



World Religions

HUM 2093

The Thou encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. — Martin Buber, I and Thou

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness. — The 14th Dalai Lama

Fall 2025 • Aug 25 – Dec 12, 2025 • MWF 1:00–1:50 • MH 2.02.10

Final Group Presentation: Dec 8, 1:00–2:50 p.m.

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Office hours by appointment

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Class website: <http://rosetta.reltech.org/UTSA/HUM2093/>

I. Course Description

What is religion? What are its origins? How do its current practitioners live? Are the major world religions really all that different? How does religion interact with the modern world? These are some of the questions we will explore as we delve into the history, beliefs, practices, and phenomenology of religion. We will examine in detail several of the largest religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Chinese folk religions (including Daoism and Confucianism), Judaism, Christianity, Islam—as well as other selected religious traditions. Through personal exploration, individual and group research projects, and classroom discussion, we will also explore issues that cut across several different religious traditions.

II. Course Aims and Objectives

Aims

Students will learn about selected religious traditions from around the world; will analyze issues and concepts such as good and evil, divine and human, war and peace, science, and ethics from a variety of religious perspectives; and will understand the religious traditions studied on their own terms and in the context of other religious traditions.

Specific Learning Objectives

- Students will gain a basic knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the world's largest religious traditions.
- Students will gain a basic knowledge of the beliefs and practices of other selected religious traditions.

- Students will learn to identify and reject pejorative stereotypes associated with specific religious traditions.
- Students will observe and/or participate in organized religious services of at least three religious traditions.
- Students will analyze current topics that concern people in many or all religious traditions.

III. Format and Procedures

This class will meet in person and will follow a weekly schedule of assignments, including readings, prescribed viewing of videos, and written papers and group work to be submitted through Canvas. Students are expected to read or view assigned material by the due date listed on the class website. Assigned papers, projects, and discussions are also due by the designated date. Class announcements, assignments, and supplementary material will be available on Canvas and/or the class website.

With the exception of the two exams, which will be administered in class, assignments should be submitted to Canvas on the due date no later than 11:59 p.m. Assignments are due on the assigned date regardless of illness, work schedule, or other complications. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per week (or portion of week), with a minimum penalty of half a letter grade (e.g., for work submitted one day after the due date). Students experiencing extraordinary circumstances (e.g., an excused absence lasting an entire week) that prohibit turning in an assignment on time may contact the instructor for guidance.

Students who email the instructor should include HUM2093 at the beginning of the subject line of the email, followed by whatever other subject information is relevant.

IV. Course Requirements

1. Class Attendance, Participation, and Assignments

Students will endeavor to turn in every assignment on time, every week, and participate in all work assigned to their group. Everyone is also strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. Students who fail to participate in group discussions and presentations will be penalized. Excused absences are illness, death in the family, and officially sponsored UTSA activities. The student will be expected to provide documentation for all excused absences. Students who are absent, whether the absence is excused or unexcused, are expected to complete assignments on time (see section III). Students who know in advance they will be absent may make arrangements to turn in assignments or take tests early.

Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments should be printed in Times or Times New Roman font, 12 point type, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all four sides, and follow MLA specifications. Papers with a minimum page count specified will be considered short of the required minimum if they employ excessive margins. For example, **a three-page paper must extend to the bottom of the third page, or it will be considered a two-page paper.** Charts, illustrations, and other non-textual material may be included in a paper when appropriate—in fact, they may well improve a paper in some instances—but the non-textual material will not be counted toward the total page count, so students should adjust the length of their papers accordingly.

2. Course Readings

The class text is:

Urubshurow, Victoria Kennick. *Introducing World Religions*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Students will read the following book and record discussions of each chapter with their assigned group:

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil*. Rev. ed. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

Students will write a book review of the following book (more information below):

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2003.

Students will read and react to two religious traditions discussed in the following book (more information below):

Urban, Hugh B. *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015.

Other online readings will be assigned, and videos will be assigned for students to watch as well.

3. Encountering Different Religious Traditions

Over the course of the semester, students will visit three places of worship representing different religious traditions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, etc.). At least two places of worship should be visited in person, and the third may be either in person or online (e.g., watching a live or recorded worship service). Students will submit a “visit report” describing the activities witnessed and reactions to the experience. Each visit report will be a minimum of **three pages, double-spaced**. Up to two additional visit reports will be accepted for extra credit. Although students may choose houses of worship from any three religious traditions, they are strongly encouraged to choose religious traditions with which they are not already extremely familiar. For example, a student who was raised as a Protestant Christian who wants to visit a Christian house of worship should consider visiting a Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox congregation. A list of suggested houses of worship will be posted on the class website, but students are free to visit any congregation or community they like. The first visit report is due by the end of the 5th week of class, and the second is due by the end of the 11th week. (Exact due dates are listed on the class website. The third visit report and any extra credit reports are due on or before Dec 6 (not during the final exam period). **Make sure to include the name of the place of worship you visited, the religious tradition represented, and the date of the visit.**

Please note that while students are free to visit Messianic Jewish congregations for their visit reports, these congregations (for the purposes of this class) count as groups related to Christian, not Jewish, traditions. Also, the following churches are all part of the Christian tradition: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness.

When visiting places of worship or religious activity, especially in person, and when interviewing people (see following section):

- contact the house of worship in advance and let them know you would like to attend a service, and ask if they have any suggestions about dress or conduct
- listen more, talk less
- watch & take notes
- do not record either audio or video (including photos) unless you have permission beforehand
- when asking questions, allow the interviewee to use his/her own language to describe things
- avoid questions that compare one religion to another; think about each religion in its own terms
- be friendly and gracious to your hosts
- feel free to join in activities if invited to do so, but if it makes you uncomfortable, it's fine to decline

4. Interviews

Each student will interview three practitioners of different religious traditions, preferably people who are congregational or other types of leaders in the religious community. Students will develop a questionnaire or script to be followed during the interview, which will include a minimum of ten questions, but it is fine to deviate from the questionnaire as long as at least ten questions and answers are recorded. The interviewees may be members of the houses of worship visited during the course of the semester, but they don't have to be. There is **no specified length for the interview reports**, and they may be single-spaced. Try to avoid questions that allow one word responses like "yes," "no," "sometimes." If you get one-word responses, be prepared to ask follow-up or additional questions. At least one interview must be conducted in person or by phone, video chat, etc.; the others may be conducted in person, by phone, or by email or other means of correspondence (e.g., social media). Up to two additional interview reports will be accepted for extra credit, as long as they represent religious traditions not already covered in a previous interview. The first interview report is due at the end of the 5th week of class, and the second is due at the end of the 11th week. The third interview report and any extra credit reports are due on or before Dec 6 (not during the final exam period). **Make sure to include the name of the person you interviewed, the religious tradition the interviewee represents, and the date of the interview. If the interviewee doesn't want his/her name included, put "name withheld at interviewee's request."**

5. Book Report and Discussion

Students will read *Life of Pi* and write a book report on it, **focusing especially on the way in which the book deals with the topic of religion**. The book report will be a minimum of **five pages, double-spaced**. It is due on Nov 15.

6. Group Presentations and Discussions

Every student will be assigned to one of six groups, which will work together on group discussions during weeks 3–10, on group presentations during weeks 13–15, and on the final group

presentations on Hugh Urban's book, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movement* (see item #7 below).

For the group discussions during weeks 3–10 (except week 6), students will read an assigned chapter in Charles Kimball's *When Religion Becomes Evil* and record a discussion of the chapter with the rest of the group. The discussion may be recorded in either audio or video format, and one person in the group should submit it on Canvas (submit either an audio or video file or a link to the discussion online). Each chapter's discussion should be between 10 and 15 minutes long, and it should **start with a list of students** in the group who participated in the discussion. Different group members may submit the discussions for the different chapters. Make sure to indicate which group you are at the beginning of the recording. If not all members of a group are able to participate in a single group discussion, individuals or smaller groups may record and submit their own discussion, following the same guidelines. Recordings by a single individual must be a minimum of 8 minutes; recordings by two or more people must be a minimum of 10 minutes.

For the group presentations assignment during weeks 13–15, each group will present to the class on the assigned topics. These presentations should be accompanied by visual aids (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation or something similar). Everyone in the group must participate in some way on each presentation to get credit, though not every person has to speak on the day of the presentation. For example, the group may choose to allow one or more group members to focus on research or creating the visual aid. Each presentation should be a minimum of 15 minutes long, and it must include a **bibliography** of at least **ten sources**, relevant to the topic of discussion, that meet the criteria found in the document on the class website entitled "Sources for Academic Research." A list of the students who participated in creating the presentation should be included in the visual aid. **Each group should choose a student in the group to be responsible for submitting the visual aid (or a link to the visual aid) and the bibliography in Canvas by the designated due date.**

YOUR PARTICIPATION AS PART OF YOUR ASSIGNED GROUP IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR FINAL GRADE!

7. Final Group Presentation on Other Religious Traditions

In lieu of a final exam, students will meet with other members of their assigned group and discuss two assigned chapters from the book by Hugh B. Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements*. The group will present a summary and analysis of the two assigned chapters in class on the day designated for the final exam, Dec 8, between 1:00 and 2:50. The presentation should be about 20 minutes long and should present information about both assigned religious traditions. All members of the group should participate in some way. A visual aid may be used to accompany the presentation, but it is not required.

8. Exams

Students will have two regular exams, at the beginning of the 6th and 12th weeks of class. In lieu of a final exam, students will participate in a group presentation about two assigned religious traditions (see #7 above).

Note on submissions that have length requirements: If a paper has a length requirement, full

credit will be given only if the submitted paper has text that reaches to the bottom of the page (not halfway down the page, for example). Cover sheets and bibliographies don't count toward the total page length.

V. Grading

The student's grade will be determined as follows:

- a. Reports on visits to houses of worship: 15% (+ up to 4 points added to the visit report grade average for up to two additional visits)
- b. Interviews: 15% (+ up to 4 points added to the interview grade average for up to two additional interviews)
- c. Book report on *Life of Pi*: 10%
- d. Group discussions on Kimball's book and Week 13-15 presentations: 20%
- e. Exam 1: 15%
- f. Exam 2: 15%
- g. Final group presentation on other religious traditions (presented during the final exam period): 10%
- h. Extra credit: up to 5 points may be earned for extra credit assignments given over the course of the semester (all extra credit submissions are due by Dec 6)

Rubric for visit reports, book report, and other written assignments:

- spelling, grammar, and style: 20%
- organization: 20%
- content and originality: 60%
- points may be subtracted for submissions below the minimum page length

Rubric for interviews:

- spelling, grammar, and style: 20% (note: feel free to quote the interviewee directly, even if their response doesn't follow the rules of Standard Written English)
- quality and interest of questions: 80% (if interviewees give one-word answers, like "yes" or "no," use follow-up questions to try to obtain more information)—have some supplementary questions ready in case the interviewee doesn't want to answer a particular question
- points will be subtracted for submissions with fewer than ten questions and answers

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following table:

A+: 97-100	B+: 87-89	C+: 77-79	D+: 67-69	F: below 60
A: 93-96	B: 83-86	C: 73-76	D: 63-66	
A-: 90-92	B-: 80-82	C-: 70-72	D-: 60-62	

VI. Subject to Change

Assignments, grades, schedules, and other items detailed in this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. The instructor will give students reasonable notice of any changes that are made.

VII. Supplemental Information

UTSA offers many services to help students succeed in their classes. Some of the offices that provide these services are Counseling Services, Student Disability Services, and the Tomás Rivera Center, which offers Supplemental Instruction and Tutoring. Information on these services, as well as the Student Code of Conduct and Scholastic Dishonesty policies, can be found on the following web page: <http://provost.utsa.edu/syllabus.asp>. Please read the information on this page, which may be considered an appendix to this syllabus.