

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD II: THE NEWER TRADITIONS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

There are two central aspects or emphases of this course, one of which you can probably guess from the course title, the other of which is probably less obvious. Of the two, the less obvious one is by far the more important.

The More Obvious Dimension of this Course

As the course title suggests, we will be learning about the world's newer religious traditions...or at least a few of them. While many of you no doubt already have varying degrees of familiarity with one (or some) of the older religious traditions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism, our focus in this course will be on the much less well-known religious traditions of more recent vintage – groups whose founding figures, sacred rituals, and/or revered texts emerged in recent decades and centuries. Hundreds of groups potentially fall into this latter category – some obscure (e.g., Raelians; Nuwaubians), some better known (e.g, Jehovah's Witnesses; Scientologists), some very small (e.g., The Family, International; Branch Davidians), some quite large (e.g., Mormons; Seventh-Day Adventists).

For the purposes of this course, a religious tradition qualifies as a “newer religion of the world” if it emerged in the nineteenth century or later, and now has a sizable global following. Of the numerous newer religions we could study this semester, we will focus mainly on Mormonism, the Baha'i Faith, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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.

The Less Obvious Dimension of this Course

This one will take longer to explain. I'll unpack it in several steps.

1. **Increasing Diversity of All Sorts.** All relevant demographic data predict that the world into which you will go after you leave Wofford will be marked by ever-increasing diversity: racial and ethnic diversity; diversity of national origins; linguistic diversity; diversity of expressions of sexuality and sexual orientation; and, of special concern to this class, religious diversity. Whether you stay in South Carolina, move to a different state or region of the U.S., or take a job in a foreign country, you will find yourself increasingly surrounded by people who come from very different cultural, educational, and geographic contexts from your own, who might not share your political inclinations, your social values, or your most cherished commitments and beliefs. One of the purposes of Wofford's liberal arts education is to help you attain the skills of critical thinking and empathetic imagination that will help you to navigate your way through this ever-increasingly diverse and complicated world, and to flourish while doing so.
2. **Religious Diversity.** Christianity has been the predominant religious tradition in America throughout this nation's history. Over the last half century, however, America's religious landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation, even though the number of self-identified Christians remains quite high. This religious transformation includes the following: a sharp increase in the number of adherents of some of the other older religions of the world (i.e., Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and so forth); a drastic increase of practitioners of alternative spiritualities and newer religions; a sharp rise of the self-identified "non-religious"; a precipitous decline in the number of adherents of some of the traditional American Christian groups (Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans and so forth); and an across-the-board reinterpretation of what it means to be a person of faith, regardless of faith tradition (or non-tradition). Because these trends will continue over the next several decades, which will cause religious diversity to grow ever more complex, it will be imperative for all of us to develop the capacity to form meaningful relationships and to have productive encounters with those whose fundamental values and personal commitments differ, sometimes radically, from our own.
3. **Newer Religious Traditions and Older Religious Traditions.** In this class, we will begin to develop the tools to navigate this world of religious diversity by being exposed to a handful of newer religious traditions with which most of us are likely unfamiliar. The decision to limit ourselves to select newer religions is, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary (why not consider other kinds of religious diversity, like the increased presence of older religions in America?). These younger traditions, however, do offer at least one potential strategic advantage for us in that they tend not to enjoy the same level of respect in mainstream society as do the older, better-known religious traditions. Christians, Jews, and Buddhists, for example, are generally thought to belong to legitimate religious traditions, and most people will at least attempt to respect the beliefs and religiously motivated actions of the practitioners of these older faiths. By contrast, it seems to be socially acceptable to denigrate, mock, or generally express deep skepticism toward the beliefs and religiously motivated actions of, for example, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons.
4. **Why is the general attitude of skepticism or derision of strategic advantage to us in this course?** Because I'm assuming that if we learn the skills to have productive and meaningful encounters with practitioners of faith traditions that are frequently denigrated within mainstream society, then

we will be all the more able to apply those same skills to any person of faith in our increasingly religiously diverse world. Put a little differently, I think it's probably a bit harder for many of us to interact meaningfully with people of faith that we might otherwise be inclined to dismiss, than it is to interact with people of faith we are inclined to respect. If we can accomplish the former, we can no doubt accomplish the latter.

5. Religions vs. People of Faith. You may have noticed that I began this course description discussing religious traditions in the abstract (Christianity, Islam, the Baha'i Faith, Mormonism, and so forth), but, as the discussion has moved along, have moved steadily toward discussing the actual people who practice these different faith traditions. This distinction between religious traditions as abstract concepts versus the actual people who are religious is a crucial distinction; the two categories are not equivalent. Consider, for example, the distinction between Mormonism and a Mormon. Our textbook on Mormonism provides a very nice presentation of that religious tradition as a conceptual system; the author, Richard Bushman, selects from a myriad of Mormon beliefs, practices, ethical commitments, and sacred stories, the ones that he judges to be the most fundamental. When you read his discussion of these fundamental elements later this semester, you will no doubt form in your mind a concept of what Mormonism is as an abstract system. However, when you meet an actual Mormon later this semester, you will find that this person will describe his or her faith in terms that sometimes correspond to Bushman's conceptual presentation of Mormonism, and sometimes do not. If you were to engage this actual Mormon in substantive conversation, you would no doubt find that he or she is completely ignorant of some of the things that Bushman tells us about Mormonism, or that he or she disagrees with one or some of the things that Bushman presents as crucial.
6. You should not be surprised when you discover discrepancies between presentations of religious traditions as concepts (like in the Mormonism textbook) and the kinds of faith that practitioners of those traditions actually live out. Conceptual presentations of religious systems, whether delivered by scholars like Bushman, or in Wikipedia articles, or by the religious traditions' own authorized agents (priests, theologians, designated committees, official websites, and so forth) are rarely, if ever, entirely congruent with the religion practiced by people of faith who self-identify with those religious traditions.
7. By pointing out the discrepancy between religion and people of faith, I am not suggesting that the latter are a bunch of hypocrites who are ignorant of the central tenets of their own faith traditions. In fact, I am making almost the reverse case: I think that all of our attempts to reduce religion to conceptual systems are woefully insufficient to account for the complexity and nuance of the actual people of faith within those traditions. People are complicated creatures who often live complicated lives in complicated societies. We should not be surprised that their faiths are similarly complicated.
8. This distinction between religions and people of faith connects to the earlier discussion of increasing religious diversity, for as you navigate your way through our increasingly complex world, you will form relationships not with religions-as-concepts, but with actual people in all their complexity who practice increasingly diverse forms of faith. Ten years from now, for example, your future coworker (or neighbor or business partner or client or child's teacher or whatever) will not be Islam (or the Baha'i Faith or Judaism or the Jehovah's Witnesses); she will be an actual Muslim (or a Baha'i or Jew or Witness) who practices her faith in ways that sometimes align -- but

sometimes do not -- with the various conceptual presentations of his or her faith in textbooks, Wikipedia articles, theological treatises, “authorized” expositions, and so forth. So, while in learning to successfully navigate a world of increasing religious diversity, it might be somewhat important to learn about religious traditions in the abstract (hence, “The More Obvious Dimension of this Course” section, above), it will be absolutely crucial that we learn what it means to have meaningful encounters with actual people of faith.

9. We are finally now in a position to state the less obvious dimension of this course, which as I said above, is the course’s more important aspect.
10. The Less Obvious Dimension of this Course: In order to prepare ourselves to navigate our way successfully through an ever-increasingly religiously diverse world, this semester we will learn some of the skills of critical thinking and empathetic imagination necessary to have meaningful encounters and relationships with people whose faith commitments, core values, and social priorities are different from our own.

To attain this goal, we will undertake the following this semester. We will:

- ▶ Critically examine the category of religion, focusing on its function as a locus of identity formation and meaning construction in the lives of individuals within society;
- ▶ Learn the intercultural skill of frame-shifting and apply that skill during specific encounters with practitioners of faith traditions that are new to us;
- ▶ Engage in careful and serious self-examination of our own identities as people of faith and non-faith, comparing and contrasting our own formative commitments, values, and habits with those of the faith practitioners with whom we interact during the course;
- ▶ Appraise and critique the quality of our own interactions with religious “others” off campus, with specific emphasis on the intercultural concepts learned during the course; and
- ▶ Learn some of the basic histories, theologies, practices, and/or sacred texts of several newer religious traditions (i.e., the More Obvious Dimension of this Course), emphasizing the advantages and limitations of this conceptual understanding of religion as preparation for actual encounters with people of faith.

COURSE SECTIONS

This course is divided up into three parts, the first two of which revolve around the classroom (discussion, readings, writing assignments); the third of which you will complete on your own time (either individually or in groups). The three parts of the course work together to help us achieve our main course goal.

Part One: How Should We Think about Religion, Religious Diversity, and People of Faith (and Non-Faith)?

There are two units in Part One. The first is an introductory unit that will expand on the discussion in the Course Description of the shifting religious landscape in American society.

The longer, second unit of Part One is easily the most crucial unit in the entire course. During this unit, we will examine closely what we mean by the word “religion,” focusing on how religion functions in the lives of individuals in society. We will read Frederick Ruff’s *Bewildered Travel*, a book that will push us to

think about religion in an expansive way with challenging concepts and ideas that we will return to over and over throughout the semester.

How Part One Fits the Main Course Goal: Ruf provides us with a number of extremely useful concepts and ideas about religion that will help us think about ourselves as religious or non-religious people, and the ways in which we relate to religious and non-religious others. As such, Ruf lays the conceptual framework for the rest of the course.

Part Two: Newer Religious Traditions and Individual People of Faith

The three units of Part Two will be each devoted to a distinct newer religious tradition. We will spend decreasing amounts of time on each of these traditions: Mormonism; the Baha'i Faith; and the Jehovah's Witnesses. During each of these units, we will read scholarly presentations of each tradition and we will hear from individual members of each faith. Ruf's ideas about religion will guide our understanding throughout each unit.

How Part Two Fits the Main Course Goal: Using the concepts and ideas about religion we learned from Ruf, we will, *as a class*, encounter three religious traditions and interact with individuals within those faiths. Our work as a class will provide a model for the kind of work each individual will be required to do on his/her own in Part Three of the course.

During the Parts One and Two of the course, you will be required to do a great deal of writing, especially of the more informal, exploratory, and self-reflective variety. Almost every class, in fact, will have a very short required writing assignment (sometimes composed in-class; sometimes composed prior to class) that will require you to explore that day's readings as preparation for class discussion. These writing assignments will be graded on a modified pass-fail basis.

Part Three: Encountering Religious Diversity

The third part of the course takes place outside of the classroom; it involves a robust experiential component, wherein you will attend religious services/meetings and interact with members of different faith traditions either on your own or in small groups. This component of the course will require a high degree of self-motivation, planning, coordination of schedules, and, if you desire, group work.

How Part Three Fits the Main Course Goal: Having encountered three newer religious traditions within the relative "safety" of the classroom, Part Three will require you to strike out on your own (or within small groups) to put what you've learned into practice.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

- ▶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008).
- ▶ Frederick J. Ruf, *Bewildered Travel: The Sacred Quest for Confusion* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007).
- ▶ Many other readings will be uploaded to Moodle (our course website).

EMPHASIZED COURSEWORK

In this class, certain academic activities are prioritized; if you diligently work at these activities, I am confident you will do quite well in this course. If you feel you are unable or unwilling to work diligently at any one of these activities, it will be impossible to do well in this class. In some cases, it may even be difficult to receive a passing grade.

The emphasized academic activities are as follows:

- ▶ **Patient, slow, careful reading.** While the readings for any given class will generally be rather short, you will be required to read what is assigned extremely carefully – not just skimming through what’s assigned, or doing semi-distracted reading while texting or watching TV, but reading with your full concentration, focusing on the author’s key arguments, wrestling with confusing ideas, struggling with difficult concepts, and noting places in need of further discussion and clarification. Such reading is especially required in Part One of the course – Ruf’s book, in particular – where the readings will take us through the fundamental concepts and ideas that will form the bedrock of the rest of the course.
- ▶ **Writing.** As noted earlier, there will be short, informal, exploratory, and self-reflective writing assignments to be completed for almost every class session. These shorter assignments will require your thoughtful and careful consideration of the required readings. In addition, there will be three larger writing assignments that will be more formal: the take-home midterm essay/exam, the religious cultures assignment, and the final project.
- ▶ **In-Class Discussion.** We will spend most of our class time this semester discussing the readings and the ideas we developed in our writings. Discussions will occur in both small group and whole-class settings. Every class member is expected to contribute to class discussion.
- ▶ **Out-of-Class Participation.** A non-negotiable requirement of this course is attendance of several worship services/meetings in different religious traditions outside of regular classroom hours. In almost every case, these meetings take place off campus during weekday evenings or during the mornings or afternoons on weekends. You may attend these services by yourself or in small groups.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Attendance and Participation

This grade is made up of two parts:

- ▶ *Class participation:* I expect that you will come to class each day prepared to participate in class discussion. In assigning this grade, I will consider both the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion, both in small groups and classroom-wide contexts. (Note: A necessary precondition to receiving a good grade in this category is the completion, in a thoughtful and careful manner, of the assigned readings and short writings.)
- ▶ *Class Attendance:* An accumulation of absences from class will affect your grade adversely. You are permitted one unexcused absences to use at your discretion (job interviews, doctor’s appointments, studying, long weekends, sleeping in, etc.). You will not be penalized for excused absences (officially sponsored Wofford events, illness). Each unexcused absence beyond one will result in a deduction of a single point (out of a total of 10) from your attendance and participation grade.

- ▶ Attendance and participation comprise 12.5% of your final grade.

Short Writing Assignments

Throughout the semester, I will ask you to complete many short, informal, reflective writing assignments in connection with the assigned class readings. These writings fall into three categories.

- ▶ In-Class Writings (aka “Writing A”): Many classes will begin with me asking you to write for several minutes about a specific topic related to that day’s readings. If the course schedule lists an assigned reading for a given class *with no accompanying writing assignment*, it is a safe bet that there will be a “Writing A” that day.
- ▶ Prior-to-Class Writings (aka “Writing B”): Some classes will require you to complete your writing assignment and to post it to Moodle prior to the start of class. A “Writing B” will be worth twice as much as “Writing A.” The course schedule will indicate if a “Writing B” is due on a given day.
- ▶ Special Prior-to-Class Writings (aka “Writing C”): Every once in a while I *might* assign prior-to-class writing assignments that are little more involved than a typical “Writing B”; as such, “Writing C’s” will be slightly longer and be worth triple the points of a “Writing A” on your Writing Assignments grade.
- ▶ These writing assignments are worth 20% of your overall grade.

Quizzes

There will be a total of four Quizzes during the semester, one quiz for each of the three newer traditions we will study, and one quiz on the content of the syllabus.

- ▶ The syllabus quiz will have a fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice format.
- ▶ The other quizzes will be on specific terms and names associated with each religious tradition; you will be asked to supply a definition or to provide the proper term/name that corresponds with a supplied definition. I will give you, well in advance, a list of terms/names to know for each of these quizzes.
- ▶ Quizzes will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Midterm Essay-Exam

The midterm will be a take home essay-exam and will focus on Ruf’s *Bewildered Travel*.

- ▶ You will have 24-48 hours to complete the exam (we will determine the exact amount of time as a class) and to post it to Moodle.
- ▶ If you turn in your exam late, your grade will be reduced a half-letter per hour late (e.g., a two-hour late B+ quality exam will receive a B-).
- ▶ You must work on this exam on your own; you may not consult with anyone else, whether this person is in the class or not.
- ▶ The Midterm will be worth 22.5% of your final grade.

Religious Cultures Assignment

You are required to attend services/meetings in two of the three religious traditions we will examine in class this semester (Mormonism, The Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses). **See Appendix I for a full description of the religious cultures assignment.** Here is some basic information:

- ▶ These site visits will culminate in a 4-5 page (double-spaced) analysis of your experience, as guided by the assignment's instructions.
- ▶ Apart from your attendance of the meetings/services, no additional research is required to complete this assignment.
- ▶ The Religious Cultures Assignment is worth 12.5% of the final grade.

Final Project

In lieu of a final exam, you will work on a final project either individually or in groups (it's up to you). The project will require you to select a religious tradition that is unfamiliar to you, learn about this tradition, attend at least two services or meetings, talk to members of this tradition at or after the services/meetings, and then write a paper wherein you analyze your entire experience using the concepts and ideas from Ruf's *Bewildered Travel*. **See Appendix II for a full description of the final project.** Here is some basic information:

- ▶ You may select *any* religious tradition that is unfamiliar to you, not just a newer religious tradition.
- ▶ Throughout the semester, I have designated certain class sessions as "Class Business Days" during which we will discuss and work on various aspects of the Final Project.
- ▶ You may work in groups for all parts of this assignment except the actual writing of the final paper.
- ▶ The final project will be worth 22.5% of your final grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part One: How Should We Think about Religion, Religious Diversity, and People of Faith (and Non-Faith)?

UNIT 1: Increasing religious diversity

Week 1

Monday: First Day of Class Business

Wednesday:

- ▶ Course Introduction: What We're *Really* Focusing on This Semester
- ▶ Reading: Syllabus
- ▶ Quiz (on the syllabus)

Friday:

- ▶ Transformation of the American Religious Landscape: Increasing Diversity of Religious Traditions
- ▶ Reading: Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, 1-25

Week 2

Monday:

- ▶ Transformation of the American Religious Landscape: Decline of Traditional Modes of Religion in America
- ▶ Reading: Charles H. Lippy and Eric Tranby, "Spirituality's Challenge to Religion," in *Religion in Contemporary America*, 209-222

Wednesday:

- ▶ The Rise of the "Spiritual But Not Religious"
- ▶ Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*, ix-xxii; 20-34

UNIT 2: What Is Religion? What Does It Do? Who, Exactly, Is Religious?

Friday:

- ▶ What Religion Does: Orientations and Surfaces
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 1-22

Week 3

Monday:

- ▶ Ruptures and Religion
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 22-33

Wednesday:

- ▶ Arnoldian Travel and Self-Improvement
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 34-54

Friday:

- ▶ Religious Tourist vs. Religious Traveler
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 55-80

Week 4

Monday:

- ▶ Religious "Pathology"
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 81-106

Wednesday:

- ▶ Religious Strangers
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 107-142

Friday:

- ▶ Religious Guides
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 143-159

Week 5

Monday:

- ▶ Sacred Space
- ▶ Reading: Ruf, 160-191

Wednesday:

- ▶ No Class! Mid-Term Take-Home Exam

Friday:

- ▶ Class Business Day: How to Be a Religious Stranger
- ▶ Exam Due

PART TWO: Newer Religious Traditions and Individual People of Faith

UNIT 1: Mormonism

Week 6

Monday:

- ▶ First Vision and Moroni's Visit
- ▶ Viewing: South Park, "All About the Mormons"
- ▶ Reading: selections from www.mormon.org and www.lds.org
 - [First Vision \(version one\)](#)
 - [First Vision \(version two\)](#)
 - [Moroni's Visit](#)
 - [Book of Mormon](#)

Wednesday:

- ▶ Reflective Exercise 1: Myths
- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on religious myths
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 8-13; 16-24

Friday:

- ▶ Joseph Smith and Revelation
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 24-48

Week 7

Monday:

- ▶ Restoration
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 4-6, 49-63

Wednesday:

- ▶ Cosmology

- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on cosmology
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 64-80; selections from www.lds.org

Friday:

- ▶ Class Business Day: Introduction to the Religious Cultures Assignment and in-class workshop

Week 8

Monday:

- ▶ 19th Century Development
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 81-102

Wednesday:

- ▶ Mormon Life
- ▶ Viewing: “Mormonism” (PBS)
- ▶ Reading: Bushman, 103-116; selections from www.mormon.org and www.lds.org
 - [Word of Wisdom](#)
 - [Importance of Families](#)
 - [Family Home Evening Resource Book, table of contents](#)
 - [Family Home Evening Resource Book, lesson one](#)

Friday:

- ▶ Mormon Life: Young Adults
- ▶ Reading and Viewing: selections from www.BYU.edu, www.wofford.edu, www.bju.edu, www.mormon.org, and www.mormonnewsroom.org:
 - [Aims of a BYU Education](#)
 - [Church Educational System Honor Code](#)
 - [Wofford’s Honor Code](#) (for a comparison)
 - [Bob Jones University handbook](#) – sections on attendance, social life, entertainment, dress requirements, and residence hall life (for another comparison)
 - [Missionary Training Center introduction](#)
 - [Life at a Missionary Training Center](#)
 - [Life on the Mission Field](#)

Week 9

Monday:

- ▶ Visit to Class by Barry Keller and Carlus Mansel (leaders on local Mormon wards)
- ▶ Viewing: any three videos from the “[I’m a Mormon](#)” project

Wednesday:

- ▶ Mormonism Quiz
- ▶ Mormonism wrap up

Friday:

- ▶ Class Business Day: Introduction to Final Project
- ▶ Due: Mormonism Assignment

UNIT 2: The Baha'i Faith

Week 10

Monday:

- ▶ Origins
- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on Muslim apocalypticism and 19th Century Persia
- ▶ Reading: William Garlington, *The Baha'i Faith in America*, 3-21

Wednesday:

- ▶ Founders
- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on Manifestations, prophets, inspirational individuals
- ▶ Reading: William Garlington, *The Baha'i Faith in America*, 23-28, 6-8

Friday:

- ▶ Key Beliefs: Progressive Revelation, Unity, Equality, Golden Age
- ▶ Reading: Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, 108-111, 133-147

Week 11

Monday:

- ▶ Class Business Day: Individual and Group Meetings for Final Project
- ▶ Due: Final Project Meeting Document

Wednesday:

- ▶ Scriptures
- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on scriptural traditions in Abrahamic faiths
- ▶ Reading: Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, 99-105, 117-123

Friday:

- ▶ Community Life
- ▶ Reading: William Garlington, *The Baha'i Faith in America*, 39-56; selections from www.bahai.org:
 - [Administrative Order](#)
 - [Local Spiritual Assembly](#)
 - [National Spiritual Assembly](#)

Week 12

Monday:

- ▶ Visit to Class by Laurie Barnett, Chair of the Henderson County Baha'i Spiritual Assembly

Wednesday:

- ▶ Baha'i Faith Quiz
- ▶ Baha'i Faith Wrap-Up

Friday:

- ▶ Due: Baha'i Faith Assignment

UNIT 3: Jehovah's Witnesses

Week 13

Monday:

- ▶ Origins
- ▶ Viewing: e-lecture on 19th Century Apocalypticism in America
- ▶ Reading: Stephen J. Stein, *Communities of Dissent: A History of Alternative Religions in America*, 69-84

Wednesday:

- ▶ Bible Students
- ▶ Viewing: selections from www.JW.org:
 - [Why Study the Bible?](#)
 - [Goals of the Jehovah's Witnesses](#)
 - [Inside a Kingdom Hall](#)

Friday:

- ▶ The End Times
- ▶ Reading: selections from www.JW.org:
 - [God's Purpose for the Earth](#)
 - [Living in the Last Days](#)
 - [Significant Year: 1914](#)
- ▶ Listening: two pieces from www.NPR.org:
 - Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "[Is the End Nigh? We'll Know Soon Enough](#)"
 - Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "[Doomsday Believers Cope with an Intact World](#)"

Week 14

Monday:

- ▶ Visit to class by an Elder from a local Kingdom Hall

Wednesday

- ▶ Jehovah's Witnesses Quiz
- ▶ Jehovah's Witnesses Wrap-up

Friday:

- ▶ Course Wrap-up

Week 15

Wednesday: Final Project Due

APPENDIX 1: RELIGIOUS CULTURES ASSIGNMENT

General Instructions: For this assignment you are to attend at least one worship service in *two* of the three religious traditions we will examine this semester (Mormons, the Baha'i Faith, and Jehovah's Witnesses). After you attend the two services, you are to write a short paper/report whose main purpose is to employ the "describe-explain-react" model to analyze a single moment or event from *one* of the two services you attended.

Specific Instructions - Worship Services: You may attend worship services with any Mormon, Baha'i, or Jehovah's Witnesses community. You don't have to attend services in Spartanburg, if you don't want, though I have provided basic information about the worship services of the local communities. You'll find the link to this information on our Moodle page.

Specific Instructions - Paper

Length: 4-6 pages long, double-spaced

Assumed audience: ME! (Dan Mathewson.)

I did not attend the services with you, so you can't assume I know what you saw or experienced. You need to explain things to me clearly - and you are more than welcome to use the first person.

Your Name: I don't want to know whose paper I'm grading as I'm reading it, so don't put your name at the top of your paper (or in a header or footer or in the file name you give your document). Here's where to put your name: after the last sentence of your paper, start a new page and place your name there.

Paper Elements: The paper should include two elements:

1. *General Overview.* This is a very short overview (no more than a page) of the services you attended – just the very basics of where you went and what you saw and experienced. Your goal here should be to give your reader, me, enough description such that I can picture what you experienced. Because, for the D.E.R. exercise described below, you will only write about a single moment in one of the two services, you may, if you like provide a general overview only for the service in which your moment occurred, rather than for both services. If you opt to do this, however, you must communicate to me (either in the body of your paper or in a statement tacked onto the paper at the end) which other service you attended.
2. *Describe-Explain-React.* This part of the paper is far more important than the previous one, so devote most of your paper to it. For this part of the paper, you need to select one moment or event during either of the services you attended, and you are to analyze it employing the D.E.R. model that we discussed and workshopped in class. A refresher on the three parts of D.E.R. appears at the very bottom of this page.

The moment/event you select should be one where something transpired that you had trouble understanding or that elicited a strong reaction from you or made you feel uneasy or judged or perplexed. For example:

- ▶ Someone said something to you (or neglected to say something to you) that made you feel out of place;
- ▶ Something happened in the service that was puzzling to you or off-putting to you;

- ▶ Something about the way people were interacting with each other during your visit seemed odd or strange; or
- ▶ Some aspect of the service seemed radically different from your own prior experiences at, or assumptions about, religious services.

After you've selected your moment/event, you need to:

- ▶ Describe it fully (such that I will be able to “see” it in my head);
- ▶ Suggest at least two different plausible explanations for what you described (heavy emphasis on the word “different” – you can't give me two explanations that have only slight differences from each other); and
- ▶ Articulate what your own reaction is (or would be) to each of the explanations you suggested. To be clear, if you gave two explanations, you must supply a separate reaction to both of them -- even if you're firmly convinced that one explanation is correct and the other one is not. If you gave three explanations, you must supply a separate reaction to all of them.

Paper Format: You may either:

- ▶ Compose this paper as an essay, where each of the above parts are integrated into a continuous narrative; OR:
- ▶ Write this more as a report, with sections (and section headings) devoted to each part; and subsections (and subsection headings) devoted to each of the D.E.R. parts; OR:
- ▶ Some sort of combination of the above two.

Group Work: Yes and No

You are permitted to work in groups to complete the following parts of this assignment:

- ▶ You may attend services together;
- ▶ You may discuss which aspects of the services you wish to highlight for the general overview;
- ▶ You may identify which moment/event you will focus on for your D.E.R. analysis.
- ▶ You may NOT discuss with your group your ideas about your description, explanations, and reactions of the moment/event you've selected. This part of the assignment must solely come from your own insights and observations.

Describe-Explain-React Refresher

- ▶ When you describe your “moment,” you are simply offering a value-free, judgment-free description of what happened. Just the facts.
- ▶ When you explain whatever it is you described, you are offering an interpretation of what transpired. Remember, the “moment” you described is one in which something happened that you don't quite understand, that didn't make obvious sense to you, or which was off-putting to you, or made you feel out of place (or whatever). Your explanation is your attempt to offer a theory of what was

actually going on, what that moment was all about. Another way of saying this -- and maybe a better way of saying it -- is that you are attempting to explain what that moment meant *for the people in that religious community*. What, do you think, that moment meant to them? Remember, you need to come up with at least two different plausible explanations for your moment (with heavy emphasis on the word “different”).

- ▶ When you react, you are telling how you felt (or would feel) if an explanation is actually the correct one. Remember: because you are offering two different explanations for the same moment, you need to articulate two distinct reactions, one for each of the explanations (i.e., if explanation A is what was really going on, then my reaction would be X; if explanation B is what was really going on, then my reaction would be Y).

APPENDIX II: FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

General Instructions:

The final project takes place outside of the classroom entirely; it requires you to attend religious services/meetings and to interact with members of a faith tradition unfamiliar to you. You may do this either on your own or in small groups. This project requires a high degree of self-motivation, planning, coordination of schedules, and, if you desire, group work. After completing the off-campus portion of the final project, you will then write a paper that analyzes your experiences utilizing the concepts and ideas about religion and travel in Bud Ruf's *Bewildered Travel*.

Specific Instructions:

There are four steps to this final project, and they should be completed sequentially:

1. Select a tradition;
2. Research the tradition and meet with me;
3. Attend two services/meetings/gatherings and talk to people;
4. Write your paper.

Steps 1-3 may be completed in groups (2-5 people) or individually; it is entirely up to you. Step 4 must be completed individually.

1. Select a tradition.

- a. You must choose a religious tradition or faith community that is completely unfamiliar to you, regardless of whether it's a newer or an older tradition.
- b. There are a number of really good options in or very near to Spartanburg including the following:
 - Buddhist Temple (and monastery)
 - Hindu Temple
 - Jewish Temple
 - Muslim Masjid (aka, a mosque)
 - Sikh Gurudwara
 - Tons of Christian churches
- c. If you're willing to drive a bit farther, there are plenty of options in Charlotte, the Asheville area, Columbia, and Atlanta, including a couple of my favorites:
 - U.R. Light Center (a kind of new age spiritual center in Black Mountain, NC)
 - BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir (a newer Hindu division in Atlanta)

2. Research the tradition and meet with me.

- a. Once you've settled on a group, you should start searching for appropriate sources of background information on your religious community. The purpose of this research is to give you a general sense of who the group is and what you might expect when you go to one of their services. To be clear: I'm not asking you to become an expert on your group. I

just want you to do a little reading so you don't feel completely and utterly lost when you go to the services.

- b. You must find *three* different sources.
- c. One source you *must* include (if your group is found in it) is the following: [Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, *How To Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* \(Woodstock, VT.: Skulight Paths Publishing, 2011\).](#)
- d. If your group has a website, that should be one of your sources too.
- e. Your other sources can be web-based or print-based.
- f. You will set up a 10-minute meeting with me. Prior to your meeting, each individual will submit a document on Moodle (see course Moodle page) that lists the following:
 - i. Who is in your group (if applicable).
 - ii. Which religious community you've selected.
 - iii. Contact information for your community (e.g., address, phone number, contact person).
 - iv. The times and dates of the two specific meetings/services/gatherings you will attend.
 - v. The three research sources you've found. (During our meeting, I will confirm whether or not they are appropriate).

3. Attend two services/meetings/gatherings and talk to people.

- a. Before you attend your first service, you need to read through your research sources carefully. The research sources will give you background information on your group so that you don't feel quite as lost as you otherwise might when you attend your first service. Also, you may use your research sources in your final paper (though you are not required to do so – see the instructions for the paper, below).
- b. You must attend at least two services *in their entirety*, including any fellowship or socializing periods that accompany your community's services.
- c. At some point during this project, you must engage in a conversation with at least three separate people in your community. These conversations need not be long or elaborate -- though long and elaborate conversations might be quite helpful. During each conversation, however, you should:
 - i. Explain who you are and why you're spending time with your chosen community (i.e., explain what this project is and that you've selected this community to get to know better).
 - ii. Try to have your conversation partner (emphasis on the word "try") explain why he/she is part of this community (i.e., why he/she attends services/meetings there, or what spiritual "benefits" he/she receives, or what difference the community or religious tradition makes in his/her life).
- d. There are different ways to find your three conversation partners, including the following:

- i. Simply talking to people when you attend your services. This will be easier to do than you might think; oftentimes, people are quite curious about why strangers show up in their midst. Explaining who you are and what this project is, is often a good icebreaker.
 - ii. Schedule a time to speak with someone in your community.
 - iii. Have an email exchange with someone in the community.
- e. NOTE: If you do not attend two services/meetings in their entirety, you will fail this assignment. If you do not speak to three people, you will receive a deduction in your grade:
 - Failure to speak to one person = reduction of a half letter grade.
 - Failure to speak to two people = reduction of a full letter grade.
 - Failure to speak to three people = a grade of F.

4. Write your paper.

- a. Each person must write his/her own paper *individually* whether or not steps 1-3 were completed in a group.
- b. The topic of the paper is as follows: For this project, you have travelled to an unfamiliar place, experienced religious activities unfamiliar to you, and had conversations with strangers whose commitments (at least some of them) are likely different from your own – and you’ve done all this with only minimal background preparation from a handful online and/or print resources. In other words, you’ve had the kind of travel/religious experience that Ruf discusses in *Bewildered Travel*. For your paper, I would like for you to examine your entire experience – from the research to the services to the conversations – using the categories and concepts Ruf discusses. How did your experience connect with Ruf’s discussion of travel and religion? What concepts and ideas from Ruf help explain or illuminate the different parts of your experience? Two important points to make:
 - There is no single correct way to go about accomplishing this. Because each of you will experience things in ways that are distinctive to you, different parts of Ruf will be of greater or lesser relevance for each one of your papers.
 - You are free – even encouraged – to dispute Ruf’s claims if you find them insufficient to account for your experiences.
- c. Intended audience: You should imagine Bud Ruf as your intended reader for this paper. This has two implications for how you write your paper:
 - Since Ruf obviously knows his own arguments backwards and forwards, in your paper, you will *not* need to explain in meticulous detail his concepts. For example, if you decide that his ideas about “orientation” are important for the argument you’re building in your paper, you do not need to provide a full and complete explanation of what Ruf means by this concept as you did in your midterm paper when someone who was unfamiliar with *Bewildered Travel* was your intended reader.

- Ruf has no knowledge of your experiences with your religious community, so you will need to compose your paper in such a way as to share the important experiences you've had – in particular, those aspects of your experience that tie in to the “Ruf-ian” aspects are analyzing. For example, let's take the “orientation” example again: If you decide this is an important concept that connects to your experience, and you wish to discuss it in the paper, while you do not need to explain what Ruf means by this concept (since he's perfectly aware of what he means by it), you definitely need to be crystal clear about *what* it is you experienced that connects to “orientation,” and *why* you think it connects to “orientation.”

d. Other Details about the paper:

- They should be 4-6 pages long (regular font sizes and margins)
- First person is fine (expected, even)
- When you cite any of your sources, follow either the *Modern Language Association Style Guide* or *Chicago Manual of Style* both of which are linked from our library's homepage.
- Do not put your name anywhere on your document, including in the file name of your document.

At the very end of your paper, please provide me the following information:

- ▶ Before I attended two services/meetings/gatherings I read these sources:
 - (Source 1)
 - (Source 2)
 - (Source 3)
- ▶ I attended two services/meetings/gatherings here:
 - (Service/Gathering/Meeting 1)
 - (Service/Gathering/Meeting 2)
- ▶ The two dates I attended were:
 - (Date 1)
 - (Date 2)
- ▶ I spoke or corresponded with these three people (either their names or a simple description [i.e., a middle-aged woman attendee; the leader of the congregation; the person who greeted me at the door; etc.):
 - (Person 1)
 - (Person 2)
 - (Person 3)