

Comparative Religions
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Room 308

PURPOSE: The purpose of this class is to explore the varieties of religious experience in different parts of the world as well as how these traditions are part of our country's pluralistic society. We will engage some of the core issues of each tradition to try and understand how people have come to imagine god(s) in so many different forms and try to explain the nature of people's relationship to them.

This is an effort to try to widen our own horizons, to stimulate personal growth through broadening our understanding of what spirituality has meant for people in other parts of the world and here in the United States.

Methods: We will read primary and secondary texts from each tradition in order to illustrate or describe the tradition's essential characteristics. Many of these readings will come from text handouts but there will also be other supplementary readings. These readings are merely a window into the ideology of different cultures. There will be significant attention paid to current events both in the U.S. and around the world especially those of a religious nature.

Religions and Religious Thought to be Covered:

- Characteristics of Basic Religions
- Native American Religions
- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam
- Buddhism
- Chinese Religions

Requirements:

- Nightly reading usually accompanied by a writing assignment
- Occasional projects
- Unit exams and quizzes
- World Religions/current events journal
- Midterm and Final exam**

Extra Help : Wednesday and Thursday afternoons in Rm. 308 by
Arrangement.

Textbook: Religions of the World by Hopfe & Woodward (Ninth ed.)

Unit Objectives:

Basic Religions

Chapter 1 presents an overview of basic religions. Basic religions are religions that are not based on written texts. The chapter discusses the challenges involved in studying basic religions. Elements about pre-historic religions and features common to basic religions throughout the world -- including animism, magic, divination, taboo, totems, sacrifice, myth and ritual, rites of passage, and ancestor veneration -- are described in this chapter

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Be familiar with the characteristics of basic religions.
2. Be aware of the challenges existing in defining historical and contemporary basic religions.
3. Understand important terms including ancestor veneration, animism, mythology and rites of passage.
4. Understand the similarities of basic non-literary and literary religions.

Native American

Chapter Two presents an overview of North American religions. It includes discussions of the nature of the spirit world and ways in which Native Americans contact it; the religious understanding of the natural world shared by many Native American people; beliefs about death and the afterlife; religious specialist; and contemporary rituals and issues confronting Native Americans in the modern world.

After reading this chapter you should:

1. be familiar with the diversity of Native American religions in North America.
2. know about the rituals and beliefs of several Native American communities.
3. understand the meaning of terms including, animism, taboo, sun dance and vision quest.
4. understand some of the ways in which Native American religions have adapted to the coming of European cultures, communities and religions.

5. understand the attraction of Native American religions to non-native peoples.

Judaism:

This unit presents an overview of the historical development, sacred texts and rituals of Judaism. It includes discussions of the origins of Judaism in the ancient Middle East, the biblical patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, and religion during the period of the Hebrew monarchies. The chapter also covers the texts and institutions of the diaspora, Judaism in medieval Europe and the Muslim Middle East, Jewish responses to modernity, and the Holocaust and Zionism.

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Be familiar with the history and basic teachings of Judaism.
2. Know the names and understand the importance of major figures in the Hebrew Bible.
3. Be familiar with Jewish religious texts including the Torah, Mishnah and Talmud.
4. Be familiar with the diversity of contemporary Judaism.
5. Recognize terms and concepts including Pharisees, Sadducees, synagogue, Sinai, Exodus, El, YHWH, the temple of Solomon, Sabbath, kosher, rabbi, haggadah, halachah, kabbalah, Maimonides, Yiddish, Shabbatai Zevi, Moses Mendelssohn, Baal Shem Tov, Sabbath, Passover, Bar Mitzvah, and Theodor Herzl.

Christianity:

Topics covered include an introduction to the Roman world of the first century C.E., the life and teachings of Jesus, the teachings and organization of the early Church and the production of the New Testament. The chapter also describes early theological controversies, the growth of the Church of Rome, the division between eastern and western Christianities, the Medieval papacy, and the Protestant Reformation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Christianity in the modern world.

After completing this unit you should:

1. Understand the social, political and religious contexts in which Christianity developed.

2. Be familiar with the life and teachings of Jesus.
3. Understand relationships between the principle books of the New Testament.
4. Know the names and teachings of people who made important contributions to the development of Christianity
5. Be aware of the major divisions within the Christian tradition.
6. Know the meanings of important terms including: Gospel, synoptic gospels, parables, crucifixion, miracles, Messiah, Holy Trinity, Mass, transubstantiation, icons, pope, synod, council, penance, indulgence, baptism, confirmation, Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Vatican II, evangelism, and the ecumenical movement.
7. Be aware of such influential people to Christianity as: Constantine, Martin Luther, Augustine, John Calvin.

Islam

This chapter presents an overview of the history, teachings and contemporary forms of Islam. Beginning with pre-Islamic Arabian religion, chapter 13 details the life of the Prophet Muhammad and describes the rise and spread of Islam in the centuries after his death. The Qur'an, Islamic theology and Muslim religious practice are also described—with special attention to such topics as the role of women and the differences between various groups within Islam. The chapter concludes by considering the response of Islam to the rise of the modern West and the position of Islam in the contemporary world.

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Understand the development of Islam and its historically close ties to Christianity and Judaism.
2. Be familiar with the biography of the Prophet Muhammad and understand his place in Islamic tradition and thought.
3. Understand the importance of the Qur'an and its major teachings.
4. Identify the Five Pillars of faith.
5. Understand the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite, and Sufi followers of Islam.
6. Identify where Islam has flourished and taken root geographically beyond the Middle East.
7. Recognize important terms and concepts including Abraham, Ishmael, Ka'ba, Hijrah, Mecca, Medina, hadith, imam, Five Pillars, iman, the Caliphate, jihad, halal/haram, sufi and mosque.

Buddhism

Chapter 6 concerns the many varieties of Buddhism. It begins with an account of the life of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. The chapter includes sections on the teachings of the Buddha and the ways in which major Buddhist schools in South, Southeast and East Asia have interpreted them. Among those considered are Theravada and Mahayana schools including Pure Land, Zen, Tendai, and Nichiren. The final sections of the chapter concern Buddhism in Tibet and recent developments since World War II in Buddhist thought and practice.

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Be familiar with Buddhist accounts of the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama.
2. Be familiar with major Buddhist festivals and holy days including the new year, the celebration of the birth of the Buddha, the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist festival of souls, and the robe offering.
3. Recognize the major Buddhist schools and understand their differences and similarities.
4. Know important names and terms including: Buddha, Rahula, tanha, Sangha, Dharma, Nirvana, anatman, Bodhisattva, dhyani, Amitabha, koan, satori, tantras and Dalai Lama.
5. Understand Buddhism's connection with Asian nationalism and political change, as well as the development of American Buddhism.

Religions of China

Chapter 8 discusses the nature and development of religions in China. After presenting a brief overview of several major religious concepts, this chapter examines the origins of Taoism and Confucianism and traces their development over several millennia. It also describes the significance of Buddhist influence and the persistence of traditional Chinese holidays and festivals despite political upheavals and repressions of religion. The chapter concludes with a discussion of religion in China in the second half of the twentieth century.

After reading this chapter you should:

1. Understand the historical development of religion in China.
2. Know the basic concepts of Chinese folk religion.
3. Be familiar with the life of Lao-tzu and the basic teachings of Taoism.
4. Be familiar with the life of Confucius and his basic teachings.
5. Recognize important names and terms including filial piety, yin and yang, I Ching, Shang Ti, Tao Te Ching, alchemy, Analects of Confucius, li, and jen.

