Understanding the world’s religions and ideologies is important in three ways. First, they are a vital ingredient in the varied story of humankind’s various experiments in living... Second, and of more immediate importance, is the fact that in order to grasp the meanings and values of the plural cultures of today’s world, we need to know something of the worldviews which underlie them. To understand the Middle East you need to know something about Islam, not to mention Christianity and Judaism; and to understand Japan you need some insight into Buddhism... and the Confucian heritage. Third, we may as individuals be trying to form our own coherent and emotionally satisfying picture of reality, and it is always relevant to see the great ideas and practices of various important cultures and civilization. To make judgments about philosophies and ways of life we need a comparative perspective—to know something of the quest of the Christian mystic and Hindu yogin, and of the spirituality of the Hasidic Jew and the Mahayana Buddhist. In a number of ways, the individual cultures of the world contribute to human civilization, and the religions and ideologies permeating those cultures are not to be neglected.


Course Description and Objectives

This course is an introduction to the study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As an introduction to their study, questions of orientation will predominate: How might one approach the religious phenomenon today? What is religion and how is it manifested? How does religion relate to life? Such concerns have impressed upon many the need to look for common themes in religious traditions. In this way individuals seeking knowledge of other paths may come to an understanding of them without getting bogged down by otherwise important details. It also addresses the existential and social concerns each religion deals with in its own distinct way. Our objective, then, will be to investigate world religions with a view to their common manifestations (ritual, devotion, shamanism, ethics, etc.).

Evaluation

1) Quizzes and class participation (30%): Four quizzes comprised of multiple-choice and mini-essay-type questions. These are scheduled after major segments in the course (see Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings below). Some of the questions will be based on lecture material and class discussions, which won’t be easily obtainable from the textbooks or friends’ notes. No provisions will be made for make-up quizzes. Also, quizzes will be offered only once, in class and on the assigned dates.
2) **One ten-to-fifteen page, typed research paper (40%)**: Students are to write on a topic of their choice. They are not obliged to cover traditions examined in this course. Choices may include primal or indigenous traditions, religions of the ancient world (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece), nontraditional new religious movements (Baha’i, Spiritualism, Theosophy), or spiritual movements of the twentieth-century (Scientology, Neo-Paganism, New-Age Movements). Modest comparative ventures are also welcome. Students are encouraged to implement the thematic approach of the course.

Attention to style is mandatory. Students are expected to follow at least the elements of style outlined in the “Faculty of Religious Studies Style Sheet.” This is available at the Faculty of Religious Studies and on the Faculty website <www.mcgill.ca/religion/style.htm#style20sheet>. The due date for the essay is noted below (Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings). Papers submitted after due date will have 3% per day deducted unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor. No papers will be accepted after the final day of classes.

3) **Final Examination (30%)**: The exam will comprise three sections: (1) definition of key terms—some multiple-choice; (2) short essay questions covering a common theme in a religion (choices will be provided in advance for preparation); (3) long essay questions of a comparative sort that demonstrate comprehensive knowledge and methodological insight (choices will be provided in advance for preparation).

**NB**: The Final Examination is scheduled by the Faculty of Arts in the Examination period, December 7–21. Instructors have no authority to make special examination arrangements without instruction from the Associate Dean’s office. If such special arrangements may apply to you, please read section 5.2 of the McGill Undergraduate Programs Calendar 2001-2002 well in advance of the exam.

### Required Texts


### Recommended Texts


### Web Resources

**Course Site**

WebCT <webct3.mcgill.ca>: WebCT (Web Course Tools) is an on-line course management system. It allows instructors to create and manage Web-based or Web-enhanced courses. Via WebCT students may access important course information,
read recent announcements for their course, have real-time discussions with other class participants, keep track of their grades, and so on. It’s a vital education medium today. All McGill students are entitled to use WebCT and have, in fact, been assigned a Global UserID based on their official McGill records. See attached handout for further information and instructions on accessing WebCT.

General Sites of Interest

*Religion on the Web* <users.ox.ac.uk/~worc0337/serious/religion.html>

*Religion and Philosophy* (“Religions and Religious Groups” link) <encarta.msn.com/category/religion_philosophy.asp>

*Virtual Religion Index* <religion.rutgers.edu/vri/index.html>

*Religion and World Views* <www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/8424/religion.html>

*The Major World Religions* <www.omsakthi.org/religions.html>

*United Communities of Spirit* <origin.org/ucs.cfm>

*Alternative Religions* <altreligion.about.com/mbody.htm>

*Beliefnet* <www.beliefnet.com>

Disclaimer: By providing this list of Web sites my support of them should not be seen as unqualified. They are listed here simply for their usefulness as religion resources on the Internet. They are particularly useful for the links they provide to other, sometimes more specialized sites.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sept. 5</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7, 10:</td>
<td>Topic: What is Religion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading: Ludwig 4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recommended reading</em>: Cannon 21-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12, 14, 17:</td>
<td>Topic: Ways of Being Religious</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading: Ludwig 10-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recommended reading</em>: Cannon 11, 49-77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19, 21:</td>
<td>Topic: Principles and Issues of Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading: Ludwig 9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Recommended reading</em>: Cannon 17-21, 26-39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Particular Ways of Being Religious

Religions of South and East Asia

24, 26: Quiz #1
26, 28, Oct. 1, 3: Topic: Hinduism
Reading: Ludwig 84-115
Recommended reading: Ludwig 64-83; Cannon 145-63

5: Topic: Buddhism
Reading: Ludwig 133-61
Recommended reading: Ludwig 116-32; Cannon 165-88, 145-63

8: Thanksgiving Day (No classes)

10, 12, 15
17: Topic: Buddhism (cont’d)

19, 22: Quiz #2
22, 24, 26, 29, 31, Nov. 2: Topic: Confucianism and Daoism
Reading: Ludwig 216-60
Recommended reading: Ludwig 190-215; Cannon 145-63

Religions of the Middle East

5, 7, 9: Quiz #3
9, 12, 14: Topic: Judaism
Reading: Ludwig 350-75
Recommended reading: Ludwig 330-49; Cannon 145-63

16, 19: Research Paper
19, 21, 23, 26: Topic: Christianity
Reading: Ludwig 401-27
Recommended reading: Ludwig 376-400; Cannon 189-230, 145-63

28, 30: Quiz #4
30, Dec. 3, 5: Topic: Islam
Reading: Ludwig 453-80
Recommended reading: Ludwig 428-52; Cannon 145-63

7-21: Examination period