

# Exploring Religion

REL 200  
Fall 2010  
8:00-9:20, TuTh  
Deihl 118

Joseph L. Price  
Platner #114  
TR: 10:00-11:30  
W: 2:00-4:00

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of the course is to provide an introduction to the study of religion in two specific ways. First of all, the course is designed to acquaint you with fundamental religious questions about ideas, practices, institutions, and attitudes that are connected to everyday human life. The course also seeks to stimulate your awareness of the extent to which the approach that one takes toward the compilation and analysis of religious data selects and structures what one finds in religion. The course will draw examples from a variety of religious traditions and perspectives, and it will develop questions using insights from multiple approaches to the study of religion—psychological, sociological, anthropological, philosophical, and phenomenological-historical. An important secondary theme in many of our readings will be for us to examine the depths of the ordinary. In this regard, the course also aims to sensitize you to the religious dimensions of human existence, the ways in which worldviews are conceived, constructed, consumed, communicated, and criticized.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- To recognize how one's focus on religious matters shapes one's understanding of religion
- To increase appreciation for the universality of religious experiences
- To strengthen the skill of raising probative questions about religious practices
- To recognize how one's focus on religious matters shapes one's understanding of religion
- To develop the ability to distinguish and articulate characteristics or components of religion(s)
- To develop the ability to discern how ordinary practices, artifacts, and places might function in religious ways

## TEXTS:

Rudolph, Conrad. *Pilgrimage to the End of the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Fontes, Monserrat. *First Confession*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Wiesel, Elie. *The Night Trilogy: Night, Dawn, Day*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959.

Peck, Alice, ed. *Bread, Body, Spirit: Finding the Sacred in Food*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.

Reynolds, Sheri. *The Rapture of Canaan*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1996.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Attendance: Since we will regularly discuss the readings in class, your attendance and participation will be crucial to the success of the class. An excessive number of absences (more than three) or patterns of tardiness will result in the lowering of your grade and perhaps failure of the course.

Readings: In order to participate effectively in class and in order to understand fully the writing assignments, you must complete all readings on schedule. For each class session during which the readings will be discussed, you will be required to prepare and submit two provocative discussion questions based on the reading for the day.

Papers: Completion of six short papers is required. Two papers will draw from your experiences in relation to the topics (journey and food); and in four you will analyze and reflect upon the films and readings. Completion of all papers is required to receive credit for the class.

If for any reason a paper is turned in late, the grade given will be lowered one full level (e.g., from an A to a B) for each calendar day that it is late. Papers that are more than a week late will not be graded.

**OTHER PERTINENT MATTERS:**

Communication: I will send emails to your Whittier College email address. If you prefer to use another email address, you can have your Whittier email forwarded to that address. However, all emails to the class will be sent only to your Whittier email addresses. In addition, the Moodle page for the course will provide additional links and readings, as announced in class and via email messages.

Accommodations: Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class are to contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located on the ground floor of the Library, room G003, and can be reached by calling extension 4825.

Classroom Decorum: If you must enter or leave the classroom while a presentation is going on, you should not walk between the speaker and your classmates. In addition, the use of cell phones in class is not permitted—either for making or receiving phone calls or for doing text messaging. Use of a cell phone in class or non-course use of laptops will constitute an absence.

## DAILY SCHEDULE

### COURSE INTRODUCTION

Sept. 9                      What Is Religion?

### JOURNEY

Sept. 14                      Rudolph, *Pilgrimage to the End of the World*

Sept. 16                      Moodle selection from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Pilgrimage"

Sept. 21    7:30 a.m.              Film: *Le Grand Voyage*

Sept. 23                      PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114 BY NOON

### SPACE AND TIME

Sept. 28                      Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane*, pp. 8-113

Sept. 30                      Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane*, pp. 116-213

Oct. 5            7:15 a.m.              Film: *Emerald Forest*

Oct. 7                      Moodle selections from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Space" and "Time"

Oct. 12                      PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114 BY NOON

### rites of passage

Oct. 14                      Moodle selections from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Rites of Passage" and "Initiation"

Oct. 19                      Fontes, *First Confession*

Oct. 21                      Fontes, *First Confession*

Oct. 26    7:45 a.m.              Film: *Stand by Me*

Oct. 28                      PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114 BY NOON

## COMMUNITY

- Nov. 2 Reynolds, *Rapture of Canaan*
- Nov. 4 7:30 a.m. Film: *Witness*
- Nov. 9 Reynolds, *Rapture of Canaan*  
Moodle selection from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Community"
- Nov. 11 PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114 BY NOON

## FOOD

- Nov. 16 Peck, *Bread, Body, Spirit*
- Nov. 18 7:30 a.m. Film: *Babette's Feast*
- Nov. 23 Moodle selection from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Food"
- Nov. 25 **THANKSGIVING**
- Nov. 30 PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114 BY NOON

## DEATH

- Dec. 2 Wiesel, *Night*
- Dec. 7 7:30 a.m. Film: *Seventh Seal*
- Dec. 9 Moodle selection from *Encyclopedia of Religion*:  
"Death"
- Dec. 14 5 p.m. PAPER DUE IN PLATNER #114