

## Introduction to World Religions

As announced in the syllabus, in this course we will be exploring classical, modern, and postmodern conceptions and receptions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in light of the complex phenomenon of globalization. We shall be following the order of chapters from the textbook, namely, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. To be sure, Hinduism is the oldest of all (assuming its roots in the historical Vedic religion), just as Christianity and Islam stem from Judaism. In terms of number of adherents worldwide, the descending order would be Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. The five religions studied here are regarded as the most influential world religions today, but we could certainly include others such as Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism, and Shinto, just to name a few among the most traditional and representative in global terms. We are also assuming that historical protestant denominations such as Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist (just to name the largest ones) and other branches such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists are to be counted as Christians, together with Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and other variants, denominations, and sects. We observe in passing that some important religious traditions tend to be overlooked in most textbooks, such as Native-American, African, and African Diasporic religions (for instance, African-Brazilian and Caribbean religions). We must finally remark that ours is a philosophical, nonconfessional approach to religion. Please keep in mind that this is an academic forum and that each student should feel free to share their views freely, without constraints and without any proselytist intent (i.e. trying to convert anyone to any particular religious standpoint). On the other hand, there is no such thing as a scientific, philosophically neutral approach to religion, as no single discipline has a monopoly on the word "religion." Like "morality" and "ethics," religion is inseparable from culture and its social, historical settings. The very development of art, science, and philosophy in Western civilization and non-Western civilizations runs parallel to one another and is often intertwined with the development and changes that took place in different religions, religious and anti-religious movements. Hence, both atheism and agnosticism are also important components of an interdisciplinary approach to religion, insofar as they cannot be understood apart from their philosophical presuppositions. Like "modernity" and "secularization," "globalization" turns out to be also a Western invention, as the West was continually inventing itself and its other (the "Eastern world" or "the Orient"). In effect, it was only recently that Western accounts of philosophy became more seriously open to the otherness of the Other, or to the alterity of other cultures, religions, and ways of philosophizing –even though Schopenhauer had introduced Buddhism to German idealism in the 19th century and Europeans' commercial, cultural interactions with Asian, African, and Native-American cultures were intensified in the 15th and 16th centuries. To be sure, pre-modern interactions were actually moving from Africa to Asia and then to Europe, but we tend to think of these as belonging to an "Ancient world." The history of world religions, in the light of globalization, will help us deconstruct such Eurocentric views, which we almost take for granted.

For this first week, please read Chapter 1 from the textbook. Try to come up with a definition of key words and concepts, such as religion, myth, modernity, and postmodern. Make sure you visit all suggested links, watch the indicated video clips, and read everything you can from the Oxford U Press link to the Student Resources for World Religions Today:

<http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195365634/student/?view=usa>

Then, post a comment, your opinion or insight into the correlated questions of Religion and Globalization, Universalism and Secularization:

What is the impact of globalization upon religion nowadays?

If secularization is understood as the decline of religious authority, how is universalism still defensible today, for example, in the universal declaration of human rights or in the growing appeal of democratic pluralism among different cultures and peoples of the planet?

Best,

Nita