**Dr. Adam Wells**

**Wiley 004**

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**Office Hours: M, W, F: 10-11 and 12-1**

**Religion 111: Introduction to World Religions**

This course is an introduction to the history and beliefs of select world religions. While no course can cover all the religions of the world in one semester, this course aims to provide an introduction to some of the most influential and important religious traditions. To that end, we will study Native-American religion, Ancient Mesopotamian religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In addition, we will spend a significant amount of time thinking critically about theoretical approaches to world religions. Specifically, we will consider Karl Jaspers’ notion of the “axial age,” John Hick’s approach to religious pluralism, Karl Barth’s critique of religion, and Francis Clooney’s “comparative theology.” Our guiding questions are: What are we to make of religious diversity, given that all major religions claim to be universally true? If Christianity is “true,” must that mean that Islam is “false”? Can all religions be equally “true”? Are all religions simply perspectives on one divine (or secular) reality? What can different religious traditions teach us about our own tradition?

**COURSE GOALS:**

Upon successful completion of this course,

1. The student will be familiar with the historical context and major beliefs of the religions surveyed in this course.
2. The student will have an appreciation for the diversity of world religions.
3. The student will be able to employ critical thinking skills in evaluating various theoretical approaches to world religions.
4. The student will be able to relate the religious traditions he/she studies to his/her own tradition (whether that tradition be religious, secular, or otherwise).

**TEXTS** (required, available at the Bookstore):

1) Course Packet

**SCHEDULE OF LECTURE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS** \*

\*Readings listed in parentheses after each lecture topic should be read **before** the lecture.

**Abbreviations: CP= Course Packet; M= Moodle**

**INTRODUCTION**

Jan. 10: Why are we here?

Jan. 12: John Hick on religious pluralism **(CP: 9-18)**

Jan. 17: Karl Jaspers: The axial age hypothesis **(CP: 1-8)**

**I. TRIBAL RELIGION: THE NAVAJO.**

Jan. 19: Navajo creation myth **(CP: 19-28)**

Jan. 22: The Hunta Virus **(CP: 29-39)**

Jan. 24: The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute **(CP: 39-52)**

Jan. 26: DISCUSSION: Navajo mythology and global warming **(CP: 53-59)**

**II. ARCHAIC RELIGION: ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA**

Jan. 29: God and King in Archaic Religion **(CP: 60-70)**

Jan. 31: Creation and Monarchy: *Enuma Elish* **(CP: 71-83)**

Feb. 2: Kingship: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* **(CP: 84-96)**

Feb. 5 **: EXAM I**

**III. AXIAL RELIGION I: HINDUISM**

Feb. 7: How does the axial age differ from what came before?  **(CP: 97-106)**

Feb. 9: Historical foundations of Hinduism: Aryans and non-Aryans **(CP: 107-114)**

Feb. 12: The Vedas and Upanishads **(CP: 115-121)**

Feb. 14: The Upanishadic “system” (No new reading).

Feb. 16: The Bhagavad-Gita **(CP: 122-128)**.

**IV. AXIAL RELIGION II: BUDDHISM**

Feb. 19: Buddhism and the Brahmanic tradition **(CP: 129-137)**

Feb. 21: Gotama Buddha (**M:** Movie: “The Life of the Buddha”)

Feb. 23: Four Noble Truths **(CP: 138-144)**

Feb. 26: Four Noble Truths cont’d **(CP: 144-154)**

Feb. 28: **EXAM II**.

**V. AXIAL RELIGION III: JUDAISM**

Mar. 2: Judaism: Historical Overview **(CP: 155-160)**

Mar. 5: Exodus and Monarchy **(CP: 161-168)**

Mar. 7: Jews in Medieval and Modern Europe **(CP: 169-180)**

Mar. 9: Jews in Medieval and Modern Europe cont’d (no new reading)

Mar. 10-17: SPRING BREAK!!!

Mar. 19: Issues in Modern Judaism: Suffering and God **(CP: 181-189)**

**VI. AXIAL RELIGION IV: CHRISTIANITY**

Mar. 21: Early Christianity: The Gospel of Mark **(CP: 189-203)**

Mar. 23: Christianity in Context: from the Gospel writers to the Roman Empire **(M:** Movie: “From Jesus to Christ, Part 2.”)

Mar. 26: Medieval Christianity, the Reformation, and Modernity **(CP: 204-218)**

Mar. 28**:** Cont’d (no new reading)

Mar. 30: GOOD FRIDAY, no classes

Apr. 2: DISCUSSION: “A Good Man is Hard to Find” **(CP: 219-230) PAPER DUE!!!!**

**VII. AXIAL RELIGION V: ISLAM**

Apr. 4: Pre-Islamic Arabia **(CP: 231-236)**

Apr. 6: Life of Muhammad **(CP: 236-245)**

Apr. 9: Islamic Expansion **(CP: 246-255)**

Apr. 11: Qur ‘an (**CP: 266-276**)

Apr. 13: Islam and violence **(CP: 276-282)**

Apr. 16: **Exam III**

**VIII.** **PLURALISM AND WORLD RELIGIONS**

Apr. 18: Religious pluralism and the problem of relativism **(CP: 283-292)**

Apr. 20: AMPERSAND DAY, no classes

Apr. 23: Religious Exclusivism and Inclusivism **(CP: 293-307, but do not read the small print!)**

Apr. 24: Particularism (**CP: 308-313)**

**FINAL EXAM TBA**

**Note:** University policy stipulates that final examinations are given **only** during the scheduled examination period. Please review your exam schedule before you make end-of-the-semester plans.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**1)** **Regular attendance** at and informed participation in class meetings. Bring your course packet to class. Every student should try to speak-up regularly!

**2)** **Quizzes (5%)**  Throughout the semester I will give a number of quizzes designed to assess your comprehension of the course readings**.** Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

**3) Class summaries (5%)** At the end of every class period, I will pick one student to write a summary of that day’s class. The summaries should include the main points made by the professor as well as any questions or comments made by your peers. These need not be polished essays, but spelling and grammar should be correct. The summaries should be approximately 750 words, and they should be posted to the course’s Moodle page before the next class. The file that you upload to Moodle should include your name and the date of the class that you summarized. So, for example: AdamWells1-11-17.docx

**4) Paper (10%)** Exposition: Other Religions. 1,000 words. Submitted on Moodle by midnight on Apr. 2.

*Writing Prompt:* Attend a religious service or event in a tradition other than your own. Pick one theme, event, character, object, animal, etc. featured in the service and explain it. Your paper should have a clear and arguable thesis, and your supporting evidence (namely, your own experience and subsequent research) should support your thesis. *You must* *cite at least two reputable sources from the physical or online collections of Kelly Library*. *All sources must be cited in footnotes according to the Chicago Manual of Style*. (Note: Google and Wikipedia are NOT reputable sources.)

NOTE: It is your responsibility to make sure that your papers are submitted on time. No extensions will be given for computer malfunction.

**5) Exams (55%)** (Feb. 5 [15%], Feb. 28 [20%], and Apr. 16 [20%]) Each exam will cover the lectures and reading assignments that precede it. Please remember to bring your own blue book to the exam. They are available at the MERC.

**6) Final Exam (25%)**. The final exam will be cumulative and comprehensive. To do well you will need to have a thorough grasp of all the material that we have covered during the semester. (Note: Students with a course average of 85 or above may elect not to take the final exam.)

**GENERAL GRADING RUBRIC:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter Grade** | **Lower Numerical Cutoff** | **Description** |
| A | 94 | Exceptional work that shows creativity and careful analysis of material. A-level work is sophisticated, well-written, and free from errors in grammar and spelling. |
| A- | 90 | Shows exceptional mastery of concepts, and goes well beyond requirements. |
| B+ | 87 | Work in the B-range is above average. B level work may be excellent work with several small errors or flaws. It is solid work, and shows significant command of concepts. |
| B | 84 |  |
| B- | 80 |  |
| C+ | 77 | Work in the C-range is average and satisfactory. It fulfills the criteria of the assignment, but does not display the same level of analysis, comprehension, and/or creativity as B and A-level work |
| C | 74 |  |
| C- | 70 |  |
| D | 60 | Work in the D-range is substandard. It may have major flaws, or show little mastery of major or minor concepts.  |
| F | 0 | Work in the F-range shows no mastery of relevant material. F-level work fails to complete requirements or is otherwise unacceptable. |

\*\*Letter grades are equivalent to a numerical score 1 point above the lower numerical cutoff. For example, an A paper is equivalent to a numerical score of 95

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**: During your college years, by responsible class attendance you can establish a reputation for reliability that will help your professors to write good reference letters for jobs or programs of graduate study. I value faithful attendance highly, as an indication of your commitment to the course goals.

You are allowed 5 absences. Additional absences (for any reason) will reduce your course average by 5 points per absence.

More than 8 absences will result in an automatic F.

**Note: I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Every absence counts! I do not give make-up quizzes. I only give make-up exams under exceptional circumstances—e.g., hospitalization, documented death in the family.**

**PARTICIPATION POLICY:**

Informed participation is expected. You should bring your course packet with you to every class! You should be physically and mentally present and engaged in every class! Your learning process will be helped immensely by participating actively in the course, so don’t be afraid to ask questions, or engage your peers (and me) in discussion. Follow the Apostle Paul’s advice: Be bold.

Non-participation (e.g., sleeping, eating your lunch, staring off in the distance for extended periods of time, disruptive behavior and so forth) will negatively impact your course grade.

**COMPUTER AND CELL PHONE POLICY:**

A successful class requires the active participation of everyone involved. Cell phones are distracting and disruptive; they are detrimental to both individual learners and the class as a whole. Consequently, the use of cell phones in class is strictly forbidden. Turn them off or set them to “Do Not Disturb” before class begins—off, not vibrate! If I see your cell phone during an exam or quiz, you will automatically receive a ZERO on that exam or quiz.

The use of laptops in class is prohibited unless you receive an accommodation from the Powell Resource Center.

**EMAIL POLICY:**

I would much rather meet with you in person than correspond via email. However, I will make every effort to be available to you by email. I will answer student emails during the workday. If you do not receive a response from me within two working days (note: that does not include weekends), feel free to send me a reminder. I often get 30-50 emails per day. It is easy to overlook one! Keep in mind that I do not have time to answer complex questions by email. If your question requires an answer of more than a few sentences, you should come by my office.

**POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

The Emory & Henry College Honor Pledge is as follows:

 I understand that Emory & Henry is a community built on trust. Therefore, as a member of this community, I am committed to tell the truth and to maintain the sanctity of other people’s property, including computer data/access. I will abstain from all fraud in academic work. I will neither give nor receive aid on any form of test or assigned work where such aid is prohibited, nor tolerate this conduct in any member of the Emory & Henry Community. I will deal responsibly with such acts when I observe them. By my conduct and influence, I will endeavor to build a high standard of honesty and truthfulness in all academic work.

Any evidence of academic dishonesty may result in a grade of F for the assignment or failure of the course. Academic dishonesty includes such acts as receiving improper assistance on tests and quizzes. For writing assignments, academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, which is work copied or paraphrased from another source without proper citation, copied from your own work for other classes, or written or revised by someone else. If you refer to another source, you need to give credit directly to that source when you quote directly and when you paraphrase. Any incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported and dealt with in adherence to the College’s Honor System procedures.

**How to Get the Most Out of This Course**

As with any course, what you invest will determine your return, not simply in the grade you earn but in the knowledge and perspectives you take with you. Things to do, more or less in order of importance, are:

1. **Keep up with the assignments**. There is a good deal of reading in this course, and more than in the ordinary 100-level course. Stay current with the reading assignments. If you fall behind you will have a hard time catching up.

2. **Prepare conscientiously for class discussions**. Read closely the texts assigned, ponder the questions provided, make notes, and be ready to participate in discussion in a thoughtful and well-informed manner.

3. **Take advantage of the office hours of the instructor**. My office hours are for your benefit. They provide opportunities for you not only to ask questions and obtain clarifications, but also to get to know me and to let me get to know you.

4. **Familiarize yourself with the specialized vocabulary of the academic study of religion**. There are many technical terms and fifty-cent words: learn what they mean and how to pronounce and spell them. To this end, you should freely and frequently consult online resources like Wikipedia.

5. **Make use of resources beyond those required for reading or purchase**. There are many, many commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, etc. Don’t be afraid to consult outside sources!