RS 200: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS STUDIES
Spring 2009

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Office: Loyola 32
Office hours: MW 2-3:30pm, TR 2-3pm, and by appointment
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Course Description
In this course we will consider fundamental questions about human existence in relation to “the sacred,” using examples drawn from Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. As such, this course is not an introduction to world religions per se, but a cultivation of skills at the heart of liberal arts education: the ability to evaluate critically how human beings have asked, and answered in varying ways, existential questions about meaning, suffering, goodness, and ultimacy.

Course Questions
- What do people seek in religion? What questions do they ask?
- What is sacred reality? How is sacredness mediated in the world?
- How do ritual, story, and community mediate sacred reality?
- How might we evaluate different religious approaches to the problem of evil? How is this problem related to the quest for justice in religions?

Assignments and Evaluation
- Daily preparation and participation 10%
- 2 papers 30%
- This I Believe essay 10%
- Presentation 15%
- Midterm exam 15%
- Final exam 20%

Grading scale
A 94-100    C+ 77-79
A- 90-93    C 74-76
B+ 87-89    C- 70-73
B 84-86    D+ 67-69
B- 80-83    D 60-66
F 0-59

Books and Web-based readings
- Bible (any translation): if you don’t have one and your roommate does not either, you can find plenty of copies in the reference section of the library. Look for call numbers beginning BS185 or BS191.5.
- Electronic reserve readings (password: quest) as noted in syllabus
- Online readings (no password needed) as noted in syllabus; links provided on course website
Regis Writing Center
The Writing Center is a free resource for Regis College undergraduates. Whether you are a proficient, average, or struggling writer, you will benefit from working with a writing consultant. These peer consultants help at any point in your writing process, from brainstorming for ideas to organizing a draft to polishing the final version. You get immediate and personal feedback about your writing as well as answers to your questions. Appointments for this popular service are recommended. Drop by the Writing Center in Loyola 1 or call (303) 458-4039 for more information.

Policies
Attendance
I have found that having an attendance policy makes a huge difference in students’ learning. Simply put, students who attend class regularly learn more and consequently get better grades. Further, discussion is much better and our collective learning endeavors are richer when more people are present. So, I expect you to attend class regularly. You may have 3 unexcused absences during the semester. Absences will be excused only for Regis-sponsored extracurricular activities or documented emergencies. If you have more than 3 unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered by 5 points (out of 100) for each additional unexcused absence.

Late work
Generally speaking, your learning will be greater and your life will be less stressful if you hand in your work on time. Papers will be accepted up to 1 week late, with a reduction of 5 points (out of 100) for every day they are late. If you need an extension, you must request it before the due date. Likewise, if you are in exceptionally dire straits and cannot attend an exam, you must tell me before the exam (email or phone OK), and present written documentation verifying your excused absence. NO EXAMS WILL BE RESCHEDULED FOR UNEXCUSED ABSENCES.

Plagiarism
The purpose of your college education is to think for yourself about critically important issues. Acts of plagiarism prevent this goal. If you plagiarize, you will receive a grade of 0, since I cannot grade something that is not your own work. If you plagiarize again, you will fail the course.

The following examples are forms of plagiarism:
1. The failure, whether intentional or unintentional, to cite the use of ideas, data, or specific written passages of others (note: this is the most common form; be very careful to cite your sources, even when paraphrasing!).
2. One person taking a quiz or examination, or producing a paper, for another.
3. Presentation of a paper or other work for credit in two distinct courses without prior approval of both instructors.
4. Fraudulent or deceptive generation of research or the knowing use of research gathered in such a manner.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me or ask a consultant at the Writing Center. Ignorance is not an excuse.

Minimizing class disruptions
Please be considerate of your peers, myself, and yourself, and minimize disruptions during class. This includes, but is not limited to, late entrances, getting up to go to the bathroom during class, letting a cell phone ring or worse yet checking the cell phone if it rings, and text messaging. Turn the phones off and put them away, get to the bathroom between classes, and get here on time. For my part, I will start and end class on time, making sure that your time is used well and not wasted. You may always stop me if I inadvertently run over class time.
**Schedule of Readings**

**Theme: What is sacred reality? How is it experienced in the world?**

- **T 1/13** Intro to course
- **T 1/20** no class; **This I Believe** essay due; turn in a paper copy at Loyola 32 by noon
- **R 1/22** Story of the Buddha (course website)
- **T 1/27** Thich Nhat Hanh (TNH) 17-51
- **R 1/29** Alston, “Religion” (e-reserve, password: quest), pp. 143-145; TNH 55-77, 117-134
- **T 2/3** Sacred Story: Enuma Elish (website)
- **R 2/5** Sacred Story: Genesis 1-2 (any Bible)
- **T 2/10** Exodus 1-15 (Bible); Neusner, “What is ‘Israel?’” (e-reserve; password: quest)
- **R 2/12** Micah (all) (Bible); Heschel, “The Prophets” (e-reserve)
- **T 2/17** Nolan 5-36; Luke 3-5 (Bible); **PAPER 1 DUE**
- **R 2/19** Nolan 37-61 [skim 62-82] 83-88; Luke 6 (all), 16:19-31, 17 (all)
- **T 2/24** Nolan 137-171; Luke 22-24
- **R 2/26** Midterm exam

**Spring break**

**Theme: why do the innocent suffer? How can we work for justice?**

- **T 3/10** Intro to theodicy; video: “When Bad Things Happen to Good People”
- **R 3/12** Job 1-7, 10, 31 (Bible)
- **T 3/17** Job 19, 38-42
- **R 3/19** Grand Inquisitor 1-37
- **T 3/24** Grand Inquisitor 39-80
- **R 3/26** TNH 79-115
- **T 3/31** Film: *Romero*
- **R 4/2** Film: *Romero*
- **T 4/7** Jon Sobrino, “The Crucified Peoples” (e-reserve) and “Awakening from the Sleep of Inhumanity” (e-reserve; password: quest)
- **R 4/9** Jewish responses to the Holocaust (e-reserve)
- **T 4/14** student presentations
- **R 4/16** student presentations
- **T 4/21** student presentations; **PAPER 2 DUE**
- **R 4/23** student presentations

**Final exam**

9:25am class: Tuesday, April 28 at 8am
10:50am class: Thursday, April 30 at 1:15pm