

## REL 303: Living Faiths

Instructor: Richard W. Anderson  
e-mail: [andersri27@verizon.net](mailto:andersri27@verizon.net)

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Linfield College

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In this course we will focus our attention on a number of major world religions from South Asia (Hinduism, Buddhism), East Asia (Daoism, Confucianism, Chan/Zen Buddhism, Shinto), and the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). We will be looking for similarities and differences in their concepts of god(s), the sacred/holy, ethics, evil, society and the sacred, soteriology (the path to some ultimate goal), and eschatology (the ultimate goal). The differing ideas related to these topics should lead to reflection on what Paul Tillich calls the “ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life.” While we may not find an answer to that elusive question of the meaning of life, we will encounter the answers proposed by others, at other times and in other places, and hopefully be enriched by their thoughts.

### REQUIRED TEXT:

Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Sixth Edition)

**ATTENDANCE:** You will be allowed to miss two classes without penalty. For every absence after that your grade will be lowered one full grade.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING:

**RELIGIOUS SERVICE VISITS:** For the first visit you must attend a service at either: 1) a Hindu temple, OR 2) a Buddhist temple, and for the second visit you must attend a service at either: 1) a Jewish synagogue, OR 2) an Islamic mosque. If you practice Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam please talk to me.

**REPORT FOR RELIGIOUS SERVICE VISITS:** You should contact the group before attending their service to make sure they welcome visitors. You can find the names of groups and times of meetings in the local newspaper, occasionally on flyers, and through the Yellow Pages. You can attend the service with a fellow classmate or friend. Before going to the service read some material about the group so that

you have some idea of what is happening in the service, and also so that you can ask informed questions before and after the service. In your report you should note:

- 1) name of group, date and time of visit, and type of service
- 2) a brief description of the physical setting of the service (objects, symbols, arrangement of space etc.), the main elements and activity of the service (music, prayer, reading of texts, discussion, chanting, meditation, meal, etc.), and who was involved (priests, lay people, male/female).
- 3) Your reflections and analysis of the service. How did this service compare with your knowledge of the group? Did anything about the service strike you as different from what you had expected or from your own tradition? Did you come to a deeper understanding of the beliefs and practices of this group through this visit? Include references to discussions you have with participants.

This two-page (minimum) report must be typed and double-spaced. Attach a copy of the service bulletin/program if there is one. Each report will be worth 10% of your final grade (total 20%). Late papers will be penalized.

**EXAMS:** There will be two in-class exams – a mid-term and final exam. The exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. Each exam will be worth 30% of your final grade (total 60%).

**CLASS DISCUSSION:** The final 20% of your grade will be determined by informed class discussion. You must demonstrate in class that you have read and thought about the material for each class.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Academic work is evaluated on the assumption that the work presented is the student's own, unless designated otherwise. Anything less is unacceptable and is considered academically dishonest. Any student found to be engaging in such activities is subject to disciplinary action. Further definitions of academic dishonesty may be found in your Student Handbook in the Academic Policies chapter.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who may need accommodations, who have any emergency medical information the instructor should know of, or who need special arrangements in the event of

evacuation, should make an appointment with the instructor as early as possible.

**\*\* DENOTES REQUIRED READING FOR THAT CLASS PERIOD**

February 21

Introduction to the course – definition of religion – and a brief look at the sacred & holy, sacred symbol, myth & doctrine, ritual, scripture, society and the sacred, deities, evil, ethics, soteriology, and eschatology.

\*\*Fisher – chapters 1 & 2

February 28

Hinduism

\*\*Fisher – chapter 3

PAPER DUE – one page discussion of the word “religion”

March 7

FILM: Gandhi or Water

March 14

Buddhism

\*\*Fisher – chapter 5

March 21

FILM: Kundun

FIRST SERVICE VISIT REPORT DUE

March 28

Daoism & Confucianism

\*\*Fisher – chapter 6

April 4

MID-TERM EXAM

April 11

Shinto

\*\*Fisher – chapter 7

SECOND SERVICE VISIT REPORT DUE

April 18

Judaism

\*\*Fisher – chapter 8

April 25

Christianity

\*\*Fisher – chapter 9

May 2

FILM: Agnes of God

May 9

Islam

\*\*Fisher – chapter 10

May 16

FILM: Earth

May 23

FINAL EXAM