

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Discipline: Global Studies A

Fall 2008

RELG 228Z: Religion, Politics and Society

Upper or Lower Division: Lower

Faculty Name: Paul Groner

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion, Politics and Society. This course examines the “political” role of religion in societies around the world, across a long span of human history but with a particular focus on the societies we visit. We often think of religious ideology as being attractive for its promise of individual salvation, both during this life and after death. At the same time, religions frequently include rituals that promise this-worldly benefits for both the individual and society—such as peace, prosperity, fertility, rain, or high position. Rulers not only commissioned these rituals, they used symbols and ideology from the religious traditions for legitimation. Religions that spread widely across the globe, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity did so in part because specific leaders (or aspiring leaders) at specific points in time saw the political advantages they could gain by adopting or modifying the rituals, demeanor and ethics of a religious ideal. Because much of the voyage is spent in Asia, a significant portion of our class will be devoted to examining how Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism spread in these ways, leaving behind temples and sacred sites in India, Malaysia, Vietnam, China and Japan. Study of these religions and their roles in past and current Asian societies will prepare students to appreciate the religious sites they are able to visit in and near these ports. In the early part of the voyage, while introducing the general themes of the class, we will also examine how native, imported and blended religions played similar “political” roles in Latin America and Africa.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To become familiar with some of the ways religion has been analyzed.
2. To understand some of the ways in which religion is related to politics and society.
3. To become familiar with some of the sites and cultures we will visit.
4. To take some of the traditions we have seen and investigate how they have been introduced to the United States and how they have changed.

RELIGION, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

1. enroute to Brazil: Introduction to the course. A consideration of how we define religion: as experience (William James), as psychology (Freud), as culture (Geertz), as society (Durkheim)
Winston King, "Religion," in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:282-292*
Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, in Carl Olson, *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2003), pp. 285-298*
2. enroute to Brazil: more on approaches to religion; an example of an African-Brazilian religion: Candomblé. Spirit possession, healing rituals, and the problem of what is African and what is Brazilian.
Watch "Bahia : Africa in the Americas"
Possible guest lecturer: O'Neill on Black Atlantic?
3. enroute to Brazil: the power of secrecy
Paul Christopher Johnson, "What is Candomblé?" In *Secrets, Gossip and Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 35-56*
Sheila S. Walker, "Everyday and Esoteric Reality in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé," *History of Religions* 30. 2. (Nov., 1990): 103-128.
Possible guest lecturer: Cargill on possession?
4. enroute to Namibia: Encountering the Other—Indigenous Peoples, Missionaries, Scholars, and Students
Watch the film *Silence*.
Guest Lecturer: Len Schoppa
5. enroute to Namibia: Traditional Religion in Namibia and South Africa
Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 259-272.
San Spirituality, TBA
Guest Lecturer: Mohamed Adhikari on the destruction of San society
6. enroute to Namibia: This section of the course focuses on religious justifications of colonialism and later of apartheid. Such topics as the "white man's burden," covenantal views of religion and society, how comparative religion was used for colonialism, and the comparison of the Boer Great Trek with *Exodus*. The second half of the lecture focuses on the use of religion in resistance to apartheid.
Watch "Jesus Loves South Africa."
Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp.45-96.
Guest Lecturer: Mohamed Adhikari on religion and resistance to apartheid

7. enroute to S. Africa: How apartheid was ended without excessive bloodshed. The Roles of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.
Watch “A long night's journey into day.”
Guest Lecturer: Mohamed Adhikari on the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

8. enroute to India: Caste, karma, and the *Bhagavad-gīta*. An introduction to some of the basic concepts of Hinduism that have affected society. Among them are the use of karma to control people’s behavior and to legitimate the positions of the upper classes. The stages of life, caste system, and rules for society found in the Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition* (Duxbury Press, 1971), pp. ????
Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), Second edition, 1: 213-233.274-288.

9. enroute to India: Several religious approaches to reforming the caste system are considered. First we look at Gandhi’s efforts to win freedom from Britain and to reform the caste through a reformed Hinduism. Then we look at a movement to convert untouchables (Dalits) to Buddhism, a religion that did not recognize the caste system.
Rudganshu Mukherjee, (ed.), *The Penguin Gandhi Reader* (NY: Penguin, 1993), pp. 125-136, 213-224.
Valerian Rodriques (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Ambedkar* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 168-172. 219-229.
Guest lecturer: Laksmi Tewari

10. enroute to India: Ideals of Indian Society Expressed Through Drama: the RamayanaReadings: TBA
Guest Lecturer: Cheri Vasek

11. enroute to India:Buddhism: The universe as a karmically-determined place; the early biography of the Buddha. The tension between his role as world renouncer and world reformer.
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp. 19-59.

12. enroute to India: The Varieties of Buddhism: Mahayana.
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp.60-102.
Guest Lecturer: Larry Butler

13. enroute to Penang: Confucianism. The basic ideas of Confucius' *Analects* are elucidated. The emphasis on family and lineage found in the *Classic on Filial Piety* and how they were reflected in Chinese emphases on the family and ancestor worship are explored. Field work component in Penang might consist of going to several of the traditional Clan Halls open to the public.
Tu Wei-ming, "Confucius and Confucianism," in Walter Slote and George de Vos (eds.), *Confucianism and the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 3-36.
W.T. DeBary, "Confucius," in W.T. DeBary (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 1st edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 17-35.
14. enroute to Penang: Confucianism
Stephen Teiser, "Introduction," in *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 25-32 (on kinship and bureaucracy).
Patricia Ebrey, "The Book of Filial Piety for Women attributed to a Woman nee Zheng," in Susan Mann and Yu-yin Cheng (eds.), *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 46-69.
Guest Lecturer: Larry Butler
15. enroute to Vietnam: Buddhism: Buddhist Doctrine and the role of rulers, rituals. The Vietnam War and the role of Buddhism in protesting it.
Sallie B. King, "They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators during the Vietnam War," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 127-150.
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp. 103-129.
16. enroute to Hong Kong: Monastic and Lay Practice
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp. 130-179.
17. enroute to Japan: Buddhism in Japan: Buddhism: Enlightenment. Are we speaking of a single experience or a variety of experiences? The path to enlightenment, whether it is easy to attain and why it might matter. Who built the major temples in Nara and Kyoto? How was Buddhism used to legitimate governments?
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp. 179-213, 230-242.
18. enroute to Honolulu: Buddhism: Other Views of Enlightenment and the Path. Martial arts and Zen.
Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, pp. 213-230, 242-252

19. enroute to Honolulu: Buddhism in America: Honolulu: Buddhism in America: How did Buddhism come to America? Are there differences between Asian-American and Caucasian followers of the tradition? What sorts of practices became popular? What social groups were attracted to it? Would celibate orders become popular in America?
Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 3-11, 33-50.
Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (Cutchogue, NY: Buccaneer Books, 1958), pp. 16-35.
20. enroute to Honolulu Asian-Americans and Buddhism: How was Buddhism part of the social identity of many groups of Asians and Asian-Americans? What did they expect from it: How did they organize themselves?
Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, pp. 51-69, 136-157.
21. enroute to Honolulu: Zen in America: How did American Zen practitioners organize themselves? What did they add to Zen that was not found in Asia? What was the rationale for being socially active? Zen in prisons and in environmental movements.
Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, pp. 90-112.
22. enroute to Honolulu: Buddhism in America: The Tantric Tradition.
Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, pp. 113-135.
Hugh Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions* 39.3 (2000): 268-304.
23. enroute to Panama Canal: Engaged (Socially active) Buddhism
Richard Seager, *Buddhism in America*, pp. 185-215.
Watch "Becoming the Buddha in LA"

Field Component:

Students will be expected to visit at least two sites relevant to the course and write a short (no more than one page) summary of what they saw. Virtually every site we visit will have relevant sites. Among them are the Candomblé Museum in Salvador, Brazil; temples in Madras; Buddhist, Daoist, or Caodai sites in Vietnam; Confucian ancestral halls and Buddhist temples in Penang, Malaysia; the various old Buddhist temples near Shanghai (Putuoshan, Ayuwangsi and Tiandongsi near Ningbo), various temples in Nara and Kyoto. Among the questions that students can consider are: Who built the religious site and why? Who visits it today and why? What social and ethical values are reinforced by the religion?

METHODS OF EVALUATION

Two examinations based that will be graded electronically. The final exam will only cover the second half of the course.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Donald Lopez Jr.

TITLE: The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to its History & Teachings

PUBLISHER: HarperOne

ISBN #: 0060099275

DATE/EDITION: 2002

COST: 15.95

AUTHOR: Richard Hughes Seager

TITLE: Buddhism in America

PUBLISHER: Columbia University Press

ISBN #: 0231108699

DATE/EDITION: 2000

COST: 26.00