

## **World Religions: Diversity and Dialogue**

Religion 11/Divinity 3220

Fall Term 2000: M, W, F at 10:00

Instructor: Diana L. Eck

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Class Website: <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~rel11/>

Head Teaching Fellow: Kristin Scheible

Teaching fellows: Justin McDaniel, Jennie Song, Nathan Rein, Lisa Lawrence

This course is an introduction to five of the world's religious traditions -- the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. We will focus on the writings of twentieth century adherents of each tradition, asking the following questions: How do people in each tradition articulate the central symbols, tenets, and practices of their faith in the context of the questions and challenges of the modern world? How do people in each tradition think about their own faith in the light of the diversity of other religious traditions? Is religious diversity and difference a problem? What is the spectrum of religious perspectives within each tradition? In addition to providing an introduction to the challenges of religious diversity today, the course will investigate some of the critical problems of interpretation in the academic study of religion.

### **SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS**

Note: In addition to these class meetings, there will be section meetings for discussion once a week on Thursday or Friday.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sept. 18 - M - Introduction to the Course

Sept. 20 - W - What is "Religion?" And how does one study it?

Sept. 22 - F - Religious Diversity, Religious Pluralism, and Religious Truth

Sept. 25 - M - The American Scene in 2000

Sept. 27 - W - First Section meetings during class hour

Sept. 29 - F - No Class, but our second section meeting will take place on Thursday or Friday of this week. Discussion of the assigned reading.

First Section Discussions: Bring to your section a three page essay describing the most significant encounter you have had with someone of another faith tradition; if you are not religious, the most significant encounter you have had with someone who is. What was significant for you about this encounter? What did you learn from it?

Second Section Discussion: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith Around the World* (One World, 1999); Diana Eck, *Encountering God*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 8; "Dialogue and Method: Reconstructing the Study of Religion in Patton, ed., *A Magic Still Dwells*.

## II. THE HINDU TRADITION

Oct. 2 – M - What is Hinduism?

Oct. 4 – W - A Hindu View of Religion and the Religions

Oct. 6 – F - Film: "330 million Gods"

Reading for Discussion: Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism*. (Additional Reading: Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism" in *Our Religions*)

Oct. 9 – M - Columbus Day holiday

T.B.A. - Film: "Mahatma Gandhi: The Great Soul Lives"

Oct. 11 – W - Gandhi and the Unity and Diversity of Religions

Oct. 13 – F - Panel: Hindu Perspectives on Today's Issues

Reading for Discussion: Selections from M.K. Gandhi, *All Religions are True* and Diana L. Eck, "Gandhian Guidelines for a World of Religious Difference" in Robert Ellsberg, ed., *Gandhi on Christianity*.

## III. THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

Oct. 16 – M - Who is the Buddha?

Oct. 18 – W - The Four Noble Truths, Then and Now

Oct. 20 – F - Film: "Becoming the Buddha in L.A."

Reading for Section Discussion: Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*. (Additional reading: Masao Abe, "Buddhism" in *Our Religions*)

Oct. 23 – M - Diversity within the Buddhist Tradition  
Oct. 25 – W - Buddhist Approaches to Religious Pluralism  
Oct. 27 – F - Panel: Buddhist Perspectives on Today's Issues  
Reading for Discussion: Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace.

#### IV. THE JEWISH TRADITION

Oct. 30 – M - The Jewish Tradition: God and Covenant  
Nov. 1 – W - Central Symbols of Judaism: Torah  
Nov. 3 – F - Panel: Jewish Perspectives on Today's Issues  
Reading for Section Discussion: Emil Fackenheim, What is Judaism? Introduction, Parts I and II. (Additional Reading: Jacob Neusner, "Judaism" in Our Religions)  
Nov. 6 – M - Central Symbols of Judaism: Israel and Zion  
Nov. 8 – W - Jewish Approaches to Religious Pluralism  
Nov. 8 – W - Film Scheduled in Afternoon and Evening: "The Jew in the Lotus"  
Nov. 10 – F - Veteran's Day Holiday: No Class  
Reading for Discussion: Emil Fackenheim, What is Judaism? Part III; Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity after the Holocaust," Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island."

#### V. THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Nov. 13 – M - Central Symbols of Christianity: Christ, The Incarnation  
Nov. 15 – W - Central Symbols of Christianity: Credo "I believe. . ."  
Nov. 17 – F - Film: "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory"  
Reading: John R. Stott, Basic Christianity. (Additional Reading: Harvey Cox, "Christianity" in Our Religions)  
Nov. 20 – M - Central Symbols of Christianity: The Church  
Nov. 22 – W - Christian Approaches to Religious Pluralism

Nov. 24 – F - Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 27 – M - Panel: Christian Perspectives on Today's Issues

Nov. 29 – W - The Globalization of Religion: Mission, Dialogue, Controversies

Dec. 1 – F - Multireligious Panel and Discussion

Reading for Discussion: Byron Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5; and Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God*, Chapters 4, 5, 6.

## VI. THE MUSLIM TRADITION

Dec. 4 – M - Fundamentals of Islam: The Oneness of God, The Prophet Muhammad

Dec. 6 – W - Fundamentals of Islam: The Qu'ran

Dec. 8 – F - Film: "Islam in America"

Reading for Discussion: Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in Today's World*. (Additional Reading: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam" in *Our Religions*)

Dec. 11 – M - Fundamentals of Islam: The Shariah

Dec. 13 – W - Muslim Approaches to Religious Pluralism

Dec. 15 – F - Panel: Muslim Perspectives on Today's Issues

Reading for Discussion: Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in Today's World*, Chapters 4-6. Sherwin and Kasinow, *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Part 4.

## VII. CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS

Dec. 18 – M - Responses to Diversity: Fundamentalism, Communalism, Secularism

Dec. 20 – W - Religious Pluralism and American Multiculturalism

## REQUIRED READING

The required reading has been chosen with particular criteria in mind. Most of these are books about a particular religious tradition by an adherent of that tradition. Most are not written as historical introductions to the traditions, but as introductions to the concepts, symbols, and issues of each tradition. One additional text for the course is *Our Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma. In a sense, it

constitutes introductory background readings for each tradition. Each chapter is written by a scholar/adherent of the tradition. These chapters are not the primary subject of discussion in section, but for supplementary reading and to provide additional background, you should read them as we move along.

The following books have been ordered for purchase. They are also on reserve at Hilles, Lamont, and Andover Harvard Libraries:

- Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith Around the World (One World)*
- Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras (Beacon Press)*
- Arvind Sharma, ed., *Our Religions (Harper Collins)*
- Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York)*
- M.K. Gandhi, *All Religions Are True (Navajivan Press) Xerox*
- Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught (Grove Press)*
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace (Parallax Press)*
- Emil Fackenheim, *What is Judaism? (Syracuse Univ. Press)*
- Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue (Orbis Press)*
- John R. Stott, *Basic Christianity (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.)*
- Farid Eisak, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in Today's World (One World)*

These books are available for purchase at the Harvard Coop or at the Harvard Divinity School bookstore in the basement of Divinity Hall (the main building of HDS), 14 Divinity Avenue. Additional xerox materials will be made available for purchase in class.

The CD-ROM of Diana L. Eck and the Pluralism Project, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America (Columbia University Press)* is also a resource for the course and is available substantial discount at the Coop and at HDS Bookstore. It has very basic introductions, timelines, and glossaries, as well as extensive information about religion in the American context. It can also be accessed from the course website, but this is practicable only for those who have ethernet access. The Pluralism Project website is [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org) and it has a variety of resources for the course, including a section entitled "In the News" to which you may wish, on occasion, to contribute.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Active section participation. Five short three-page response will be due in section during the weeks of October 9, October 23, November 6, November 27, and December 11 -- in each case, the second week of our study of each tradition. (There is no mid-term exam. These will cumulatively constitute 1/3 of the course grade)

Voices on the Web. During the first week of our study of each tradition, you should spend some time exploring the range of voices on the internet. By Tuesday of that week, submit to your section leader a description of the website you have found most interesting. It should be about one paragraph, and along with it you should submit a brief one-line description to become part of the class website. A selection of links will be made on the World Religions: Diversity and Dialogue web page. (This is a required, but not graded, assignment)

Term Paper. This gives you a chance to explore a topic germane to the subject matter of this course and close to your own interests. This paper should be about 15 pages in length. An extensive term paper bibliography will be distributed, but it is intended only as a starting place. Your own paper topic and bibliography should be submitted to your section leader by Monday, December 4. The paper is due Monday, January 8. (1/3 of the course grade)

Final Exam. (1/3 of the course grade)