RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE

PRE 323 (3 credits)

T 8:00AM - 12:30PM

Instructor: Lee Tasey
Office Hours: Arranged
Email: lee.tasey@doane.edu

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.

I Timothy 6:12

By all evidence we are in the world to do nothing.

E.M. Cioran

Course Description: An examination of the intellectual and social history of religion in America. Beliefs and practices of major religions are also examined.

Course Reading:


Course Goals:

1) to learn the major beliefs and rituals of various world religions. Major concepts to be explored are the nature of the Absolute, the problem with human life and its solution, and notions of life after death

2) to study the historical development of selected religions in the United States with close attention paid to how each religion impacts, and is impacted by, American life

3) to develop a greater appreciation for the breadth and depth of the human spirit, both in the United States and abroad

4) to remove prejudices and stereotypes about religious groups in America

5) to develop a tolerance for doubt and uncertainty

Course Work and Grading: Grading is based on 1) attendance, participation and attentiveness (APA) 2) a religion journal and 3) a final paper.

Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA): Attendance is mandatory. The material we’ll cover in class may not be found in the readings. Participation is expected. Learning to express your ideas orally is a huge part of a college education; it also makes discussion more interesting. Attentiveness is also expected. Students may use laptop computers for class notes only. Those who use a laptop for the Internet, email or video games will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the rest of the semester. Finally, students who are disruptive in class (talking while the instructor is talking, texting, sleeping, flirting, etc.) will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.

Note: If you’ll miss more than two classes, do NOT enroll in this class. If you leave class early, you’ll be counted as absent for the entire class. If you disrupt class, you will be marked as absent for the entire class. More than two absences will result in the grade of “F.”
Religion Journal: Each week students will write a one-page journal entry/reflection paper. The goal of keeping a journal is to reflect upon what you’ve read in the textbooks, heard during the instructor’s lecture, and learned from the guest speaker’s presentation. You could jot down something you found confusing or compelling; you could also criticize the readings or talk about how the readings are challenging your current viewpoint about religion. The journal will help to develop your viewpoint on the nature of the absolute, the human condition, life after death, the nature of religious texts, other religions, the meaning of salvation, and related issues. You are responsible for five journal entries. Journal entries should be one typed double-spaced page and will be submitted at the end of the semester.

Final Paper: The final paper will be 4-6 pages and will be affixed to the end of your Religion Journal. The purpose of the final paper is to chart your growth during the class. How have your viewpoints changed on the topics we’ve discussed? Topics may include but are not limited to the following: the nature of the Absolute, the human condition, life after death, the nature of religious texts, other religions, the meaning of salvation, and so on. The final reflection paper is your chance to fine-tune your beliefs about these and other divine matters.

Course Evaluation:

1) Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA) 40%
2) The Religion Journal 20%
3) The Religion Journal/Final Paper 40%

Grading Scale

A+ = 98-100
A = 95-97
A- = 92-94
B+ = 89-91
B = 86-88
B- = 83-85
C+ = 80-82
C = 77-79
C- = 74-76
What to Expect:

Expect to be challenged. This class will challenge your most deeply held convictions. Get used to it. You won’t grow as a human being unless you wrestle with points of view—religious, political, and ethical—in opposition to your own.

Expect to read and write. This isn’t a “coasting” course. You must do the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. This will be a boring class if I’m the only one up here talking.

Expect to pay attention in class. Don’t talk while the instructor is talking or while a colleague is talking. Raise your hand if you have a question and wait until you’re called on to speak.

Expect to be in class until at least 9:00PM.

Expect to be on time for class. If you arrive to class late, don’t ask the person next to you what you’ve missed. Wait until the break or after class to ask this and related questions.

Expect the instructor to teach the class. Don’t think you can teach the class by dominating the class discussions. Many students enroll in the courses offered at Doane College. Expect to hear from all of those students.

Expect to keep all books, notebooks and pencils on your desk until class is over. Don’t put them away early. Don’t do anything that suggests class is over when it isn’t; doing so will trigger the “off” switch and students will stop paying attention.

Expect to listen to the instructor and the guest speakers. Without listening, we can’t access the lives, experiences and beliefs that are different from our own.

Expect to turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.
A Note on Plagiarism

The Doane College Academic Integrity Policy will be adhered to in this class. All projects and tests will represent your own work. Any use of others’ ideas and words without proper citation of sources is plagiarism and will result in penalties to be determined by the instructor and/or the dean of undergraduate studies.

A Note on Courtesy

We live in the twenty-first century, not the Stone Age. Everybody should act civilized. When the instructor is talking, nobody talks. When you’re talking, your colleagues don’t talk (nor does the instructor). Also, when a student asks a question, although the question may not be important to you, it’s important to that student. Be patient. Finally, always attack a person’s argument, not the person.

Tentative Class Schedule

Session I Introduction: Religion in American Life

Session II Neo-Paganism: Wicca
   You Tube: Wicca (National Geographic)
   You Tube: Fleetwood Mac “Rhiannon”
   Martin: 1-50

Session III Judaism
   Marty: “Introduction” + “Judaism”
   You Tube: Metallica “Creeping Death”
   Martin: 51-100
   Journal Entry on Wicca
Session IV Christianity
Marty: “Christianity”
You Tube: Lenny Kravitz “A New Door”
Manson: 1-8
Journal Entry on Judaism

Session V Islam
Marty: “Islam”
Manson: 9-16
Journal Entry on Christianity

Session VI Secular Humanism + Religion Symposium
You Tube: “Secular Worldview: Roots of Secular Humanism”
You Tube: Kansas “Dust in the Wind”
Martin: 101-150
Journal Entry on Islam

Session VII Hinduism & Buddhism + Religion Symposium
Marty: “Hinduism” and “Buddhism”
You Tube: Warren Zevon “Bad Karma”
Martin: 151-250
Journal Entry on Secular Humanism

Session VIII Unitarian Universalism + Separation of Church & State
You Tube: “Voices of a Liberal Faith: Unitarian Universalists”
You Tube: Van Halen “Right Now”
Religion Journal/Final Paper Due