Comparative Study of Religion
Courses Designed for Undergraduates
Spring Term 2015

Comparative

RELIGION 13. Scriptures and Classics
William A. Graham | MW 10:00am – 11:00am
An introduction to the history of religion through selective reading in significant, iconic texts from diverse religious and cultural traditions. Considers important themes (e.g., suffering, death, love, community, transcendence) as well as problems of method and definition as they present themselves in the sources considered. Readings from texts such as the Upanisads, Bhagavad Gita, Dhammapada, Lotus Sutra, Analects, Chuang Tzu, Gilgamesh, Black Elk Speaks, Aeneid, Torah, Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an.

RELIGION 20. Ethnographies of Religion, Texts and Contexts
Mara Block | W 3:00pm – 5:00pm
The course presents ethnographic works on Religion in the humanities and social sciences and introduces students to the concept and practice of ethnography.

RELIGION 53. From Soul to Personality: Religion and Modern Psychology
Mara Block | MW 11:00am - 12:00pm
Critics and religious adherents alike have used psychology to understand religion for centuries. Some argue that knowledge of the human mind can “explain away” religion while others argue to the contrary that it buffers religious belief. This course takes a different approach to understanding the modern self, religion, and the rise of new scientific languages and practices used to make sense of them. Throughout this course, we will track shifting conceptions of the self (soul, mind, psyche, personality) and their role in understanding religion in a range of psychological, literary, anthropological, and philosophical texts. We will examine the function of these texts—the purposes they serve in alleviating suffering and teaching readers the “good life” as well as critiquing authoritative ways of knowing the self in the modern world. We will read exemplary texts through the rise of empirical psychology, the making of a field of the “psychology of religion,” psychoanalysis, and the sciences of personality.

RELIGION 54. Women, Religion and Redemption
Marla Frederick | T 2:00pm - 4:00pm
RELIGION 126. Introduction to Human Rights and Justice
Francis Fiorenza | W 2:00pm - 4:00pm
This course seeks to give an introduction to contemporary discussions about justice, human rights, and religion. It will survey the conceptions of rights within political theology and within contemporary theories of justice. Special attention will be given to the work of Rawls, Habermas, Nussbaum, Sen, Walzer, Sandel, Motlmann, Woltersdorf, and Schmitt. It will seek to show how a conception of human rights relates to religion with the framework of a discourse ethics.

RELIGION 1012B. Dreams and the Dreaming
Kimberley Patton | W 2:00pm - 4:00pm
A continuation of Dreams and the Dreaming. We will evaluate current research in the psychology and neurobiology of dreams with respect to relevance for the religious and spiritual dimensions of human dreaming. Focus is on Eastern, Native American, and Australian aboriginal traditions. Offered jointly with the Divinity School as 3315b. This course can be taken either as the second half of a year-long sequence, or as a single-semester, stand-alone course.

ETHRSON 15. If There is No God, All is Permitted: Theism and Moral Reasoning
Jay Harris | MW 12:00pm - 1:00pm
This course will examine the ways in which a concept of God has informed Western moral discourse trying to help students engage the literature as they consider why one might think "if there is no God, all is permitted" and why one might think if there is a God, human moral achievement is impossible.

FRSEMR 31R. Guilty until Proven Innocent. Finding Justice and Truth in the Middle Ages
Racha Kirakosian | T 2:00pm - 4:00pm
Diving into the world of medieval law and rituality, students will discover the “Real Game of Thrones”. We are going to explore concepts of justice and law, encompassing the first written laws from the time of the so-called Barbarian Invasions, Church law, and reminiscences of pre-Christian rituals. The place of the divine in search of truth and justice, of women in a male-dominated culture, of Jews in a world ruled by Christian sovereigns will be analyzed in particular. Students will work with primary sources in order to elucidate the ways in which truth and justice were searched and established.

Buddhist

AESTHINT 36. Buddhism and Japanese Culture
Ryuichi Abe | TTh 02:00pm - 02:59pm
This course is designed to enable students to analyze a wide range of Japanese cultural creations - including the traditional Noh theater, modern Japanese paintings, and contemporary anime - by
illustrating the influence of Buddhism both on their forms and at their depths. The first part of the course is a study of major Buddhist philosophy and its impact on Japanese literature. The second part observes Buddhist ritual practices and their significance for Japanese performing arts. The last part traces the development of Japanese Buddhist art, and considers the influence of Buddhism on diverse contemporary popular Japanese art media. This course fulfills the requirement that one of the eight General Education courses also engage substantially with Study of the Past.

**Christian**

**RELIGION 44. Augustine's Confessions**  
Charles Stang | Th 2:00pm - 4:00pm  
The aim of this course is to introduce students to the Confessions of Augustine of Hippo, a Christian theologian of the 4th/5th c. This seminar will introduce students to the life of Augustine, but will focus on a close reading of the Confessions in English translation, attending to such questions as: what is a "confession" and how does it relate to autobiography? Who is the "I" that speaks and the "you" to whom it speaks, and what is the condition of that speech? How are we best to understand this text, as a work of theology, philosophy, or literature (or is that division even helpful)?

**RELIGION 46. Historical Jesus**  
Giovanni Bazzana | MW 10:00am - 11:00am  
The course will introduce the students to the history of the quest for the historical Jesus by examining the most relevant methodological issues and by reviewing the ideological and socio-political stakes in this enterprise that has been intertwined to the cultural history of the western world from the XVIII to the XXI century.

**FRSEMR 43D. Christianity and Slavery in America, 1619-1865**  
Catherine Brekus | W 1:00pm - 3:00pm  
Most people today assume that Christianity and slavery are incompatible. For most of Christian history, however, the opposite was true. Christians not only owned slaves, but they argued that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible. This course will explore the relationship between Christianity and slavery in America from 1619, when the first slaves arrived in Virginia, to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865. We will ask several questions. How did white Christians become convinced that slavery was sinful? Why did many slaves convert to Christianity, the religion of their oppressors? How did enslaved Christians make sense of their suffering?

**East Asian**

**AESTHINT 36. Buddhism and Japanese Culture**
Ryuichi Abe | TTh 02:00pm - 02:59pm
This course is designed to enable students to analyze a wide range of Japanese cultural creations - including the traditional Noh theater, modern Japanese paintings, and contemporary anime - by illustrating the influence of Buddhism both on their forms and at their depths. The first part of the course is a study of major Buddhist philosophy and its impact on Japanese literature. The second part observes Buddhist ritual practices and their significance for Japanese performing arts. The last part traces the development of Japanese Buddhist art, and considers the influence of Buddhism on diverse contemporary popular Japanese art media. This course fulfills the requirement that one of the eight General Education courses also engage substantially with Study of the Past.

**JAPNHIST 115. Religion and Society in Edo and Meiji Japan**
Helen Hardacre | T 10:00am - 12:00pm
Examination of religion and society in Japan from 1600-1912, beginning with an era of state control over religious institutions and religious affiliations of the populace, followed by the demise of the Edo-period system and diversification of religious practice in context of rapid social change, modernization, and imperialism during the Meiji period. Separate section for students able to utilize primary sources in Japanese will explore the Maruzen Meiji Microfilm collection in the Harvard-Yenching Library. Offered jointly with the Divinity School as 3957. General knowledge of Japanese history and religion is helpful.

**JAPNHIST 126. Shinto**
Helen Hardacre | W 10:00am - 12:00pm
An examination of Shinto, emphasizing its concepts of deity (kami), patterns of ritual and festival, shrines as religious and social institutions, political culture and interactions with party politics, and its contribution to contemporary youth culture. General knowledge of Japanese history and religion is helpful. Japanese language is not required, but several meetings will be held for students able to use Japanese-language sources. Offered jointly with the Divinity School as 3960.

**Judaic**

**RELIGION 25. Judaism: Text and Tradition**
Jon Levenson | TTh 11:30am – 1:00pm
An exploration of the Jewish religious tradition, from its inception in biblical Israel through its rabbinic, medieval, and modern iterations, with a focus on central theological claims and religious practices. Readings concentrate on classical sources and their various modes of interpretation but also include modern restatements, reformulations, and critiques of tradition.

**Islamic**
**AESTHINT 54. For the Love of God and His Prophet: Religion, Literature, and the Arts in Muslim Cultures**
Ali Asani | TTh 11:30am - 1:00pm
The course surveys the literary and artistic dimensions of the devotional life of the world's Muslim communities, focusing on the role of literature and the arts (poetry, music, architecture, calligraphy, etc.) as expressions of piety and socio-political critique. An important aim of the course is to explore the relationships between religion, literature, and the arts in a variety of historical and cultural contexts in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Europe, and America.

**Modern Western/Religion of the Americans**

**FRSEMR 43D. Christianity and Slavery in America, 1619-1865**
Catherine Brekus | W 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Most people today assume that Christianity and slavery are incompatible. For most of Christian history, however, the opposite was true. Christians not only owned slaves, but they argued that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible. This course will explore the relationship between Christianity and slavery in America from 1619, when the first slaves arrived in Virginia, to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865. We will ask several questions. How did white Christians become convinced that slavery was sinful? Why did many slaves convert to Christianity, the religion of their oppressors? How did enslaved Christians make sense of their suffering?