Religion G8830: Colloquium on Comparative Religion
Spring, 2013

“WORLD RELIGIONS”: IDEA, DISPLAY, INSTITUTION

Wednesdays, 4:10-6:00, plus the equivalent of an additional hour each week as two evening sessions (Wednesday March 6 and 13, 7:30-9:30) and an all-day workshop on Wednesday, May 8
Room 101, 80 Claremont

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Bulletin description:

This course explores the creation, maintenance, and performance of the dominant rubric in the field of Religious Studies--the concept "world religions." It also asks about the creation of the "isms" that sustain it: Since when? By whom? How contested?

Course rationale:

The Religion Department’s colloquium on comparative religion currently focuses on five zones of inquiry. This course is different, directing its attention to the comparative framework that has increasingly come to be thought of as foundational for the field of Religious Studies itself—variously phrased as “world religion” or “world religions.” This concept is especially prevalent in the writing of textbooks and the fashioning of other instructional media; it figures importantly in common English speech, as well. Our purpose is to understand how this came to be so, and to investigate major issues attend the rubric “world religions.” Among them are:

What counts as having “world” status?
Is the concept “religion” globally generalizable? (Or locally?)
What efforts of border maintenance are required to isolate and sustain the entities that qualify as “religions” under this schema?
How does the East/West dichotomy play in (the “Orientalist” question)?
What are the relations between academic categorization and institutionalization on the one hand and other public representations of “world religions” on the other?
How does the digitization of knowledge alter the production of “world religions”?
Course description:

The course proceeds in three overall units.

(1) We begin with a study for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, held at the Columbian Exhibition at Chicago in 1893, because it is so often regarded as one of the great annunciatory moments for the field. A number of the 19th-century European “founding fathers” were invited or present, as was Swami Vivekananda, who has been at least as significant as any of them for the development of the field as a global idea. The WPR’s American location not only relates to the course’s own location in obvious ways; it also serves lays a basis for asking whether scholarship on the history of the field (e.g., Masuzawa) may have been more Eurocentric than it should have been. In addition, the WPR serves to introduce students to each of the aspects of the course featured in its subtitle: the conceptual content of the idea “world religions” and problems classically associated with it (e.g., Barrows, Clarke, Ellinwood); the element of display involved (continuing forward to millennial events in 2000 and the ongoing meetings of the organization that claims the WPR as its direct ancestor; and the institutional aspect (organizations who contributed delegates; the special role of the University of Chicago in the framing of the academic field that would be known as Religious Studies; and funding institutions related to both of these, and beyond).

(2) In the second part of the course we investigate the consolidation/invention of the conceptual entities that comprise “world religions,” as well as debates about just how many of them they are, and by what principle of accounting. To exemplify the production of “isms” that are said to comprise the world religions, we investigate the conceptual origins of Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Judeo-Christian Tradition. Others are in the wings.

(3) In the third part of the course we turn to major academic institutions in the United States that have played roles in the production and maintenance (to use the industrial metaphor that is now typical) of “world religions.” Again, the list cannot be exhaustive, but by anyone’s standard it would have to include Chicago and Harvard. Columbia belongs there too, arguably, at least in relation to the larger complex of which it is a part, and since that is our own location, it must be included. A week on the Interfaith Center of New York—again, exemplary of a larger set of institutions—is new in the syllabus this year.

The course includes an evening workshop (March 6 and 13) intended to enable students to discuss various materials that they might use if they were to teach a course of the “world religions” type, as a number of the course’s graduates have, in fact, done. Like the weekly seminars, this serves as a forum where Religion graduate students can share their particular areas of expertise with others who work in different domains of “Religion”—and with graduate students coming from different disciplinary perspectives. The final meeting of the course is structured as a mini-conference in
which students make brief oral presentations on their seminar papers and discuss those that others have written.

**Course requirements:**

* Careful preparation for, faithful attendance at, and lively participation in all seminar meetings. Each seminar will typically be introduced by a member of the seminar.

* That person will post her/his reflections on the week’s readings and proposals for discussion on Courseworks. This short (1-2 page), carefully edited text will be expected by the end of the day on Monday—at 10:00 pm. Other participants will respond to the seminar leaders about any additional dimensions of the topic they hope to discuss or simply to congratulate the leaders on their perspicacity. These short responses will be due on Tuesday at 10:00 pm.

* A presentation contributing to the workshop on classroom and media resources, March 8.

* A seminar paper (due for common reading on May 3) and a class presentation introducing it in the course conference on May 8. A prospectus and advance bibliography are due on March 15. Please come and talk with me as you begin to think about this project.

**Required reading:**

We will read most or all of the contents of the following books, which are available for purchase at BookCulture and are listed in the order of their appearance in the course.


The following is available for purchase (in limited supply, alas) at the Barnard Religion Department, from Tynisha Rue:

The following is now print-on-demand from Augsburg. You might therefore want to check Amazon or Abebooks to see if they provide a better alternative:


Other books:

I have not placed an order at BookCulture for the following books, either because we will read only portions of them together or because the purchase price is prohibitive. In case you would considering acquiring them, however, let me say that they are particularly germane to the course. As follows:


Library:

Copies of the above books are available at the Reserve Desk of Butler Library, except those that are filed in the library’s reference collection. Other copies may be available at Barnard or in the Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary. On Common Ground can be consulted in the Reference section of the Barnard library. In addition to the titles listed above, you will also find the following on reserve at Butler (in order of their appearance in the syllabus):


COURSE SYLLABUS

January 23. Introduction to the course.

Part I: The Founding of ‘World Religions’

January 30. 1893: Chicago and the theatre of world religions.
Convener: Mark Balmforth


Supplementary:


February 6. The Chicago Parliament (II) and the University of Chicago
Convener: Liz Dolfi


Swami Vivekananda’s Addresses at World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), entire (55 pp.).
**Supplementary:**


**February 13. Comparative religion and its “founding fathers.”**

*Convener: Tia Carley*


**Supplementary:**


**February 20. Friedrich Max Müller**

*Convener: Rex Barnes*

Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* chapters 5-8, pp. 147-308.


M. Winternitz, *A General Index to the Names and Subject-Matter of the Sacred Books of the East* [constituting volume 50 of the SBE], introductory materials (including a preface by A. A. Macdonell, an introduction by Winternitz, and a list of the 49 volumes of the SBE), pp. vi-xvi.


*Supplementary:*


Part II: ‘Ism’ization

February 27. The invention/discovery of Hinduism

Convener: Jay Ramesh


Supplementary:


[http://www.soas.ac.uk/ijjs/index.html](http://www.soas.ac.uk/ijjs/index.html)

**March 6. Disputing ‘Hinduism’**

*Convener: Robert Lindsey*


S. N. Balagangadhara, ‘The Heathen in His Blindness...’: Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), introduction, chapter 7, chapter 12, and references (pp. 1-10, 223-262, 501-516). Important sections of the book that are not included in this listing are as follows: the concluding sections of chapters 8 and 9, chapter 10, and chapter 11:3-4.

Some reactions to Balagangadhara’s book are collected in *Cultural Dynamics* 8:2 (1996). Please read the following:

Editorial introduction, pp. 115-118;

Vivek Dhareshwar, “The Trial of Pagans,” pp. 119-136;

Philip C. Almond, “The Heathen in his Blindness?,” pp. 137-145;


**Supplementary:**


Balagangadhara et al., *Rethinking Religion in India* (a five-year project, currently ongoing:

http://www.rethinkingreligion.org/


**March 6, 13  Workshop on classroom and media resources (7:30-9:30 pm)**


Please note: It can be very instructive to browse at Butler, Union, and elsewhere to get a quick sense of what’s out there now (or almost now) and what’s been there before. I especially recommend the classifications BL80–BL80.2 and, in the Dewey system, 209. Also, the presence of some form of the word “man” in each of the titles listed just above is striking. All have since been retitled at some point in their history of publication, and thereby hangs a tale worth pursuing.

Projects: Each student will be responsible for a brief presentation on 1-2 books and on the intellectual and institutional biographies of their authors. A balance will be struck between books that have appeared quite recently and older works that have been through multiple editions and printings and have been historically influential. Alternatively, students may choose to focus on non-text media intended for the classroom or available to be used there; or, finally, on the case-studies archive being developed by the Pluralism Project.

(1) Textbooks
A list of textbooks will be distributed separately, and many will be available for you to consult. I am hoping that in addition we will have access to the text now being completed by Jeffrey Kripal for Blackwell’s.

(2) Films, YouTube, Wikipedia and the Web

In regard to films, a benchmark classic is:


Videotapes comprising *The Long Search* can be viewed in the media center of the Barnard Library: VIDEO BL80.2 .L65 1977.

(3) The “Case Studies” component of the Pluralism Project (www.pluralism.org)

(4) A visit from Liz Kineke of CBS’s “What They Believe”

E.g., http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7405258n.

March 13. The discovery/invention of Buddhism

Conveners: Evan Jerome and Liz Tinsley


**Supplementary:**


[March 20.  University holiday]

**March 27.  The birth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition**

*Convener: Laura McTighe*


**Retrospective:**


**Supplementary:**


**Part III: America again: cities, schools, and the institutionalization of “world religions”**

**April 3. The Chicago school.**

*Convener: Andrew Jungclaus*

By “the Chicago school,” a designation that could certainly be disputed, I mean especially Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Kitagawa, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Wendy Doniger. Of course, the presence at Chicago of a host of other witnesses also bears on the formation of this “school,” if we may call it such, and there are more recent eminences as well, among them Martha Nussbaum, Bruce Lincoln, Hugh Urban, and Jeffrey Kripal. We will focus on four “moments”: foundations (see Cherry, below), Mircea Eliade and his encyclopedia, Wendy Doniger, and Jeffrey Kripal.


Jeffrey J. Kripal, “Questions Toward a New Comparativism: A Personal Response to Tomoko Masuzawa’s *The Invention of World Religions*,” Ohio State University, April 7, 2008.


[http://divinity.uchicago.edu/](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/)

**Supplementary:**


April 10. Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard

Convener: Alessandro Poletto


http://www.hds.harvard.edu/
http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/resources/lectures/radhakrishnan.html
http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/about/news/Nov2006_history_event.html

Supplementary:


April 17. Diana Eck and the Pluralism Project

Convener: Zach Ugolnik


There are many parts of the website that will capture your interest and elicit comment, but be sure to give attention, amid all the rest, to the online-accessible version of World Religions in Boston, since it is an explicit link between the overarching themes of our course and the goals of the Pluralism Project. See also a new component of the Pluralism Project: “The Case Study Initiative: Teaching Pluralism.”


Supplementary:

Diana L. Eck, Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 2009. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0wDxV4vOqU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0wDxV4vOqU).

April 24. Columbia and its neighbors

Convener: Cara Rock-Singer

(a) Union Theological Seminary


(b) Asian Humanities and Neo-Confucianism

Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, Asia in the Core Curriculum (New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 2000), especially pp. 9-31, which include comments by Wm. Theodore de Bary, Ainslie T. Embree, and John D. Rosenberg.

(c) Postcolonial and Cultural Studies


(d) The current evolution of the Columbia/Barnard Religion Departments


May 1. Interfaith New York

Guest: Henry Goldschmidt, Interfaith Center of New York

http://interfaithcenter.org

Our special focus is on two ICNY projects: the webinar for teaching world religions [http://interfaithcenter.org/archives/3494] and the NEH-sponsored summer seminar in 2012 mainly for high school teachers [http://www.neh.gov/divisions/education/other-opportunities/religious-worlds-new-york-teaching-the-everyday-life]. For the latter, curricular materials to be provided.

Further, see:

Tibet House U.S.
http://www.tibethouse.org
The erstwhile Muslim Communities in New York project, housed at the Middle East Institute, Columbia and funded principally by the Ford Foundation. [http://www.mei.columbia.edu/research.shtml#muslims](http://www.mei.columbia.edu/research.shtml#muslims).

The project on “Religion and Immigrant Incorporation in New York” of the International Center for Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenship at the New School under the direction of Jose Casanova and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts: [http://www.newschool.edu/icmec](http://www.newschool.edu/icmec).

The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, August 28-31, 2000, opening at the United Nations. The main website for this event ([http://www.millenniumpeacesummit.com](http://www.millenniumpeacesummit.com)) is apparently no longer online. One can have various perspectives on it, however, by using a search engine. One example is: [http://www.spiritofmaat.com/archive/feb1/summit.htm](http://www.spiritofmaat.com/archive/feb1/summit.htm).

**May 3.** Seminar papers due electronically to Courseworks and as hard copy in Milbank 219.

**May 8**
Course conference: Paper presentations
10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Other students’ papers are available to be read on Courseworks.

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**General Reference**


Wendy Doniger, consulting editor, *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1999). This volume, prepared under the aegis of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is also the point of origination for a number of
recent emendations of and additions to the Britannica’s database in the Religion domain. These are visible at: [http://www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com).


