INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS
THRS 112
SECTION 03

University of San Diego
Fall Semester, 2013
MWF 10:10am-11:05am
Room: Maher 224
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Professor Louis Komjathy ("Dr. K")
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Office: Maher 282
Office Hours: MW 12:30-2pm (in office);
T 10am-12pm (in Aroma’s); and by appointment
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Course Description: This course examines most of the major religious traditions of the world in terms of
their history, worldviews, practices, goals and ideals. These include the religions of the Middle East
(Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and Europe (Protestant Christianity), commonly identified as
“Western,” and the religions of South Asia (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism) and East Asia
(Confucianism and Daoism), commonly identified as “Eastern.” Primary emphasis is placed on historical
and geographical origin, though we will also discuss later adaptations and developments (e.g., Buddhism
in East Asia and world religions in America). Tracing the contours of nine major “world religions,”
students will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the diversity of religiosity in various
cultures and contexts. In addition, this class will contextualize world religions within the larger contours
of human history and relevant issues from comparative religious studies. This course also serves as an
introduction to Religious Studies as an interdisciplinary academic field and to the Department of
Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego.

Course Objectives: To familiarize students with the depth and breadth of the world’s religious traditions,
including their changing historical contexts, worldviews, practices, goals, and ideals. To deepen students’
appreciation of these traditions through selected readings from relevant primary sources in translation.

Learning Outcomes: Committed, engaged and motivated students will be able to explain and analyze the
categories, concerns, doctrines, symbols, and practices of various world religions, including critical
methods for analyzing the content of religious texts (USD 1, 2, 9 & 10; THRS 1). Such students also will
be able to explain and apply at least two methodologies and research techniques that are standard in the
fields of theology and religion, such as anthropological, comparative, hermeneutical, historical, literary,
phenomenological, philosophical and sociological approaches (USD 1 & 4; THRS 2).

Religious Literacy: This course emphasizes the acquisition of “basic religious literacy,” or knowledge of
significant dimensions and defining characteristics of religious traditions. Basic religious literacy will be
gained through understanding tradition-specific technical terms and important doctrines as well as
through the ability to identify and interpret representative scriptures. Important technical terms will be
identified during class meetings through the use of “asterisks” (*). Students should keep a notebook or
working glossary of such terms, as these will form a substantial aspect of exams. The meaning of
technical terms may be clarified through consulting the glossaries in the Oxtoby/Segal and Fieser/Powers
books.

Prerequisite Fulfillment: Along with THRS 110: Exploring Religious Meaning (The Nature of
Religion), this course fulfills the prerequisite for the following courses: THRS 312: Hindu Faith and
Practice; THRS 313: Jewish Faith and Practice; THRS 314: Buddhist Faith and Practice; THRS 315:
Islamic Faith and Practice; THRS 316: The Daoist Tradition; THRS 317: Religions of China; THRS 320:
Native American Religious Traditions; THRS 321: Afro-Latin Religions; & THRS 371: Cults and Sects
in the United States.
**Omissions:** Due to time restrictions, we of course cannot cover every major religious tradition of the world or every dimension of religiosity. With respect to the latter, distinguishing characteristics and representative concerns will be emphasized. Some major omissions in the course include ancient Egyptian, Persian and Mesopotamian religions, indigenous African, Australian, European and Native American religions (“primitive cultures” and “aboriginal religions”), Abrahamic religions in “non-Western” societies (e.g., Christianity in Africa and Korea), Baha’i, Japanese New Religions, Paganism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, as well as contemporary American and “non-American” religions. Students with the interest and motivation may write their papers on one of these topics. Uncovered topics and inspired interests may be addressed by taking additional Theology and Religious Studies courses and by independent study.

**Approaches to Teaching and Learning:** The primary pedagogy utilized in this course is interactive lecturing. Many class meetings will involve formal and semi-formal lectures by the instructor, but such sessions will be informed by student questions and insights. Some class periods will also be set aside for full-class and small-group discussions as well as for guest-lecturers. This class thus utilizes subject-centered and student-centered approaches to learning. Student engagement and participation are strongly encouraged. With respect to gaining the envisioned religious literacy, four primary dimensions are essential and will ensure comprehension and accomplishment: (1) Class meetings and student-directed discussion; (2) Office visits; (3) Personal reading and study outside of class; and (4) Peer meetings and study sessions. That is, true study and learning are not simply a matter of class attendance.

**Course Requirements:** Consistent class attendance, familiarity with assigned readings, intellectual engagement, and participation. Your grade will be based on the following assignments and corresponding points:

- Biography Sheet: -5% if not turned in by the second day of class
- Attendance and participation: 15 points (including informal writing assignments)
- Two quizzes: 10 points each (20 points)
- Mid-term: 20 points
- Paper: 20 points
- Final: 25 points

These assignments have been designed with the intention of providing balanced evaluation. They include assignments based on knowledge acquisition, critical reflection, nuanced interpretation, analytical writing, and so forth. We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due. See “Evaluation” section below and “Class Guidelines” handout.

Please note this course utilizes a work-based and merit-based model of education that emphasizes student self-responsibility. If you need help with anything, please ask questions during class and/or speak to me directly.

**Required Textbooks:** Please bring your textbooks to class, as we will often utilize them during lectures and class discussions.


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* Please note that this assignment does not contradict USD’s policy barring assignments amounting to 10% of a student’s grade during the add/drop period; that policy is intended for students adding courses late. For students enrolled in my classes who miss the first class meeting, there is a make-up assignment. In addition to the Biosheet, such students must complete a five-page summary of the syllabus and Class Guidelines. In order to receive full credit, these assignments are due in hard-copy form at the beginning of the second class meeting. There is a parallel assignment for students who add the course late, with the Biosheet and summary due at the beginning of the second class after registration.
In terms of weekly reading assignments, you should ideally complete the Oxtoby readings by Monday and the Fieser readings by Friday.

**Course Reserves and Recommended Materials:**


**Evaluation:** You are responsible for reviewing, understanding, and keeping all matters outlined in this syllabus and in any other handouts. I assign grades based on my years of experience in evaluating assignments, the quality of your presence in the class, the criteria for each assignment, the quality of your work, and the quality of your work in relationship to the work of other students in the class. Assignments are evaluated based on execution, not effort. I also consider evidence of improvement and progress made throughout the semester. If you wish to schedule an office visit to discuss grades, please read the corresponding policy document on my personal website.

**Attendance.** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students receive a total of three unexcused absences, or one week of classes, for the entire semester. This commences on the first day of official registration. For each additional absence, two points are deducted from one’s attendance and participation grade. After five such absences, students forfeit the entirety of their attendance and participation grade (15%). The only acceptable reasons for excused absences are officially-recognized religious holidays, university-exempt activities (e.g., sports), medically-documented illness (a doctor’s note is required), or family emergencies. Arriving to class late, leaving class early, leaving the classroom during class, or using cellphones/text-messaging during class will adversely affect your attendance grade. Two such behavior patterns amount to one unexcused absence. This and similar policies are in place to inhibit potential distractions, to maintain an optimal learning environment.

You do not need to notify me about unexcused absences. However, if a major issue arises during the semester, please contact me as soon as possible.

**Participation.** The points associated with your attendance and participation grade are earned, not given. Participation includes active participation in class discussions. Attentiveness and engagement are as important as verbal expression. Disrespectful behavior (e.g., talking to classmates or text-messaging during lectures or presentations) will adversely affect your participation grade.

You will also be required to complete two informal writing assignments related to participation: (1) A weekly question derived from the reading, lectures and/or class discussions, with a week-by-week list due on Friday, December 13; and (2) A write-up on a direct experience with a “world religion” in San Diego other than your birth-tradition, which is due on Monday, December 9. The former will occasionally be used for class discussions; the latter will form the core of our inquiry into “world religions” in San Diego. Please read the “Guidelines for Site Visits” document on my homepage before completing the second assignment.

**Assignments.** All assignments must be handed in on time. Again, the only exception made in this regard involves university-exempt activities, documented illness, or family emergency. Exams must be taken on the scheduled date. There will be no make-up exams, extra credit assignments, or incompletes. Please keep this in mind as you determine your level of commitment to the class.

**Paper Assignment:** There is one formal writing assignment in this class, a 5-page paper due in hard-copy form at the beginning of class on Monday, November 18. Like class assignments in general, we will review and discuss relevant requirements as the due date approaches. You will receive a handout on suggested paper topics, though I recommend that you develop your own topic.

Late papers will receive a half grade deduction for each day after the due date. This means that if you started out with a “B”, you will receive a “C+” if the paper is one day late. There will be no rewrites.
However, I will provide comments on 1-page writing samples, outlines, and/or working bibliographies. Please submit such materials at least two weeks before the due date so that you may benefit from my suggestions. I will not look at paper-related materials the weekend before the due date.

You will be required to use and cite at least three sources, with at least one coming from outside the required course reading. This is the minimum requirement. Here “sources” refer to books and articles written by experts in the associated field. For identifying accurate academic articles, the ATLA and JSTOR databases will probably be most relevant. Engagement with and citation of primary sources will serve you well. You may supplement these sources with electronic information, but make sure it is reliable. (Wikipedia, Religioustolerance.org, and similar sites are not academically-reliable.) ALL INTERNET/WEBSITE SOURCES MUST RECEIVE PRE-APPROVAL FROM ME. See also the “Information, Knowledge, Insight” section of the Class Guidelines. Cite your sources. Do not engage in plagiarism. In order to avoid potential issues related to the latter, I recommend that you check your paper through Turnitin.com.

With regard to formal features, papers must be type-written, double-spaced and printed in a clearly-legible style. Use a 12-point font and at least 1” margins. Choose a standard system of citation (APA, Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, etc.) and remain consistent in using it. Papers should be stapled, with your name, the date, the class, and the assignment at the beginning of the paper. An exceptional paper will have a title that both engages and orients the reader. For guidance concerning citation methods see the “Citation Methods and Formatting Styles” document on my homepage.

No religious tradition should be taken as normative, as the standard by which all other religions are judged. At times it may be appropriate to use the subjective voice (“I”), but in all cases avoid apologetic and confessional language.

Papers that do not meet the basic requirements will receive an “F” and require an automatic rewrite. The resulting paper grade will be an average of the two grades.

For additional guidance see “Class Guidelines” handout. See also the “Paper Grading Rubric” and “Citation Methods” documents on my personal website. There you will also find examples of successful student papers.

Email and Office Phone: I usually check these throughout the week and only rarely on weekends. The exception to the latter is when assignments are due or when exams are scheduled. Please keep these details in mind when asking for a response to a question or notifying me of a sickness or emergency.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Orientations I (Wednesday, September 4-Friday, September 6)
   Topics Covered:
   1. Syllabus review
   2. Personal introductions
   3. Traditions covered
   4. Class Guidelines
   Required Reading:
   1. Class Guidelines

***FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6—BIO-SHEET DUE***

II. Orientations II (Monday, September 9-Friday, September 13)
   Topics Covered:
   1. Religion, Religions, Religious
   2. Theology and Religious Studies
   3. “World Religions”
   4. Teaching and Learning (THRS & USD)
Required Reading:
1. Definitions of Religion
2. *Concise Introduction*, 540-66

**MIDDLE EASTERN AND EUROPEAN RELIGIONS**

III. Judaism: Covenantal Genealogies and the Obligations of Chosenness (Monday, September 16-Friday, September 20)

Topics Covered:
1. YHWH, the *Torah* and the Holy Land
2. Covenants and Commandments: Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David
3. Ontological Separateness, Collective Salvation, Biological Survival
4. Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 60-128
2. *Scriptures*, 267-334

Optional Experiential Exercise: Eat *kashrut* (kosher) for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division Course: THRS 313: Jewish Faith and Practice with Professor Aaron Gross

IV. Early and Medieval Christianity: From Jewish Messianic Sect to Universal, Evangelistic Institution (Monday, September 23-Friday, September 27)

Topics Covered:
1. The Life and Teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 3 BCE-ca. 30 CE)
2. The New Testament and Gospels: Jesus the Messiah and Christ
3. The Early Church
4. The Schism of 1054: Eastern (Greek/“Orthodox”) and Western (Latin/“Catholic”) Churches

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 130-58
2. *Scriptures*, 335-98

Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice silent awareness of God’s presence for at least one hour or unconditional charity for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: Many

V. Islam: Submission to Allah and Qur’anic Revelations (Monday, September 30-Friday, October 4)

Topics Covered:
1. Muhammad (570-632 CE) and the Line of the Prophets
2. The *Qur’an* and *Hadith*
3. Sunni and Shi’a Muslims
4. The Five Pillars

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 198-257
2. *Scriptures*, 413-75

Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice Salat (Islamic prayer) for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 315: Islamic Faith and Practice with Professor Bahar Davary

***MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30—FIRST IN-CLASS QUIZ***
VI. Later Christianity: Reformation and Counter-Reformation (Monday, October 7-Wednesday, October 9)

Topics Covered:
1. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the 95 Theses of 1517
2. Catholic Religious Orders and Protestant Denominations
3. Literacy and Bible Reading: Literalism and Symbolism
4. Vatican Councils (1869-70 & 1962-65) and Contemporary Theology

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 158-97
2. *Scriptures*, 345-72, 398-412

Optional Experiential Exercise: Read and reflect on the Gospels or attend Catholic Mass

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: Many

***FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11—MIDTERM REVIEW***

SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS

VII. Hinduism: The Religion of the Sindhu (Indus) River and Inclusive Soteriology (Wednesday, October 16-Friday, October 18)

Topics Covered:
1. Harappa Culture, Indus Valley Civilization, and the Indo-European Invasion
2. * Shruti* and * Smrti*: * Vedas, Puranas*, Epics, and Regional Bhakti Literature
3. Karma, Samsara, and Moksha
4. The Four Castes and the Three Paths

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 258-325
2. *Scriptures*, 1-57

Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice Karma Yoga (fulfillment of social duties) for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 312: Hindu Faith and Practice with Professor Lance Nelson

***MONDAY, OCTOBER 14—MIDTERM EXAMINATION***

VIII. Jainism: The Conquerors, Ford-makers, and Karmic Materiality (Monday, October 21-Friday, October 25)

Topics Covered:
1. Mahavira (599-527 BCE) and the 24 Jinas
2. Digambara (Sky-clad) and Svetambara (White-clad) Jains
3. Ahimsa and the Doctrine of Many-sidedness
4. The Five Principles

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 352-75
2. *Scriptures*, 59-74

Optional Experiential Exercise: Maintain Ahimsa (non-violence) for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 312: Hindu Faith and Practice with Professor Lance Nelson

***FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25: NO CLASS—FALL HOLIDAY***

IX. Early Buddhism: “Awakening”: From Personal Liberation to Universal Salvation (Monday, October 28-Friday, November 1)
Topics Covered:
1. Siddhartha Gautama/Śakyamuni Buddha (624-544 BCE/566-486 BCE)
2. The Suttas (Discourses) and Tripitaka (Three Baskets)
3. Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana (Tantra)
4. Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Noble Path

Required Reading:
1. Concise Introduction, 376-401
2. Scriptures, 75-119

Optional Experiential Exercise: Observe the five precepts, both actually and virtually, for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 314: Buddhist Faith and Practice with Professor Lekshe Tsomo

X. Sikhism: Discipleship to Truth beyond Hindu-Muslim Sectarianism (Monday, November 4-Friday, November 8)

Topics Covered:
1. The Ten Gurus: Guru Nanak (1469-1538), Arjan (1563-1606) and Gobind Singh (1666-1708)
2. Absolute, Apophatic Monotheism
3. The Emergence of the Khalsa: The Beginning/End of Sikhism?
4. The Five “K’s”

Required Reading:
1. Concise Introduction, 326-51
2. Scriptures, 133-51

Optional Experiential Exercise: Recite the Mul Mantra for at least one hour

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: N/A

***MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4—SECOND IN-CLASS QUIZ***

XI. Confucianism: Personal Morality, Familial Obligations and Social Harmony (Monday, November 11-Friday, November 15)

Topics Covered:
1. Kongzi (Confucius; ca. 551-479 BCE), Mengzi (Mencius; 343-289 BCE), and Xunzi (d. 215 BCE)
2. From Scholar-official Lineage to State Orthodoxy and Syncretic Revival
3. The Logic of Previousness: Antiquity as Source of Authority and Behavioral Model
4. The Five Classics, Five Virtues and Five Relationships

Required Reading:
1. Concise Introduction, 440-68
2. Scriptures, 153-80

Optional Experiential Exercise: Cultivate the five Confucian virtues for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 317: Religions of China with Professor Louis Komjathy

XII. Daoism: Cosmic Attunement and Living through the Dao (Monday, November 18-Wednesday, November 20)

Topics Covered:
1. Daoism as Religious Tradition: From Inner Cultivation Lineages to Organized Religion
2. Laozi and the *Daode jing* (Scripture on the Dao and Virtue); Zhuangzi and the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang)
3. Dao (Way) as Source, as unnamable mystery, as sacred presence, as cosmological process
4. Ritual, immortality, and monasticism

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 468-98
2. *Scriptures*, 181-211, 213-16 (NOT 211-13)

Optional Experiential Exercise: Embrace simplicity and decrease desires for one day

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 316: The Daoist Tradition with Professor Louis Komjathy

***MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18—PAPER DUE***

***FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22-MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25: NO CLASS—AAR CONFERENCE***

***WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27-FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 29: NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK***

XIII. Later Buddhism: Global Transmission, Adaptation and Transformation (Monday, December 2-Friday, December 6)

Topics Covered:
1. Introduction to China: Rejection and Sinification
2. New Chinese Mahayana Schools and East Asian Buddhism: Pure Land and Zen
3. Buddhism in Japan and Korea (Mahayana)
4. Buddhism in Tibet (Vajrayana)

Required Reading:
1. *Concise Introduction*, 401-39
2. *Scriptures*, 105-32

Optional Experiential Exercise: Practice Zazen (Zen meditation) for at least one hour

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 314: Buddhist Faith and Practice with Professor Lekshe Tsomo & THRS 317: Religions of China with Professor Louis Komjathy

GLOBALIZATION, MULTICULTURALISM & RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

XIV. World Religions in San Diego: Known and Unknown Cultures in Our Immediate Landscape (Monday, December 9-Wednesday, December 11)

Topics Covered:
1. History of American Immigration
2. Identity, Participation and Demographics
3. World Religions in America, American Hybrid Spirituality & New Religious Movements (NRMs)
4. San Diego as Multicultural and Religiously Pluralistic Place

Required Reading:
1. Personal research

Optional Experiential Exercise: None: Direct personal experience with local religious community

Corresponding THRS Upper-division course: THRS 371: Cults and Sects in the United States with Professor Evelyn Kirkley

***MONDAY, DECEMBER 9—WRITE-UP DUE***

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND COURSE REVIEW
XV. Concluding Discussion and Course Review (Friday, December 13)

Topics Covered:
1. Nine Major Religious Traditions Covered
2. The Human Condition
3. Seeing through Religions
4. Student Questions

Required Reading:
1. Review Course Readings
2. Personal Notes

***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13— QUESTION LIST DUE***
***FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13—LAST DAY OF CLASS***

FINALS WEEK: MONDAY, DECEMBER 16-FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

***MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 11:00AM-1:00PM—FINAL EXAMINATION***

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**COURSE SCHEDULE CHANGES**

Any amendment to the course schedule will be announced in class. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to contact class members or me until you receive such information concerning changes.

**SPECIAL NEEDS**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in the event of a building evacuation, please speak with me.

**CORE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENT**

This course fulfills 1 of the 3 USD Core Curriculum requirements in Theology and Religious Studies. If you have any specific questions regarding university requirements or THRS requirements, please speak with me or with Judith Liu, Interim Chair, Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

The university’s policy on academic honesty will be strictly enforced in this course. Plagiarism, cheating, and stealing or defacement of library materials will result in automatic failure of the course.

**IMPORTANT DEADLINES**

September 13: Add/drop with full refund.
November 6: Pass/fail filing.
November 13: Withdraw from class.