

REL 101 – Introduction to World Religions

Dr. Christopher B. Zeichmann (he/him or they/them)

Email zeichman@torontomu.ca (only one “n”)

Drop-in hours Thursdays 3-4 p.m. or by appointment [Zoom]

Purpose

This course is a survey of the history, social and political context, beliefs, practices, and influence of the major religious traditions of the world. The course will introduce students to the religions of Indian origin (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism), the religions of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese origin (Confucianism, Taoism, and Asian Shamanism), the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and recent religious developments (atheism, new religious movements). This course presupposes no religious or anti-religious perspective.

Remote Learning

Many of you are taking your first remote learning course. I would strongly encourage you to build a schedule around this course, as it is very consistent in its structure. Even though this class is asynchronous, it will be very easy to fall behind if you are not proactive with your learning. I would encourage you to do course activities in the following order for each session:

- 1) Complete assigned readings
- 2) Watch lecture presentations
- 3) Watch videos posted on D2L for that session (e.g., documentaries, “if you only read...” project)
- 4) Complete initial post in discussion
- 5) Engage in follow-up discussion, if applicable

Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain the importance of the act of categorizing something as a “religion”
- Describe the major features of various religions across the globe
- Have an informed conversation about the role of religion in the Canadian legal system
- Characterize the distinctive histories, beliefs, and leaders in several Canadian religions
- Speak to the similarities and differences of worship services from two distinct religions

Student Assessment

- “When Indigenous Canadians Did Not Have ‘Religion’” Paper at a minimum of 1000 words (20%)
- Worship Comparison Paper at a minimum of 2000 words (30%)
- Discussion board postings (20%)
- Final Exam (30%)

Textbook

The textbook is free for all TMU students via e-reserve; you are welcome to purchase a physical copy instead, but you do not need to do so. All other readings can be found on D2L in the content folder for the session in which it has been assigned.

Christopher Partridge and Timothy Dowley, eds., *Introduction to World Religions* (3rd edition; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).

Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, I invite you to approach Academic Accommodation Support as soon as possible.

Course Outline

Part I: Introduction

Th Sep 10 Welcome

Session 1 Syllabus; Blum 2017; Newton 2017; Gadsby 2017; Smith 2017 (these readings are all **very** short!)
REQUIRED: Live Video Introduction 3-4 pm (recording to be posted on D2L)
Discussion post by 17 Sep (Th), 4 pm

Th Sep 17 What Do We Mean by “Religion”?

Session 2 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 2-4; Martin 2017a: 1-18
Discussion post by 24 Sep (Th), 4 pm

Part II: Religions of the World

Th Sep 24 Indigenous Canadian Religion

Session 3 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 158-162; Paper 2012; Posluns 2010: 38-40
Discussion post by 27 Sep (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 1 Oct (Th), 4 pm
Live Video Discussion regarding Indigenous Canadian Religion Assignment 3-4 pm (recording to be posted on D2L)

Th Oct 1 Hinduism

Session 4 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 177-216
Indigenous Canadian Religion Assignment due at 4 pm (feedback)
Discussion post by 4 Oct (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 8 Oct (Th), 4 pm

Th Oct 8 Buddhism

Session 5 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 217-254
Indigenous Canadian Religion Assignment due at 4 pm (no feedback)
Discussion post by 18 Oct (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 22 Oct (Th), 4 pm

Th Oct 15 Fall Reading Week: NO CLASS

Th Oct 22 Sikhism

Session 6 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 484-513
Discussion post by 25 Oct (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 29 Oct (Th), 4 pm

Th Oct 29 Religions of China, Korea, and Japan

Session 7 Partridge and Dowley 2018: 137-141, 289-327
Discussion post by 1 Nov (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 5 Nov (Th), 4 pm

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| Th Nov 5 | Judaism |
| Session 8 | Partridge and Dowley 2018: 329-384 Discussion post by 8 Nov (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 12 Nov (Th), 4 pm |
| Th Nov 12 | Christianity |
| Session 9 | Partridge and Dowley 2018: 385-434 Discussion post by 15 Nov (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 19 Nov (Th), 4 pm |
| Th Nov 19 | Islam |
| Session 10 | Partridge and Dowley 2018: 435-482 Discussion post by 22 Nov (Sun), 11:59 pm; response by 26 Nov (Th), 4 pm <i>Live Video Discussion regarding Worship Comparison Paper 3-4 pm (recording to be posted on D2L)</i> |
| Th Nov 26 | New Religious Movements |
| Session 11 | Partridge and Dowley 2018: 515-531 Worship Comparison Paper due at 4 pm (feedback) Discussion post by 2 Dec (Wed), 11:59 pm |
| Wed Dec 2 | Worship Comparison Paper due at 11:59 pm (no feedback) |
| Th Dec 3 | Secular Humanism and Atheism |
| Session 12 | Partridge and Dowley 2018: 532-537; Dickman 2017; Stausberg 2017; Martin 2017b <i>Live Video Discussion regarding Final Exam 3-4 pm (recording to be posted on D2L)</i> |
| TBA | Final Exam |

Assignments

- 1) Two due dates are given for each assignment in the class schedule. If you prefer to receive written feedback on your final submission from the instructor (in addition to the rubric), you must submit by the first due date. If you do not care to receive feedback from the instructor, you may submit by the second due date *without penalty*, but your feedback will be limited to the rubric. Late penalties begin accruing after the second due date. However, any student can schedule a meeting with the instructor if they wish to get feedback on a paper via video-chat, regardless of when the assignment was submitted.
- 2) Citation guidelines for primary (i.e., insider) and secondary (i.e., scholarly) sources are posted on D2L in the “General Course Files” folder.
- 3) Egregious “fluff” will not contribute toward word count (e.g., needlessly long quotations).

Assignment One: When Indigenous Canadians Did Not Have ‘Religion’

What counts/counted as “religion” in Canada and why does that matter? A significant part of the logic that justified the Canadian government’s cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples was their lack of “religion” – most settlers believed “religion” was a necessary feature of civilized cultures and insofar as Indigenous people did not, it was necessary to bring it to them via residential schools, for instance. Limiting yourself to the readings, lectures, and documentaries that have been assigned, write a paper at a *minimum* of 1000 words that addresses the following: 1) Read

Posluns 2007: 38-39, discussing British Columbia's *Evidence Act* (sections 12-14), which was in effect until 1977. How did this law understand what "religion" is? That is, what features did it imagine "religion" to have, features that were ostensibly not found among Indigenous Canadians? What are the assumptions and claims it makes about the nature of "religion"? It would be good to refamiliarize yourself with the Martin 2017: 1-18 for this portion. 2) What are the implications of the *Evidence Act's* definition of religion? That is, why does it matter that it defines religion this way and how does this definition affect the lives of Indigenous Canadians? 3) Drawing upon the Paper 2012 reading, to what extent does the *Evidence Act* accurately represent or misrepresent Indigenous Canadian "religion"? Note that your paper should take the form of an argument with a clear thesis statement. Use the Chicago citation system.

Assignment Two: Worship Service Comparison Paper

How do different religions worship? Attend or watch videos of TWO worship services from groups based in the province of Ontario (each at least 35 minutes long) – one each from two different traditions, neither of which may be your own religious/secular tradition. Choose a service from a religion from List A and one service from a religion from List B.

List A: Indigenous Canadian Religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sinkyo, or Shinto.

List B: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Unitarian Universalist, Baha'i, or Secular Humanism.

If you are unsure of what category a worship service falls into or if it eligible, email Dr. Zeichmann. Toronto alone has a multitude of different worship sites that stream services on a weekly basis; be sure to check that the service occurs in a language you understand before choosing it. If you attend in person, you **MUST** be in contact with the worship site first to see if there are any expectations they have from outsiders (e.g., how to dress, rituals you should not participate in). Note that this paper does not require a thesis statement or an argument. For a paper to get a grade in the "A" range, it must be well written and discuss all of the following. Your paper should include proper citation and a works cited page (in Chicago citation system) that does NOT include Wikipedia or any other encyclopedic or non-scholarly web site. In a *minimum* of 2000 words address the following:

1. Fundamental beliefs (important if you are visiting a sectarian group and note differences in belief and practice from its parent group) and sources of authority or basis for the religion or sect (inspired scriptures, teachers, direct revelations, etc.). Specify both the religion and the sect or branch you have visited (e.g., Hinduism: Shiva, Vishnu, Hare Krishna; Judaism: Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative, Reconstructionist; Buddhism: Tibetan, Mahayana, Theravada; Islam: Nation of Islam, Sunni, Shia; Christian: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, United Church of Canada, Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints).
2. Describe art, symbols, images, sacred objects of the religion – and most importantly, their meaning and importance! Explain how they were used in the building/service. Remember, all kinds of things may have importance – such as the direction the building is facing, the colors used, any symbols.

3. Distinctive dress, articles of clothing, of members and/or clergy of the religion you witnessed during visit. Inquire as to whether normally there is a distinctive dress, etc. in other locations. Include how much adaptation or concessions to “Canadian” ways of worshipping you witnessed during your visit (for this you may also have to tap a knowledgeable person for information). How also has COVID-19 affected things – what parts of the service needed to change and what needed to remain the same?
4. Forms of ritual, worship/liturgy, special ceremonies, particular/distinctive practices that you saw practice during your visit. Be sure you can describe the flow of the service and what rituals were performed.
5. Describe how what you saw and heard impacted you. Did visit enhance your appreciation for that particular religious faith and/or for religion in general? Did you feel you were “worshipping”? Did anything strike you in a negative way? What was the most positive result of your visit?
6. How did the service differ from or conform to your expectations, especially based on the readings you had done for class and any other preconceived notions?
7. Finally, be sure this is a COMPARATIVE paper! Discuss the similarities and differences (do not say there aren’t any) between the services you attended. You may also draw in comparisons with your own religious/secular background.

Participation

Participation is assessed through the discussion board on D2L. Each session will include a short reading, a prompt, and discussion board for that particular session. You will be required to post your initial post by the following class and your response(s) by the session following that one. More details can be found on D2L. Interactions *must* follow the guidelines posted for courteous online participation in the General Course Files folder of Content. Note that the discussion mark is not merely based on the length of posts, but on the quality of posts and the depth of discussion.

Participation Rubric

20/20 = timely, insightful, engaged discussion of small group material, evinces ability to draw connection to other materials discussed in other modules of the course, strong evidence that student has done all required reading

10/20 = occasionally late and shallow interaction with the readings and peers, overlooks obvious points of reference from other class materials

0/20 = consistent absence from discussion or poor treatment of peers

Course Bibliography

Blum, Jason N. 2017. “What Is the Difference Between Religious Studies and Theology?” in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 241-244.

Dickman, Nathan Eric. 2017. “Why Do So Many People Believe That Only One Religion Can Be Right?” in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 81-84.

- Gadsby, Blair Alan. 2017. "Does the Academic Study of Religion Deny the Existence of God?" in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 265-268.
- Martin, Craig. 2017a. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 2017).
- Martin, Craig. 2017b. "Is Atheism, or Secularism, Just Another Religion?" in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 61-63.
- Newton, Richard. 2017. "Is It Possible to Study Religion Academically and Still Be Religious?" in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 261-264.
- Paper, Jordan. 2012. "Aboriginals," in *The Religions in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1-32.
- Partridge, Christopher and Timothy Dowley (eds.). 2018. *Introduction to World Religions* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).
- Posluns, Michael W. 2010. *Speaking with Authority: The Emergence of the Vocabulary of First Nations' Self-Government* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- Smith, Brent A. 2017. "Can't I Just Learn about Religion in My Church, Mosque, or Temple?" in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 286-289.
- Stausberg, Michael. 2017. "Can I Be Spiritual But Not Religious?" in *Religion in Five Minutes* (eds. Aaron W Hughes and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2017), 57-60.

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D2L BRIGHTSPACE

This course will use Desire to Learn (D2L) Brightspace for posting readings, announcements, weekly discussion questions, assignment and exam information, and grades. Students are expected to check the course site and email on a regular basis.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

It is important that assignments be handed in on time, but I will accept late assignments. **Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 5% for the first day, and 2% thereafter** (including weekends). Essays submitted after the final exam will not be accepted.

USE OF TURNITIN.COM

Students agree that by taking this course their essays will be subject to submission to Turnitin.com for textual similarity review and the detection of plagiarism.