RELIGION IN AMERICAN LIFE

PRE 323 (3 credits)

T 6:00PM – 10:30PM

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

Course Description: This course will examine 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: Students will write a one-page journal entry for each religion/topic covered in the class. The goal of keeping a journal is to reflect on what you’ve read in the course readings, heard during the instructor’s lecture, and learned from the guest speaker’s presentations. 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 ten journal entries (one entry for each religion/topic we cover). Each journal entry should be one typed double-spaced page.

Final Essay: The final essay will be 3-5 pages. The purpose of the final essay is to expound your view of God and other divine matters (or lack thereof). Our models for the class will be the essays in How Can I Find God?. 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 essay is your chance to fine-tune your beliefs.

Note: The religion journal and the final essay should be stapled together and submitted as a whole on the last day of class.

Course Evaluation:

1) Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA) 40%
2) The Religion Journal 20%
3) 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
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 turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.
A Note on Plagiarism

All written work must be in your own words. Borrowing an author’s words, sentences or thoughts without a citation is a crime. If I find you guilty of plagiarism, not only will you earn a free trip to the Dean’s Office, you’ll also fail the course. Play it safe—don’t steal.

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 Judaism & Christianity
   Osborne: “Judaism” + “Christianity”
   You Tube: Metallica “Creeping Death”
   Martin: Introduction + 1-100

Session III Church of Satan (LeVeyan Satanism)
   You Tube: “The Church of Satan on the History Channel”
   Manson: Entire

Session IV Paranormal America
   You Tube: Ray Parker, Jr. “Ghostbusters”
   Brittle: Entire
Session V Islam
   Osborne: “Islam”
   Martin: 101-191

Session VI Hinduism & Buddhism
   Osborne: “Hinduism and Buddhism”
   You Tube: Warren Zevon “Bad Karma”
   Bukowski: 1-143

Session VII The Rise of Secular America
   You Tube: “Secularism: A Short Film”
   You Tube: Michael Jackson “Man in the Mirror”
   Bukowski: 144-288

Session VIII Unitarian Universalism & Separation of Church & State
   You Tube: “Unitarian Universalism: Voices of a Liberal Faith”
   You Tube: Van Halen “Right Now”
   Religion Journal (10 entries) + Final Essay Due