test**

Part Three:
Buddhism: Search and Refuge

- 17 October **I go to the Buddha for my refuge**
Mary Pat Fisher, 75-79.
Yukio Mishima, v-52.
- Extra Credit: TCU Gates of Chai Lecture on Contemporary
Judaism
Dr. Susan Estrich, 5th Gates of Chai Lecturer.
Ed Landreth Auditorium, Texas Christian University.
- 22 October **I go to the teaching as my refuge**
Mary Pat Fisher, 79-83.
Yukio Mishima, 53-133; Evening Film: *Mishima*.
- 24 October **I go to the order (*Sangha*) for my refuge**
Mary Pat Fisher, 84-91.
Yukio Mishima, 134-191.
Video, “Buddhism: Religions of the World.”
- 29 October **O King, everything in this world changes and decays**
Mary Pat Fisher, 91-98.
Yukio Mishima, 192-262.
- Field Trip: Visit to the Japanese Gardens, Fort Worth, 3pm.
Docent-led tour: Dr. Brent Plate, Assistant Professor of Religion
and Visual Culture, TCU.
- 31 October **Buddhism in transition: an American Buddhist in China**
Mary Pat Fisher, 98-102.
Gretel Ehrlich, “The Road To Emei Shan” (handout).

Part Four:
Christianity: On the Kingdom of God

- 5 November **The black church in the American South**
Mary Pat Fisher, 172-180.
Susan Ketchin, xi-xix [Introduction]; 172-197; 260-302 [Sandra
Hollin Flowers; Randall Kenan].
Evening Film: *The Apostle*
- 7 November **Temptation and tent revivals: on being saved – constantly!**
Mary Pat Fisher, 180-189.
Susan Ketchin, 3-55 [Lee Smith].

- 12 November **Celebrating the true and lively word**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 189-201.
 Susan Ketchin, 303-325; 352-370 [Mary Ward Brown; Clyde Edgerton].
- 14 November **Kudzu kingdom**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 201-213.
 Susan Ketchin, 100-139 [Larry Brown].
 Guest Lecturer: Ms. Betsy Flowers, Ph.D. student in American Religious History, with an emphasis on American Evangelicalism.
- 19 November **Christianity in transition: Jesus and West African Pentecostalism**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 213-222.
 Afua Kuma, “Jesus of the Deep Forest” [selections] (handout).

Part Five:
Islam: There Is No God But God

- 21 November **Islam, Iran, and the contemporary woman**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 223-229.
 Nahid Rachlin, 1-57.
 Video, “The Five Pillars of Islam.”
- 26 November **Our Lord: grant unto us wives...**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 229-239.
 Nahid Rachlin, 58-140.
- Field Trip: Visit to the Islamic Mosque, Fort Worth, 4:15pm (11-27-'02).
 Dr. Yushau Sodiq, Associate Professor of Islam and African Studies, TCU.
- 3 December **Forging an identity**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 239-245 .
 Nahid Rachlin, 141-220.
 Video, “The Hajj.”
- 5 December **Islam in transition: lifting the veil on Egyptian Muslim Women**
 Mary Pat Fisher, 245-255.
 Alifa Rifaat, “Distant View of a Minaret” (handout) and
 “Bahiyya’s Eyes” (handout).
- 10 December **Second Test**

For the “Comprehensive Class Paper,” the Syllabus indicates:

This assignment is a *10 page paper* response to an assigned question. It is due on *Thursday, November 14*. The writing assignment counts toward 30% of the final grade.

Instructions

1. Examine the following quotations:

All religions meditate on the Source...If the Source be the same, as indeed it must be, all of us and all religions meditate on the same Source.-- Dr. Wangari Maathai^{1[1]}

Different religions lead to the same mountaintop.

-- Anonymous.

2. These two quotations express a common position or assumption. Based upon our readings and studies, do you agree or disagree with this position – that all religions share a common purpose and lead to the same end?
3. Write a well-developed 10 page paper that explains your position, using at least three literary works. Basically, what I am asking is: are the various religions we have studied similar enough to say they share a common purpose, different enough to say they lead to dissimilar ends, or something in between (hint: consider the elements of religion in the texts we have studied – myth, symbol, ritual, ethics, experience, doctrine, space, worship, et cetera).
4. Respect the writing process – make an early start on your assignment. Read, think, make notes, write, talk to me, talk to your peers, think again, re-write, show a rough draft to a person you respect, et cetera.
5. If it helps you in some way, visit the TCU Writing Center and/or consult an online writing site: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/student/index.html>
6. Be aware that your “audience” for this essay is educated and familiar with the sources. Thus, you do not need to summarize the stories; avoid plot rehearsal. Accustomed to academic writing, your “audience” would not be impressed with papers containing grammar and spelling mistakes. Resolve to proof-read your final copy.

^{1[1]} Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions: A Brief Introduction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 280.

7. Organize your ideas and thoughts. Some students make the mistake of summarizing the issue in one story and then in the next. In my view, this is not an appropriate method of analysis. It might help to organize your paper around *points of comparison* and *points of contrast*.
8. Avoid the three point thesis many students learn in high school. Again, in my view, this is too elementary an approach for college writing. Your thesis should state the topic of the paper, your goal or aim in writing the paper, and not a condensed summary of every point you will make.
9. This is the same for your introduction. It should introduce your subject, not summarize all you will say. Avoid broad generalizations in your introduction that have little to do with your subject. For example, you don't need to give the history of each author, the history of Hinduism or Islam, et cetera.
10. Make sure your paper is: typed, double-spaced, uses (maximum) 12 point font, the MLA Manual of Style, and is sorted and stapled.
11. Quality of your answer in relation to elements of religion in three or more literary texts will be evaluated as well as the organization, grammar, structure, spelling, and adherence to both the above guidelines and the course objectives.

Thank you,

Dr Darren J. N. Middleton
Texas Christian University
Fall Semester, 2002.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Kennedy, Douglas. *In God's Country: Travels in the Bible Belt, USA*. London: Unwin, 1989.

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Electronic Resources

For a list of websites containing information germane to our course, please point your browser at my own website: <http://personal.tcu.edu/~dmiddleton2/> In particular, the "Site-Seeing" link reveals links to full texts of the world's scriptures.

Hinduism

www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/rel/hinduism.htm

www.Advaita-Vedanta.org

www.ramanuja.org

www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/special/Ramayana

www.courses.rochester.edu/muller-ortega/rel249

www.avatara.org

www.hindu.dk/english/1a/default.htm

Judaism

<http://shamash.org/trb/judaism.html>

<http://www.jewfaq.org/>

http://judaism.about.com/library/intro/bl_intro.htm?PM=ss11_judaism

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/index.jsp>

<http://www.wujs.org.il/activist/activities/sources/theology/index.shtml>

Buddhism

- http://buddhism.about.com/library/blbud101.htm?PM=ss11_buddhism

<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Buddhism.html>

<http://www.buddhanet.net/>

<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Zen.html>

<http://home.earthlink.net/~srama/>

Christianity

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/index.shtml>

- <http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/christ/>

<http://emuseum.mnsu.edu/cultural/religion/christianity/christianity.html>

<http://www.library.yale.edu/div/electext.htm>

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

Islam

- <http://www.islamworld.net/>

<http://www.islam-guide.com/>

<http://islam101.com/index.htm>

<http://www.questia.com/Index.jsp?CRID=islam&OFFID=se1>

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam/>