He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskillfully, beyond desert;
And all men are idolaters, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if thou take them at their word.

Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in thy great,
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

("Footnote to All Prayers," by C. S. Lewis, 1898-1963)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
(Please note that this course carries "IP Credit." That is, it fulfills the requirement of a course from the Intellectual Perspective of Religious and Philosophical Thought and Tradition at Westminster College.)

Required Texts:
This entire class website is required reading!

To get started:
1. Bookmark (set as favorite) this syllabus and either bookmark or print out the class schedule. You will need to read these thoroughly and refer to them frequently.
2. Buy the class textbooks (right now)! Skim the books until you are familiar with their layout and table of contents (don't forget the index).
3. Read the introduction below (as far as ‘the problem of definition’ and make sure that you are familiar with it. If you don’t understand any of it, ASK QUESTIONS!
4. Begin with Week 1.

Religion can be studied in many ways, by many methods, and from many points of view. For the purposes of this course it will be assumed that religious narratives are, among other things, metaphorical expressions of important truths. They operate both as models of human experience and as models for human life; that is, as metaphorical descriptions and as exemplary ideals. Human experience provides the source of these narratives.

This is a historical and phenomenological approach to the study of religion and religious experience. So one of the first things students will have to do is to find out what “phenomenology” means in this context. Most importantly, we will attempt to withhold judgment of the issues until after we have inspected and analyzed religion as it appears in the world. What exactly is religion and religious experience? What forms does it take? How would it be apprehended by someone who made it their business to travel around the world researching it? Does religious experience possess any consistent recognizable characteristics? What types of people have
Understanding Religious Experience and Expression

religious experiences? What types of experience do they have, and how do they express that experience?

Asking such questions is the basis of research in the academic study of religion. This course will equip students with the basic research skills needed to construct reasonable, reliable, and well-informed answers to such questions. Although the instructor can provide answers to simple factual questions, such as the probable dates to the life of the Buddha, or the probable number of Christians in the world, the instructor's task is not primarily to answer questions about religion, but to help the students to formulate and answer their own questions. In other words, to conduct elementary research in the discipline.

In order to consider such questions I will first introduce the class to actual manifestations of religion and to examples of expressions of religious experience. Then we will discuss relevant elements of the basic history of religions. This will introduce students to the major religious traditions and faiths of the world, presenting these as the genuine beliefs and actual practices of living persons and attempting to answer the above questions. Ultimately, we will consider how it is that some people can sincerely make claims that are quite incredible to others.

Familiarity with the concepts and the terminology of alternative religious traditions is essential to the understanding of other people's religious experience and expression. To that end students will be expected to acquire the knowledge and the vocabulary presented in the textbooks. Huston Smith's The Illustrated World's Religions will provide us with the basic material knowledge of the various faiths of our world, and selections from Philip Novak's The World's Wisdom will provide an introduction to the texts of those faiths. Other short readings will be provided by the instructor.

Classes will involve discussion of the material presented, so it is essential that students do the required reading before each class and that resulting questions are raised in the class. Evident failure to do the required reading will result in loss of attendance/participation points. Individual inquiries and responses are strongly encouraged.

COURSE OUTCOMES

The general aims of this course are, first, to acquire the basic research skills of the academic study of religion. This requires a knowledge of those experiences and expressions which have been identified as religious along with some critical understanding of what "religion" is taken to be. Second, various theories and definitions of religion will be considered as tools for the construction of relevant and durable opinions about material which is often confusing and uncertain. Third, the skills required to communicate those opinions clearly and persuasively will be practiced.

So-the acquisition, the analysis, the assessment, and the articulation of information will all be practiced and evaluated.

All student work should be well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written

Successful students in this course will demonstrate their abilities:

- to acquire reliable knowledge of the experiences and expressions characteristic of the major religious traditions of recorded history
- to consider critically various theories and definitions of religion
- to acquire a critical understanding of what "religion" is taken to be
- to articulate that understanding
- to construct relevant, informed, and durable answers to their own questions about religious faith and traditions
- to articulate and communicate those answers clearly
- to be prepared to discuss their own answers graciously with people of differing opinions

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Preparation

To prepare for each class you must consider the given readings. Try and formulate any questions that arise from these readings and be prepared to discuss them in class. You are strongly advised to write out your questions as this will help you to put them clearly before the class. You are encouraged to discuss the issues raised in the readings with your classmates (or anyone else who's interested) outside of the classroom. There will be an on-line discussion group to facilitate this.

Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory. Absences will result in an automatic lowering of your grade. This will be done on an exponential scale so that the first absences will have little effect, but after three classes are missed the cumulative effect will be significant (1st absence -1, 2nd -2, 3rd-4 etc.). Reading alone will not give you the skills or the information needed to pass this course satisfactorily; in-class discussions and explanations are the most important component of the course.

Participation

The classes will generally follow a question-and-answer pattern. I will ask students to raise questions or to outline and explain what they understand from their readings and classroom materials and the class as a whole will discuss the topic. During that discussion I will attempt to answer students' questions as thoroughly and clearly as I can. All students will be expected to participate in discussions. The ability to express yourself clearly before a small audience like this is absolutely necessary to your advancement in almost all areas of life. Credit will be given for participating in--and particularly for effectively encouraging--class discussion.
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Academic Integrity
(see the Student Handbook and the Academic Integrity Policy.ppt on your class My.Westminster Handouts)

Westminster College as an institution and I as an individual both pursue a strict policy of academic honesty. Plagiarism: leading your reader or listener to believe that what you have written or said is your own work, when, in fact, it is not, will be treated severely. But always remember that while using someone else’s work without declaring your source is dishonest, doing the same thing and citing the source is good scholarship! Books must be cited in the correct bibliographic style (see below) and personal sources can also be cited.

Your instructor reserves the right to use the plagiarism software at Turnitin.com.

GRADING

Attendance and participation will constitute 10% of your grade, but note well that repeated absences will not only lose these points but will finally result in a subtraction of points earned elsewhere.

Students will be required to take notes in class, which will be periodically and randomly inspected by the instructor. These notes will be graded up to 10% of the course. Earlier low grades can be expunged by later improved grades. That is to say, if a student gets a C on their first inspection, but an A on the second, they will not earn an averaged grad of B, but will earn the later A.

Short Quizzes (x4) will be held to ensure that the required reading is being properly done. These will constitute a combined total of 10% of the grade.

In-Class Essay Answers will be written out and submitted during three class periods to give you practice and feedback on longer written work. These will constitute 30% of your grade.

Research Project: Islamic Theology.

During weeks thirteen and fourteen of the course all students will be required to design a small research program involving Islamic theology and scripture. The object is to gain an understanding of the main theological tenets of Islam in their specific relation to the Holy Qur’an and to report on that relation and one’s method of coming to understand it. The best of the reports resulting from this research may be presented at Westminster URAC. This will be worth 10% of your grade.

Examination. There will be a final examination worth 15% (Sample Questions) Note that there is no midterm exam).

Term Paper. All students will submit a typewritten critical essay of 2,000 to 2,500 words (that is, 8-10 pages double spaced) due in on the final class. The topic of this paper will be selected by each student and approved by me no later than week eight. (I will provide a list of sample essay topics but I much prefer that students use their own imagination in the selection of their topic.) Students will have the whole of the semester to work on this paper and it will be their major opportunity to display their personal potential. It will constitute 15% of the grade. Your topic and thesis must be determined by the beginning of week 8. An annotated working bibliography must be submitted by the end of week 12. Rough drafts of this paper can be submitted to me for comments and corrections up to seven days before the due date.

Please remember that high grades reflect very well on my teaching record. I want to give you good grades! But I am examined also and you must give me cause to give you a good grade. Like most other skills academic ability improves with practice. If you feel weak in public speaking or critical analysis now is the time to practice and improve.

The Problem of the Definition of Religion.

First, it must be borne in mind that “what we call ‘religion’ is of much wider prevalence and of much longer standing than is the use of this term, or indeed of any other term, to designate it” (W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, 18). The human activities which we identify as religious are unquestionably factual, the experiences which prompt people to behave religiously are as real as any other experiences, and the expressions of those experiences have historically constituted the most significant products of human culture.

So what is ‘religion’?

“Recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, and worship.” (Oxford English Dictionary 1971)

“The relationship which humanity establishes with the divinity through worship; a specific group of beliefs, moral laws and cultic practices whereby humanity establishes a relationship with the divine.” (Grand Larousse de la langue française, 1971)

“The essence of religion consists in a feeling of absolute dependence. . .” (Frederick Schleiermacher, (1768-1834) The Doctrine of Faith)

E. B. Tylor, thought that “it seems simplest . . . simply to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings.” (Primitive Culture, 1871)

“By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of Nature and human life.” (Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1890)
“The ideas of religion arose not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears, which activate the human mind.” (David Hume, 1711-1776) “The Natural History of Religion”

“All ideas and feelings are religious which refer to ideal existence, an existence that corresponds to the wishes and requirements of the human mind.” (W. Wundt, Ethics)

“A man’s religion is that set of objects, habits, and convictions . . . which he would die for rather than abandon, or at least he would feel excommunicated from humanity if he did abandon.” (H. Bosanquet, Philosophy of Religion; in Baldwin’s Dictionary)

Religion is “an hypothesis which is supposed to render the Universe comprehensible. . . . Now every theory tacitly asserts two things: first that there is something to be explained; secondly that such and such is the explanation . . . that the existence of the world with all it contains is a mystery ever pressing for interpretation . . . and that it is not a mystery passing human comprehension.” (Herbert Spencer, (1820-1903) First Principles)

Religion is “a pathological manifestation of the protective function, a sort of deviation of the normal function . . . caused by ignorance of natural causes and of their effects.” (G. Sergi, Les Emotions, 404)

“Religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.” (William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 69, 1902)

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community . . . all who adhere to them.” (Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life)

“The psychic origin of all religious thought, is the recognition, or, if you please, the assumption, that consciousness is the ultimate source of all Force. It is the belief that behind the sensuous, phenomenal world, distinct from it, giving it form, existence, and activity, lies the ultimate, invisible, immeasurable power of Mind, of conscious Will, of Intelligence, analogous in some way to our own; and,--mark this essential corollary--that man is in communication with it.” (Daniel G. Brinton, Religions of Primitive Peoples)

Religion is a means of ultimate transformation. In this definition the focus is on the religious character of human awareness, which includes at least two elements: ultimacy and effective power. When we ask, why is one action ‘good’ and another ‘bad’? or Why does man suffer? or Why does man reflect on his nature?, we are seeking a certain kind of answer. . . If we want to understand the religious answers to the above questions, then we must become sensitive to the assumptions behind religious answers; and one of these assumptions is that there is more to life than just physical existence. It is this ‘more than’ character to which our term ‘ultimate’ points. (Frederick Streng, Understanding Religious Life, 4)

[The claim] “there is a Beyond or an Unborn, and that this is somehow accessible to the religious experience of the human race, and is not just a philosophical speculation or a theory about the world.” (Ninian Smart, Beyond Ideology)

“On the theoretical side [religion] is characterized by a world-view which denies the adequacy of the world of the senses and affirms the existence of a transcendent world, conceived both as highest existence and highest value. On the practical side, it consists in the passage from things of this world to a conception and experience of the reality of the transcendent world, and thus to salvation from the world.” (Hermann Siebeck, Lehrbuch der Religionsphilosophie)

“Religion is a human response to mystery. . . . not as a deadly emptiness, but somehow as a reality in which lies the meaning of human existence. . . . The response to the mystery as fullness is religion. In general, religion is a way of relating to mystery as a sacred or divine reality rather than as useless or meaningless.” Michael H. Barnes, In the Presence of Mystery, 1-2.

“To be--or, rather, to become--a man means to be ‘religious.’ “ (Mircea Eliade, The Quest, preface)

Religion consists of the beliefs, experiences, and practices of specific communities with respect to non-falsifiable entities (James Cox, From Primitive to Indigenous, 88)


“A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” (Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”)

“Religion is a cultural system and a social institution that governs and promotes ideal interpretations of existence and ideal praxis with reference to transempirical powers or beings.” Armin Geertz, “Theory, Definition, and Typology.” Temenos 33 (1997), 39. (Note that by ‘ideal’ Armin Geertz seems to mean perfect or ultimately desirable rather than mental or non-material--from a reading of this paper at the World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, August 11th, 1998.)

Finally perhaps 'the sustained inability to clarify what the word 'religion' signifies, in itself suggests that the term ought to be dropped; that it is a distorted concept not really corresponding to anything definite or distinctive in the objective world. The phenomena we call 'religious' undoubtedly exist. Yet perhaps the notion that they constitute in themselves some distinctive entity is an unwarranted analysis’” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, 17). But Smith goes on to say that this is too extreme a conclusion, 'an alternative suggestion could be that a failure to agree on definitions of religion may well stem from the quality of the
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Material. For what a man thinks about religion is central to what he thinks about life and the universe as a whole. The meaning that one ascribes to the term is a key to the meaning that one finds in existence" (18). This is one of the reasons that, as John Lyden points out, "we have a tendency to limit what we view as religion to that which is recognized as such by us in our own culture? (Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals. New York; NYU Press, 2003: 2). However, "one cannot generalize about religion on the basis of the language and norms of just a single case, just as geologists do not construct a geology on the basis of the rocks that merely happen to be in one's neighborhood. The neighborhood rocks, analogues to one's own local religion, are themselves instances of certain common, universal properties" (William Paden, "Comparative Religion," in The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion edited by John Hinnells, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 208).

Dimensional Models of Religion are examples of some attempts to identify 'common, universal properties' of religious traditions:

- Ninian Smart
- Frank Whaling
- Bryan Rennie
- Ter Haar and Busuttil
- Harvey Cox/AFC Webster

Ninian Smart's Six Dimensions of Religion.

The Ritual Dimension
"Religion tends in part to express itself through such rituals: through worship, prayers, offerings, and the like. We may call this the ritual dimension of religion. . . . Some form of outer behavior . . . coordinated with an inner intention to make contact with, or to participate in, the invisible world." (16/3--these numbers in parentheses refer to the pages in The Religious Experience of Mankind and in The Religious Experience respectively.)

The Mythical Dimension
"Stories about God . . ., about the gods . . ., but also [stories relating to] historical events of religious significance in a tradition." (18/5). We can count both historical myths (that is to say, stories about the invisible world which have an anchorage in history) and non-historical myths (those that have no such anchorage) as aspects of the mythological dimension.

The Doctrinal Dimension
"Doctrines are an attempt to give system, clarity, and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythic and symbolic language of religious faith and ritual. . . . The dividing line between the mythological and what I shall call the doctrinal is not easy to draw. . . . The world religions owe some of their living power to their success in presenting a total picture of reality through a coherent system of doctrines." (19/5)

The Ethical Dimension
"The code of ethics of the dominant religion controls the community. Quite obviously people do not always live up to the standards they profess' thus "we must distinguish between the ethical teachings of a faith . . . and the actual sociological effects and circumstances of a religion." (19-20/5)

The Social Dimension
"The mode in which the religion in question is institutionalized, whereby through its institutions and teachings, it affects the community in which it finds itself. The doctrinal, mythological, and ethical dimensions express a religion's claim about the nature of the invisible world and its aim's about how people's lives ought to be shaped: the social dimension indicates the way in which people's lives are, in fact, shaped by these claims and the way in which religious institutions operate." (21/6)

The Experiential Dimension
Religious people 'may hope to have contact with, and participate in, the invisible world through ritual, [but] personal religion normally involves the hope of, or realization of, experience of that world.' (21/6)

Frank Whaling's Eight Dimensions
(from Christian Theology and World Religions, 37-48, 1986)

'All the major religious traditions of the world contain eight inter-linked elements. The major religions are dynamic organisms within which there are eight inter-acting dimensions; they are historical chains within which there are eight connecting links. . . . these elements are present in separate traditions with different weights and different emphases. Because all religions have these elements this does not mean that they are all the same' (38).

Religious Community
Ritual and Worship
Ethics
Social and Political Involvement
Understanding Religious Experience and Expression

Scripture/Myth

Concept

Aesthetics

Spirituality

"Lying behind them is something that is even more important, namely transcendent reality. For a Christian this would be God, for a Muslim Allah, for a Jew Yahweh, for a Hindu Brahman, and for a Buddhist Nirvana. Insofar as it is transcendent this reality is less clear than the eight elements . . . they are directly observable, transcendence is not.

"However, transcendent reality is made more clear by means of a Mediating Focus that lies at the heart of each religious tradition. This mediating focus--Christ for a Christian, the Koran for a Muslim, the Torah for a Jew, a personal deity or the Atman for a Hindu, and the Buddha or the Dharma for a Buddhist--brings transcendent reality closer and makes it more meaningful. God is therefore mediated through Christ, Allah through the Koran, Yahweh through the Torah, Brahman through a Hindu Lord or the Atman within, and Nirvana through the Buddha or the Dharma. It is this combination of a transcendent reality and a mediating focus that lies behind and gives meaning to the eight elements of each religious tradition.

"... some person, and indeed some group of persons, has to respond to mediated reality. Persons have dynamically to use the eight elements that form a tradition otherwise those elements are lifeless forms" (46-47).


The dimensions of religion are certainly not independent one of another but interpenetrate like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each one completes and is completed by the others, and the whole is a dynamic unity.

The Dimension of Experience (Revelation)

Religion represents an assurance not only that there is an unseen order but that this order authoritatively reveals itself to humanity in some way. In the major world religions the main vehicle of revelation is often thought to be scripture, the written sacred word. Whatever the vehicle of revelation, the arena is always, and necessarily, human experience. The Christian bible is not so much the revelation as was the life of Jesus in history; the Koran (the sacred book of Islam) is not so much the revelation of Allah as were the visions of Muhammad; the Tripitaka (the sacred texts of Buddhism) are not so much the revelation as was the enlightenment of the Buddha. In pre-literate religions the experience of the shaman or spiritual specialist is the vehicle of revelation and only thereafter sacred lore, mythology. Of course, a large part of our experience is the experience of our human community.

The Dimension of Response (Faith)

Faith is a response to experience as revelation which can be divided into faith as assurance and faith as belief. The former is the emotional state of final optimism about the unseen order, the latter is the adherence to certain specific doctrinal claims about that order. Although separable as descriptions of inner or intentional states, they can be seen to converge in specific behavior. One acts out of one's optimism and out of adherence to specific propositional truths. The human creative response to our environment as both that which is inspired or breathed into us (by the gods etc.) and that which is imitative (of the divine acts of creation and of revelation) thus becomes itself a medium of revelation.

The Dimension of Knowledge

What is revealed through faith is thus regarded as sacred knowledge. That experience apprehended in faith as an authoritative source of knowledge (i.e. revelation) is conducive to specific activities in response. This activity is justified by knowledge of cosmology, of theology, and of anthropology. For example, that all action (i.e. karma) will be justly repaid; that Allah is merciful; or that the meek will inherit the earth.

The Dimension of Ethics

This represents the specific claim that there is a particular correct and beneficial pattern of human behavior. This pattern of behavior is harmonious with the unseen order: externally it harmonizes community with cosmos, internally it harmonizes personal behavior with personal experience of the world (mediated through knowledge).

The Dimension of Community

Those who share the same 'sacred genealogy,' that is to say, whose ethics are known through the same faith in the same revelations, have a recognizable identity and are united into a coherent and recognizable social or fictive kin group.

The Dimension of Expression (Witness)

The expressions of the religious group, both intentionally and unintentionally, support and strengthen the worldview from which they are made. Deliberately in the
form of mission and unconsciously in the application of religious knowledge as knowledge—in the living of the life of the community—the religious community bears witness to and to persuades others of its truth and thus propagates and spreads as a faith. The arts are particularly effective in this dimension of religion. Iconography, drama, architecture, oral tradition, and written scriptures express the whole matrix of religious dimensions. As these expressions become part of the experience of others the religious dynamic tends to close; human expression displaces natural experience as the primary stimulus of our response to our environment. Note that, as Clifford Geertz pointed out, ‘for participants they are in addition enactments, materializations, realizations of it [the religious perspective]—not only models of what they believe, but also models for the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it.’ That is, our own expressions, to some degree, become our own experiences. (Clifford Geertz. *Religion as a Cultural System* in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, edited by Michael Banton, London: Tavistock, Publications, 1965.)

Gerrie Ter Haar and James Busuttil, the editors of Bridge or Barrier: Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace (Leiden/Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004/2005) use a highly simplified dimensional model of religion:

Religious resources are contained in the four main elements of which religion consists: religious ideas (content of belief), religious practices (ritual behaviour), social organization (religious community), and religious/spiritual experiences (psychic attitudes). These various dimensions of religion can all be used in the service of a human striving for peace? (22).

Of course, religious ideas are doctrinal, religious practice is ritual, social organization is social (duh), and religious experience is experiential so this model can be seen as a simplified form of Smart's.

The orthodox priest and theologian, Alexander F. C. Webster, in his Orthodox Mystical Tradition and the Comparative Study of Religion: An Experimental Synthesis (Journal of Ecumenical Studies 23 (1986): 621-649) adapts from the lectures of Harvey Cox at Harvard Divinity School. Webster suggests that any religion could be said to entail in schematic form four logical structural components, and a variety of phenomenal sub-categories? (625).

A philosophy, or worldview, which includes a credo (system or collection of beliefs, particularly about the nature of reality and the cosmos), a curse (explanations or understanding of why the is is not the ought—that is, the chief problems of meaning including evil or theodicy, suffering and confusion, and nonbelievers), and a canon (standards by which truth is known such as rational principles, scriptures, authoritative personages, etc.)

A psychology, or philosophy of human nature, which includes a cause pertaining to the motivating forces of human experience and the significance of history for that experience, a career history (myths or explanations of the origin, present status, and history of human creation both within and beyond the given religion), and a champion (role model[s] such as the founder of the religion, gods, heroes of faith, etc.).

An ethical theory, or code of desired or mandated attitudes and behavior.

Institutions, which embody all of the above and encompass, in particular, a cultus (rituals, specific material symbols, use of time and space), and a community (the composition and ordering of practitioners of the given religion). (626).

Once more, the Cox/Webster schema can also be assimilated to that of Ninian Smart in the sense that the philosophy (1) is doctrinal, the psychology of human nature (2) is mythical, the code (3) is ethical, and cultus and community (4) are social. But each schema has its own implications and its own applications.

The Development of the Study of Religious Experience

The German Friedreich Schleiermacher published On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured among its Despisers in 1799. It is generally agreed that, as W. C. Smith has said, On Religion ‘would seem to be the first book ever written on religion as such—not on a particular kind or instance and not incidentally but explicitly on religion itself as a generic something.” (The Meaning and End of Religion, 45). Although one should note also Natural History of Religion, published in 1779 but written before 1752 by David Hume and other such works. Following the lead of Schleiermacher many later scholars (e.g., Wm. James, Rudolph Otto, Jonathan Edwards, Joachim Wach, Ernst Troeltsch) agreed that the religious experience is ‘a sense or feeling that is not to be identified with either belief or practice.” (It was Schleiermacher who defined religion as ‘the feeling of absolute dependence upon God.”)

It has been pointed out that ‘with this idea of religion as an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct, Schleiermacher sought to free religious belief and practice from the requirement that they be justified by reference to non-religious thought and action and to preclude the possibility of conflict between religious doctrine and any new knowledge that might emerge in the course of secular inquiry.” (Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience, xiii) The idea of religious experience as a class of human subjective experiences different in kind from all other, "non-religious" experiences thus had its origin in a deliberate attempt to defend Christian institutional religion against the "threat" of alternative conceptions of the real. This defensiveness is neither surprising nor unfounded. This was a period of intense positivism, empiricism, and materialism. Darwin’s Origin of the Species appeared in 1859 and Herbert Spencer's First Principles in 1862. The advances of science continued with increasing vigor with the development of Einstein's theory of relativity and Max Planck's quantum theory in the early years of the twentieth century. Recently the rhetoric of "experience" has come under concerted attack. The clearest example is perhaps Robert Sharf's contribution to Critical Terms for Religious Studies edited by Mark C. Taylor (University of Chicago Press, 1998). Under the heading "Experience" Sharf points out that the claim to some privileged access to or understanding of the subjective experience of the religious believer allows critics and scholars to justify their own claims without any empirical justification and thus to propagate their own understanding and their own interests without hindrance. Such an appeal to experience has, for example, served the interests of Western Imperialism by serving as a justification for the theoretical privileging of Western Religion.
In 1856 with the publication of the Essays in Comparative Mythology of Max Müller the 'science of religion' or the 'comparative study of religion' began in earnest. Müller was primarily a linguist who studied, among other texts, the Rg Veda, which he held to represent a 'primordial phase' of Indo-European religion. He saw religion as a 'disease of language' through which the nomen (Latin for 'name') became the numen (Latin for 'holy'). One example would be the development of the idea of the human soul from the word for breath. This seems to have happened, for example, to both the Greek pneuma and the Hebrew ruwach. Both of which originally meant wind and breath but came to mean spirit. This process of reification, ascribing a real and independent existence to abstract entities or assuming that a merely named concept must have material existence, was thus proposed as an explanation of the origins of religion.

In 1871 Edward B. Tylor published Primitive Culture (see Eliade, Essential Sacred Writings, 177-185 for a sample of Tylor's work). He argued for an evolutionary development in religion. Monotheism, he claimed, had developed from polytheism which in turn had grown out of animism. Animism, the religious belief that everything has some kind of a soul, was proposed as the universal human condition out of which all religious beliefs developed.

In his books Custom and Myth (1883) and Modern Mythology (1897) Andrew Lang attacked the theories of Max Müller pointing out that the processes of reification could not be traced through all known forms of religion. In The Making of Religion in 1899 Lang attacked Tylor's arguments. Since the Australian Aborigines and the Andaman Islanders both had a developed belief in a High God but exhibited no traces of Animism then animism could not have universally preceded and thus be the origin of other forms of religion. Despite the difficulties set against such attempts at a universal account of the origins of religion the theory of Mana dominated the study from 1900 - 1920. This theory, proposed by R, R, Marrett, differed from Tylor's theory only in that belief in mana was seen as even more archaic than animism and mana was impersonal where the anima was a personal force.

Wilhelm Schmidt between 1912 - 1955 published a multi-volume work on The Origins of the Idea of God in which he argued that, in fact, primal monotheism was the universal human belief from which all religions had developed. This was not well received.

Partially in a reaction to the extremities of logical positivism and materialism the early twentieth century saw the development of various irrationalist theories. Freud's psychoanalysis of the unconscious mind, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's 'prelogical mentality,' Rudolph Otto's Idea of the Holy, and even Wm. James's adaptation of the unconscious as the 'hither' side of the religious experience were all such theories. They had in common the proposal that, despite its evident utility, pure reason did not govern all processes of human development.

It must be noted that all these attempts to explain religion had a common preoccupation with the origins of religion. Like religions themselves, these attempted explanations sought to base themselves on a genesis of religion, a sort of theoretical cosmogony. While Müller's 'disease of language' and Tylor's animism sought an explanation in the early stages of religion, Marrett's mana, and Schmidt's primal monotheism sought to replace them with theories promising a revelation of the very beginnings of religion. Mircea Eliade pointed out the quasi-religious nature of this quest for origins in The Quest chapter 3.

Emile Durkheim in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912) and Sigmund Freud in 1913 with his Totem and Taboo sought once again to explain the very beginnings of religion--the personification of society in the first case and the primal murder of the tribal father in the second. These, however, were the last attempts to explain religious origins and they were followed by the quest for complete knowledge and global familiarity. The attempt to study the origins and development of religion gave way to the attempt to study the context and history of religion. In a precursor of the new development James George Fraser published his enormous The Golden Bough in 1890. Other massive works of compilation began to appear; Hastings' The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, was published between 1908 and 1921. Pritchard published his Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Bible in 1950.

Following hard on the heels of the attempt to catalogue the data of world religions rather than the elaboration of overconfident theories of religious origins came studies in perspective and method. Geradus van der Leeuw published his Phenomenology of Religion in 1933. Here it was suggested that by the method of 'bracketing' (called epoché) one's own personal beliefs one could achieve an intuition of the essence of religion, an 'eidetic vision.' As well as the phenomenology of religion a smaller but possibly more important classification of the study, the morphology of religion, sought to classify religious phenomena into connected groups or categories. Mircea Eliade's book Patterns in Comparative Religion (1954) is one of the clearest examples of this type of approach but Ninian Smart's attempt to clarify the 'dimensions' of religion can be seen as a type of morphology (The Religious Experience of Mankind, 1969).

In 1959 Wilfred Cantwell Smith made a number of observations and suggestions regarding the academic study of religion in an important paper entitled 'Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?' One of his earliest published writings on comparative religion, and one which is in many ways a seminal piece from which much of his later work develops, 'Comparative Religion: Whither and Why?' traces the chronological development of the study of religion. I can do no better than to let Smith speak for himself at this point.

The argument may be summarized briefly, in pronominal terms. The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of other men's religion was that of an impersonal presentation of an "it". The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a 'they'. Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the discussion is one of a 'we' talking about a 'they'. The next step is a dialogue, where 'we' talk to 'you'. If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that 'we' talk with 'you'. The culmination of this process is when 'we all' are talking with each other about "us". (34)

Not only does Smith trace the process by which this is coming about - at least to the 'we' and 'you' stage - but he also "urges desiderata" (ibid.) to encourage the progression to the 'we all' stage. Throughout this analysis and exhortation, the central motifs of Smith's thought are apparent. His stress on (i) persons as the locus of religion, which cannot otherwise be reified (ibid.), along with the warning the 'personal explanations must be checked against or co-ordinated with texts and other overt data' (40 n.18). His stress on (ii) faith as a quality of men's lives and his recognition that his own faith is one among many, and that 'faith cannot adeqately
be expressed in words, not even by a man who holds it devoutly" (39 n.18). There are also six other elements which can be seen to develop in his later works: (1) his recognition that the secular rationalist is a person like any other not substantially different from, and certainly not superior to, the committed religionist. Smith posits rationalism as a 'tradition' like the Christian, Hindu or whatever (46). (2) His urging of the general principle that one can only understand a great religion if one approach it with humility and love (50 n.39). (3) His contention that comparative religion must formulate statements intelligible from within both of the traditions involved and in the academic world (52/53). (4) His suggestion that 'comparative religion may become the disciplined self-consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life' (55). (5) His consideration of the writing of a 'religious history of man' (56), and (6) his contention that "Since every religion has to do with transcendent reality, it is part of the truth of that religion to be dissatisfied with its external forms" (50 n.39).

This may be seen as the final and inevitable fruit of the treatment of religious experience as an experiential moment irreducible to either science or morality, belief or conduct, free from the requirement that it be justified by reference to non-religious thought and action. As such a subjective classification persons are necessarily the locus of an irreifiable religion. Faith is the response to personal experience and so is necessarily a quality of human life. Finally each person and each life is an equally valid source of experience and faith and the secular humanist, like everyone else, must be considered equally. Although Smith's other points are not logically entailed they are an inevitable conclusion considering Smith's Christian faith in which "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:37, Mk 12:31, Lk 10:27) is one of two commandments upon which 'depend all the law and the prophets." (Mt. 22:40) The religious commandment to 'love one's neighbor as oneself' constitutes a revelation of sacred knowledge of the equal value of the subjective experience of others, an injunction to accord to the experience of others value equal to one's own personal experience. With such an injunction as this and the insistence on personal experience as the fundamental source of religion it is understandable how belief has developed in both the final ineffability of religious sentiment and in the final equality of alternate religions.

**Another point of view: John Hick's Complex of Arguments for the change from Christocentrism to 'Reality-Centeredness.' (adapted from Gavin D'Costa's 'Theology of John Hick')**

**Argument 1. The argument from the untenable 'Ptolemaic' theology of religions (v. 73-92).** This basically revolves around the apparent paradox of the doctrine 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus' (there is no salvation outside the Church) with the salvific will of a benevolent and omnipotent deity.

**Argument 2. The argument from encountering saintly and holy people within non-Christian religions.** This is a tremendously important point and deserves full attention. Many of the pluralist theologians of our day have been deeply influenced by the fact that no one tradition can claim a monopoly of apparently genuinely holy adherents. The exemplary lives of Christocentric persons find correspondence in all other traditions.

**Argument 3. The argument from an all-loving God.** This strand of Hick's argument is inextricably linked with argument #1 above as it is characterized by D'Costa. Given an understanding of the deity as 'all-loving', Hick's point is that the majority of humankind living outside the boundaries of Christendom cannot be lost by such a geographical accident.

**Argument 4. The argument from a proper understanding of Jesus.** This argument is a composite skein of thought, incorporating, (a) the tendency evinced by other religions to divinize their founders; (b) the distinction between mythic and literal language; and (c) historical skepticism towards the biblical texts, cumulatively, these arguments form a single attack on what Hick considers to be 'traditional' Christology in favor of the 'degree Christologies' that he describes, eg. in "Religious Pluralism," (1984).

**Argument 5. The argument from the nature of religion and religious history: 1.** Hick agrees with W.C. Smith's conception of religious faith as a universal human constant; 2. he criticizes organized religious communities as contrary to the intentions of their founders and/or socially divisive; 3. he points to "genetic confessionalism", that is, the obvious tendency to adhere to the religion of one's parents or place of birth; and 4. the necessity of discriminating between religious beliefs. Can one meaningfully say, asks D'Costa, that the "faith" of X (a materialist humanist), Y (a Roman Catholic) and Z (a Theravada Buddhist) is the same thing? (136) It would appear that Hick can answer this question affirmatively. Although the form and content of these faiths may differ they are alike in giving meaning, coherence and continuity to the lives of the faithful. The characteristics they share are the resultant irenic and benevolent lifestyles which they avow. While altruism, caritas and ahimsa are themselves tradition-related terms the characteristics of the actions which they ideally inculcate in their respective proponents transcend the specific references of the words used to describe them. Hick himself identifies these characteristics to be "acceptance, compassion, love for all human kind or even all life" (The Problem of Religious Pluralism, 81). This is what he means by the move from "self-centeredness to reality centeredness" ("Religious Pluralism," 148).

**Argument 6. The argument from the theological and practical benefits of the Copernican revolution.** D'Costa suggests that the dialogical benefits of Hick's theology are open to doubt. "Unless Copernicans limit their dialogue exclusively to other like-minded Copernicans they will implicitly entertain a view which holds that the partner has a relative truth compared to their own absolute Copernican perspective" (145). Hick, however, has specifically repudiated such a view in "God Has Many Names" where he criticized the 'confessional end of dialogical spectrum' and warned against that very position wherein one's own view is granted 'absolute truth whilst his partner's has only relative truth' (81). The basic point of Hick's reality-centered stance is that one's dialogue partner is held to be centered on that same reality, in a similarly though not identically limited manner.

**Argument 7. The argument from the infinite divine nature.** Hick's point here is that God, as infinite, can be both personal and impersonal and thus may be genuinely experienced as personal and genuinely experienced as impersonal. It is crucial to Hick's position that the God/theos/Real at the center of his paradigm is infinite, ineffable, including all the characteristics attributed to deity or absolute reality by all the traditions (and more, infinitely more). In agreement with W.C. Smith, Hick conceives God as both and not either/or (Smith, The Faith of Other Men, 17).
All students will submit a typewritten critical essay of 2,000 to 2,500 words (double spaced) due in the final class of the semester.

These are not reports but argumentative essays: that is to say they are editorialism rather than journalism--your own views are as essential as knowledge of your subject material. Your subject material is religious experience and expression, so do not use this as an opportunity to go on a rant about your favorite argument, whatever that may be. Your argument must be constructed upon careful research into religion, and you should attempt to come to some conclusion that increases your understanding of religion.

The standard of your technical writing as well as your accuracy and argument will be taken into consideration. To that end, here is a short list of common avoidable writing errors which should help you to avoid simple mistakes which will otherwise reduce your grade.

Westminster College as an institution and I as an individual both pursue a strict policy of academic honesty. Plagiarism: leading your reader or listener to believe that what you have written or said is your own work, when, in fact, it is not, will be treated severely. But always remember that while using someone else's work without declaring your source is dishonest, doing the same thing and citing the source is good scholarship! Books must be cited in the correct bibliographic style (see below) and personal sources can also be cited.

Your instructor reserves the right to use the plagiarism software at Turnitin.com.

Although you are not required to do so, I have found it quicker, easier, more convenient, and more economic to submit these papers as e-mail attachments. That way I can grade them on my computer, you do not have to decipher my handwriting crammed into the margins of your paper, I can send them back by the same means, so you don't have to wait to see me personally to get your papers back, and we both get copies.

Papers cannot be accepted after the due date (the final class of the semester). YOU HAVE BEEN Warned Of THIS Three MONTHS BEFORE THEY ARE DUE. NO EXCUSES WILl BE ACCEPTED. You may hand in a rough draft of your paper to be checked anytime up to ONE WEEK BEFORE the due date.

General requirements of this research paper.

Papers must have a title which states the topic of your essay. In order to maintain the focus on religious experience as the topic of this course your papers should be entitled “Religious Experience and Expression: . . . ” with your topic or focus following the colon. So you must attempt to make some general conclusions about religious experience and/or expression. Papers must be typed on standard 8 1/2 x 11 paper (no folders please!). Papers will be kept by the professor.

You must have a thesis, argument, and a conclusion. That is, a specific statement you want to make, an attempt to persuade your reader that your statement is correct, and a conclusion to your thought. This is mainly to help you to focus your thoughts. “Thesis” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘a proposition laid down or stated, especially as a theme to be discussed or proved.”

The arguments and research which support your thesis should make the main body of the essay.

The whole point of college writing is ACCURACY, so do not sacrifice accuracy for dramatic effect. For example, do not claim that your topic has been a matter of disagreement “since the beginning of time.” It hasn't. Don’t exaggerate and don’t misrepresent the facts for dramatic effect.

Source material (books, but don’t forget articles in journals and encyclopedias, even newspapers and personal interviews) should be integrated into your argument as evidence, example, or illustration. You MUST document the sources of all quotations, statistical information, and paraphrased material. Do not rely on Internet sources to the exclusion of the more reliable print media available from the library. You must have at least as many print media sources as you have Internet sources.

Your conclusions must be clearly stated. They can be negative as well as positive. Don’t worry if you find that your original thesis is insupportable. As long as your conclusion is based on your research, negative results areas valuable as positive ones. Just re-write your introduction to reflect your results. You must attempt to draw some kind of conclusion about “religious experience and expression” since that is the title of your paper. Use the specific material you have dealt with to make some general observation about religion.

You must give a list of sources (entitled “References” or “Bibliography” or “Works Cited”) at the end of your paper. In alphabetical order give the full name of each author, surname first, then first name, followed by the title of the work. Book and journal titles should be italicized (you can use underlining if you do not have italics available). Article titles should be in quotation marks. Place and date of publication must be included. For example:


For Internet sources the required information is basically the same: the author's name, the title (of the website), the URL (that is the "http://filename/etc.htm"), which is the 'place' of publication, and the date you took it from the Internet.

If the author is not identified state "Author Unknown."

Do not rely on Internet sources to the exclusion of the more reliable print media available from the library. You must have at least as many print media sources as you have Internet sources.

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In-text citations can then be given in the form: (Author, page number) or, if the same author has more than one work listed in your bibliography, (Author year, page number). Thus: (Batson and Ventis, 62) or (Ferre 1970, 14) or (Fieser 1996, no page number).

Your bibliography does not count as part of your length (2,000 to 2,500 words as stated above).

PLEASE ASK ME IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY OF THIS!

Possible topics.

These are only suggestions to give an idea of the type of topics possible. I much prefer that students select topics of their own which particularly interest them and discuss their titles with me so that I can recommend reading material.

The "essence" of religious experience.
(Is there such a thing, if so what is it, if not then how can we speak of "religion" at all?)

The definition of religion.
(Possible suggestions or consideration of the difficulties associated with, the possibility, or the utility of such a definition)

Common elements in religious experience or expression around the world.
(Remember that experience and expression are very different concepts.)

Mysticism and religious experience.
(What is Mysticism? Is it common to all religions? What are its benefits, its disadvantages?)

Your own personal religious experience.
(Such a topic is perfectly acceptable but you must be careful to fulfill the requirements of an argumentative essay--make some claim or statement about your experience and support that statement with reference to the class material.)

Religious experience in current affairs.
(This can include anything, from David Koresh to Mother Theresa, from Black Holes to Noah's Ark, but once again it must not be a simple report but an argument of some kind.)

The function of religion.
(This could focus on psychological functions such as the reduction of anxiety, epistemological functions such as the explanation of human existence, sociological functions such as the definition of the social unit etc. etc.)

The academic study of religion.
(What is its history? What influence has it had? What can it achieve? Can we study an experience we have not ourselves had?)

Religion and gender.
(To what extent has religion contributed to the establishment of a male-dominated society, to what extent does it challenge such a society?)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

These are the sort of questions which you should be able to answer after taking this course, and they are the sort of questions you will be asked in the quizzes and in the final examination. You could also adapt some of these questions for your papers if you really cannot find your own topic.

Understanding Religion | Studying Religion | Oral Traditions | Hinduism | Buddhism | Chinese Traditions | Judaism | Mediterranean Religions | Christianity | Islam | Myths, Models, and Metaphors |

Section One: Understanding Religion

1. Select two or more of the definitions of religion suggested on the class webpage and either defend or attack them. You must attack at least one and defend at least one.
2. Suggest your own definition of religion and explain what you feel is useful or informative about it. Make references and comparisons to the definitions on the class webpage.
3. Clifford Geertz suggests that religion is a set of symbols or a cultural pattern that is both a model of and a model for reality. What does he mean by this? How does this work to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations?
4. Discuss the understanding religion as having multiple "dimensions" as suggested by Smart and Rennie. Where do they differ, which do you prefer? What do they achieve, in what ways are they useful?
5. Apply one dimensional model of religion (Smart's, Whaling's, Rennie's, or your own) to one religious tradition. Does the religion accurately conform to the
Section Two: Studying Religion

1. What is the "phenomenology of religion" and "heterophenomenology" in this class? Try to explain by giving some examples. Do you think that it is a constructive way to come to an understanding of religion. Explain your response.

2. As the terms are used in this class, how does "phenomenology" relate to "heterophenomenology"? How could phenomenology help to achieve the goals of heterophenomenology?

3. Explain what C. J. Arthur means by "imaginative re-experiencing." Do you think such an idea would be useful in the study of religion? Why or why not?

4. Consider the webpage description of this course as a study of religion. Explain what you like or dislike about it. Remember to give examples, illustrations, or explanations.

5. Describe Huston Smith's "point of departure." How does he treat religion? Do you think that this is a fair and adequate treatment?

6. According to Huston Smith, there is a "primal view of time" (237). How might the conception of time differ between oral and literate traditions?

Section Three: Oral Traditions

1. Explain the particular characteristics of the "primal religions" as described by Huston Smith (234-37).

2. Identify and discuss some of the common features of the oral creation myths in Philip Novak's textbook.

3. What does Smith mean by the claim that "the symbolist vision sees the things of the world as transparent to their divine source" (241)? Give some examples from the oral traditions in order to explain this.

4. What is the significance of the oral religions for our understanding of religion in general? Do the ways in which, say, Australian Aborigines, find "meaning for life, sanction for conduct and hope for the future" resemble those of other religions? (Eliade, Essential Sacred Writings, 164.)

5. What common human experiences expressed in oral creation myths? How are they expressed? Give examples from your readings.

6. How can the story of Jumping Mouse be seen as a model of human experience and model for human life?

Hinduism

1. Huston Smith tells us that there are "four paths to the goal." What precisely does he mean by this goal? Describe these four paths as they have been expressed in Hindu thought.

2. Traditional Hindu texts describe kama, artha, dharma, and moksha as the valid aims or goals of life. What are these. Try and suggest what experiences of life may have led to their organization, especially in this hierarchical order?

3. How were the stages of life (ashramas) exemplified by the members of Sivesh Thakur's family. What other elements of Varnashramadharma were shown in the video?

4. What are the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad-Gita? Give as much information about them as you can and try to describe either one or both of them as models of and models for human life.

5. Describe the Hindu sacred scriptures. How are they organized and what do they contain? What do you think this body of literature can tell us about religion as a whole?

Buddhism

1. Recount the Legend of the Buddha's life and enlightenment. In what way can this legend be seen as a model of human experience?

2. Apparently the Buddha's experience of asceticism and mystical self-deprivation proved unsatisfactory to him. How did he describe the state which he desired to experience? (Novak, p. 54 and 55)

3. Describe the Long Search video on Buddhism. How did it present the doctrines of the Buddhadharma/the activity of the Sangha?

4. How did Gautama the Buddha use the parable of the poisoned arrow? How does this relate to the religious life?. (Smith, p. 68; Novak, p. 64)

5. What does it mean to claim that the parables of the poisoned arrow and of carrying a girl can be seen as models of human life?

6. Describe Buddhist meditation. How does the suggested understanding of heterophenomenology apply to this?

7. Is Theravada Buddhism really a religion? What does your answer have to do with the problem of defining religion?

Chinese Traditions

1. It has been argued that Confucianism is not really a "religion." What do you think? Explain your reply with reference to the concepts and definitions of
Understanding Religious Experience and Expression

1. How does the Jews' religious expression (as related in the Old Testament of the Bible) relate to their experience of the world? OR How does the (pre-Christian) history of the Jews relate to their religious worldview?
2. What is the "Tanak" in Judaism? What do you know about its composition, editing, and collection?
3. What was the "Exile in Babylon"? How did this affect the Jewish faith?
4. Huston Smith (p. 180) suggests that it is the Jews' "passion for meaning" which lifted their culture from obscurity to greatness. Explain what he means by this.
5. With a relatively small number of adherents, how could Judaism be considered the most important religion in the world?
6. How could the experience of suffering lead to a strong expression of personal identity? Give an example from Judaism or Christianity.
7. How can the Aqedah (the narrative of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac) and/or the narrative of David's defeat of Goliath be seen as models of/for human life?

Other Religions of Antiquity

1. Why might Zoroastrianism be counted among the great religions of the world?
2. What features of Zoroastrianism are of particular interest to the study of religion and why?
3. What were the iatromantes and what sort of religion did they practice? What was a particular feature of their understanding of human nature? What did Gnosticism inherit from them?
4. What is mystery religion? Where did it begin and when did it flourish? What is the relevance of votive religion for mystery religion?
5. What is known about Mithraism and from what sources? Why was it popular and who composed its initiates?
6. What were the Eleusinian Mysteries? Which gods and goddesses did they principally concern? Explain the connection between the myths associated with the Eleusinian mysteries and agriculture.
7. What is the main indication of Gnosticism in the early centuries of the Christian era? What was the "Demiurge" and why was it often identified with the god of the Hebrew Bible? What principles of Christianity and Judaism does Gnosticism thus contradict?

Christianity

1. What is the distinction between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History? Do you think it a valid distinction?
2. What was the political position of the Jews in the time of Jesus? What affect did this have on Christianity? OR What expectations among Jews was a major influence in the formation of Christianity?
3. Explain the "Insider/Outsider Problem" in the study of religion. What is its relevance to our study of Christianity?
4. Whether you are an "insider" or an "outsider," you came into this course with some assumptions about Christianity and/or Christians. Have your assumptions been confirmed, called into question, or unaffected by the treatments of topics such as the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, the spread of Christianity, Christian denominations or branches, and Christian sacraments? Cite specific data in your response.
5. How and why did Christianity spread across the Roman Empire?
6. Discuss the three major doctrines of the Christian religion as explained by Huston Smith (pp. 222-29).
7. Discuss the Christian Liturgical Year. How does it relate to the seasons of the solar year? What, in your opinion, is the significance of this?
8. Can the seven sacraments of Christian religion be seen as religious expressions of ordinary human experience?

Islam

1. There are five practices which are fundamental to the expression of Islam. What are these "five pillars?" Consider the subjective religious experience of the believer who practices these observances.
2. What evidence is there that the religion of Muhammad was related to earlier religion? Can Allah be seen as the same God as that of the Jews and Christians?
3. "If Jesus is the 'mediating focus' of Christianity, then the Qur'an is the mediating focus of Islam." Explain this statement with particular emphasis on Islam.
4. Which "dimension" of religion do you think is most emphasized in Islam? Explain why.
5. How can Muhammad be seen as a model for Muslim behavior?

Myths, Models, and Metaphors

1. In what ways do religious narratives operate as models of and for human life and human experience? Give examples.
2. In what ways might religious narratives constitute metaphors for ideas which are otherwise extremely difficult to express? Give examples.

Some Recommended Reading

W. Paden, Religious Worlds

W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion

M. Eliade, The Quest, and Essential Sacred Writings from around the World

B. Rennie, Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion

M. Stausberg, Contemporary Theories of Religion

Back brennie@westminster.edu