

RELIGION 100: INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY

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In 2014, Dr. Rahuldeep Singh Gill participated in a Teaching Interfaith Understanding faculty development seminar, run in partnership between the Council of Independent Colleges and Interfaith Youth Core, and generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. For information on future seminars, and to access more resources created by seminar alumni, visit www.ifyc.org/content/ifyc-cic-resources.

Course Description

This study of Christianity explores the formation and structures of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and the development of Christianity from the first century to the present. This course will explore some of the theological and ethical traditions of Christian thought and practice, with special attention to the relationships and differences among Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The course will provide students with a basic framework for the academic study of religion, and prepare you for further study in this area. In this particular section of the course, we will emphasize questions of interfaith cooperation. That is, how can members from differing faith commitments work together towards constructive ends?

¹ In consultation with the author, this syllabus has been edited for length, removing details particular to the author's context such as office hours and location, absence policies, honor codes, and other instructor-specific (or institution-specific) details.

Course Outcomes

Through completion of readings, quizzes, writing assignments, and discussions you will learn the basics of Christian traditions, as well as learn a little bit about Jewish and Muslim scriptures. I hope you will also learn a lot about yourself. As part of your participation in this course, you will be asked to demonstrate the following four University learning outcomes:

- ▶ Growth in **interpersonal skills** by respectfully and consistently engaging with your peers during class meetings.
- ▶ Development of **creative and critical thinking** by completing course work that evaluates your abilities to make judgments about primary and secondary sources. This means you will:
 - Identify, interpret, assess, and evaluate relevant information.
 - Generate relevant and probing questions and multiple solutions.
 - Think open-mindedly and consider issues from multiple perspectives.
- ▶ Develop your awareness of your **identity and values** by:
 - Beginning to articulate a purpose and direction in life.
 - Developing a sense of responsibility to self, community, and the world.
- ▶ Gain some basic **cross-cultural competency** from having to:
 - Identify influences of Middle-Eastern cultures (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) on European and North American Culture.
 - Describe how different cultures have contributed to the contemporary world.
 - Identify and explain the social importance of religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation.

In addition to the University Learning Outcomes, in the religion department we seek to develop your **critical reading** skills. In this class you will practice reading primary sources (scripture and other texts), secondary sources (historical backgrounders and encyclopedia articles), and a memoir (*Acts of Faith*). I think reading well requires:

- ▶ Lots of practice
- ▶ Patience
- ▶ Repetition
- ▶ Commitment to work through frustrations
- ▶ Active participation with the content being read

Key to your evaluation in this course will be how seriously you take your academic pursuits. I suggest that you take class participation very seriously, engage with me in and outside of class, and find peers with whom to discuss class concepts. **In this course, we are each responsible for our own learning.**

Student Evaluation

10%: 2 page writing project

- ▶ 1 page: responding to the case studies so far.
- ▶ 1 page: what you didn't know and what you're most curious about going forward.

15%: Grade from quizzes and in-class writing assignments (in Green books)

- ▶ Once a week, or so, you'll be given a reading quiz question at the beginning of class, or a chance to write for 5-10 minutes on a specific prompt later in the class. Each Green book opportunity will be worth a point. No makeups allowed.

20%: Assignments on Vocation, Identity, and Values (based on Acts of Faith)

- ▶ Rough draft of Moments in Spiritual Autobiography (five pages).
- ▶ Final draft of A Moment in Spiritual Autobiography (two or three pages, **to be shared**).

30%: Final Writing Project

25%: Demonstration of scholarly collegiality (behavioral examples include engagement in discussions, serious academic pursuit, participation, respectfulness of others).

Course Materials

- ▶ Eboo Patel's *Acts of Faith* (Beacon Press)
- ▶ Readings posted on course website

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

Spiritual Autobiography Moments: First Draft (5 points maximum)

Write a reflective paper of your own spiritual or moral / ethical development. Please include examples, like Patel did, of specific experiences, people, and texts that influenced you. What have you learned about their own faith or non-faith (moral / ethical) background from people of religious and secular traditions?

For example, we may want to know:

- ▶ How has a Jewish student, been influenced by a Christian friend or a Hindu text?
- ▶ What values do they hold important as Jew and why are those values important to them?
- ▶ Has their own faith ever motivated them to act on a social issue?

Optional

Please let me know if your faith journey will be available for sharing, in a safe space, with others in our classroom. For those who would like to share these stories with one another, we will set up a safe space in which to do so. The classroom members will set up own guidelines as a group, like active listening, respectful dialogue, and not sharing personal information outside of class.

Assessment

The first draft will be assessed simply on page numbers. You will earn 1 point per double-spaced page (5 points maximum). Each page that earns a point will show your willingness to thoughtfully discuss personal religious and spiritual experiences while also contextualizing them with pertinent examples of how other people and experiences have influenced their faith or non-faith.

Spiritual Autobiography Moment: Second Draft (15 points maximum)

The second draft is a cleaned up version of one of the selected stories from your first draft.

Assessment

The second draft will be assessed on quality. It should be a creative and improved version of one of the story selections from the first draft. Some criteria:

- ▶ Coherent narrative?
- ▶ Demonstrates that the author is grappling with a challenge?
- ▶ Writes with attention to clarity, style, and voice?
- ▶ Sophistication?
- ▶ Does the piece use all the words effectively and efficiently? Concise?

COURSE CALENDAR

As the course's instructor, my principal concern is the collective learning of the entire classroom community, so I may choose to modify our schedule if it facilitates a better learning experience. We may also discover that we need to spend more time on certain topics and less on others, so I will consider changing the schedule if it best suits our collective learning experience.

Week 1

Wednesday: Introduction to the Course

Friday: Case Study – Coercion or Conversion

- ▶ Available online at: bit.ly/IFcasestudies
- ▶ How to Use Case Studies in the Classroom

Week 2

Monday: Case Study – Coercion or Conversion

- ▶ Discussion

Wednesday: Introduction to Christianity

- ▶ Jesus: The God-Man (Woodhead)
- ▶ *Mark 1, Luke 1, Matthew 1, John 1*

Friday: Christianity

- ▶ Signs and Symbols of Christianity (Woodhead)
- ▶ *1 Corinthians 1 and 11*

Week 3

Monday: The Jewish Roots of Christianity

- ▶ The Historical and Intellectual Context of Early Christianity (Aldair)
- ▶ Selection from *Genesis 1-2 and 11-12*

Wednesday: The Jewish Roots of Christianity

- ▶ Film: *From Jesus to Christ*, first 35 minutes of Part One

Friday: Rabbinic Judaism

- ▶ Encountering Judaism: The Way of God's Chosen People (Van Woorst)
- ▶ *Exodus 1-2*

Week 4

Monday: Islam: Another Middle Eastern Tradition?

- ▶ *Encountering Islam: The Straight Path of the One God* (Van Woorst)

Wednesday: Case Study – *Reading the Qur'an at UNC*

- ▶ Available online at: bit.ly/IFcasestudies

Friday: Reading the Qur'an

- ▶ Selection from Michael Sells' translation
- ▶ In-class reading from Medinan Suras

Week 5

Monday: No Class

Wednesday: European Christianity: as opposed to what?

- ▶ A film on global Christianity, TBA

Friday: Martin Luther's world

- ▶ *Luther's life* (Methuen)

Week 6

Monday: Martin Luther's writings

- ▶ Selections from Luther: Protesting indulgences, The Peasant's revolt, Reforms to the Mass

Wednesday: Martin Luther's writings

- ▶ Luther on *Christian Freedom*

Friday: Martin Luther and other faiths

- ▶ *Luther's Views of the Jews and Turks* (Miller)

Week 7

Monday: Luther and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Why Interfaith Understanding is Integral to the Lutheran Tradition* (Mahn)
- ▶ *Luther as a Resource for Christian Dialogue with Other World Religions* (Rajashekar)

Wednesday: A Catholic Vision of a Common Humanity

- ▶ *Nostra Aetate*
- ▶ Rough draft of Moments in Spiritual Autobiography (five pages), due

Friday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 1: The Crossroads of the Identity Crisis

Week 8

Monday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 2: Growing Up American, Growing Up Other
- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 3: Identity Politics

Wednesday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 4: Real World Activism

Friday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 5: An American in India

Week 9

Monday: No Class

Wednesday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 6: The Story of Islam, the Story of Pluralism
- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 7: The Youth Programs of Religious Totalitarians

Friday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Chapter 8: Building the Interfaith Youth Core

Week 10

Monday: Spring Break, no class

Wednesday: What is Lutheranism Today? And Christian Diversity

- ▶ www.elca.org
- ▶ Final draft of A Moment in Spiritual Autobiography (two or three pages, to be shared), due
- ▶ Class event: Dr. Willis Jenkins on campus to speak on “Cultivating the Sky: How the Ethics of Food Matters to the Politics of Climate Change” at 7pm

Friday: Lutheran Social Statements

- ▶ ELCA Social Statement: “Caring for Creation”

Week 11

Monday: Why are we here?

- ▶ Lutheran Social Statement on Education (focus on Higher Education)

Wednesday: Lutheranism and Vocation

- ▶ Vocational Leadership

Friday: What is Your Vocation?

- ▶ Class discussion

Week 12

Monday: Religion and Intersectionality

- ▶ Readings TBD

Wednesday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ Harvard Case Study: Cordoba House
- ▶ Available online at: <http://pluralism.org/casestudy/selected-case-studies/>

Friday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ Harvard Case Study: Minneapolis Taxi Drivers
- ▶ Available online at: <http://pluralism.org/casestudy/selected-case-studies/>

Week 12

Monday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ Harvard Case Study: A Mosque in Palos Heights
- ▶ Available online at: <http://pluralism.org/casestudy/selected-case-studies/>

Wednesday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ Harvard Case Study: “We Support Israel” at Interfaith event at Temple Israel
- ▶ Available online at: <http://pluralism.org/casestudy/selected-case-studies/>

Friday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ IFYC Case Study: Muslims and Atheists Battle on Campus
- ▶ Available online at: bit.ly/IFcasestudies

Week 14

Monday: Case Studies in Interfaith Relations

- ▶ IFYC Case Study: Westboro Baptist Church, tolerant of intolerance? Liberal v. conservative
- ▶ Available online at: bit.ly/IFcasestudies

Wednesday: What is Pluralism?

- ▶ Diana Eck, *A New Religious America* (2001), pp. 26-79

Friday: Atheism at the Interfaith Table

- ▶ Selections from *Faithiest* (Stedman)

Week 15

Monday: Why Interfaith Cooperation?

- ▶ “The Civic Relevance of Interfaith Cooperation for Higher Education” (Patel and Meyer)

Wednesday: Demographic Shifts in America

- ▶ Data from Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.org

Friday: Eboo Patel and Interfaith Cooperation

- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Conclusion: Saving Each Other, Saving Ourselves
- ▶ *Acts of Faith*, Postscript

Week 16

Final Paper due by Friday at noon