

**Semester at Sea Course Syllabus
Colorado State University, Academic Partner**

Voyage: Fall 2017
Discipline: Philosophy
Course Number and Title: PHIL 479 Topics in Comparative Religions
Division: Upper
Faculty Name: James D. Bratt
Semester Credit Hours: 3

Meeting: B Days 1530-1650, Vierjahres

Prerequisites: One (1) religions of the West course OR one (1) religions of the East course, OR one (1) issues in the study of religion course

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course uses auto/biographies rooted in five different world religions to explore the dynamics of religious experience as it can unfold in a wide variety of social and historical contexts. The settings chosen for our study are closely calibrated to the itinerary of the Fall 2017 Semester at Sea. The figures include people both famous and ordinary: Martin Luther, Mohandas Gandhi, and Desmond Tutu in the first camp; a combat Marine in Vietnam, a Jewish refugee from Nazism in Shanghai, and a low-ranking samurai traveling the 17th-century world in the second. Our focus will range from religious psychology to the intersection of religion and politics to the role of religion in dealing with personal trauma to the ambiguities of religious conversion. Throughout, we will be looking for the similarities and differences in the ways in which our authors drew off their respective faiths, and how their understandings of their traditions—and of themselves—changed in the process. As we read their accounts we will also be reflecting on our own journey: literally, the one we are taking on the ship, and figuratively, the trajectory we are taking from our pasts toward our possible futures. That is to say, we will be engaging in some personal “soul-searching” as we watch others do the same, and as we visit the sites where they modeled different paths for us to consider.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course students will have demonstrated the capacity to:

1. understand personal religious accounts in terms of an individual’s developmental dynamics, social and historical setting, and faith tradition.
2. draw informed and nuanced comparisons across various individual case studies and faith traditions.
3. incorporate data and experiences at field sites to enrich or alter impressions gained from reading.
4. speak more knowledgably about major world religions.
5. reflect in a more intelligent and self-critical manner upon their own religious, spiritual, or philosophical commitments and trajectory, based upon their encounters on ship and on shore.

ON THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION

This course takes religious convictions very seriously—both those of the subjects we study and our own. It assumes that—whether these convictions are understood as “religious” in the traditional sense of that term, or as “spiritual” or “philosophical” or “ethical” as these labels have come to be used—everyone has some basic outlook on life, a framework or worldview or set of operating assumptions by which we approach and interpret our everyday course of behavior as well as our larger, higher, or longer-term goals in life. Our own interpretive frames will inevitably shape our responses to the religious accounts in this course; our learning will be enhanced if the opposite is also the case, that is, if our subjects’ deepest convictions challenge our own.

That said, let it be clear: there is no “orthodox” religious position required in this course! You will not do better or worse if you are Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc., etc. or a “none of the above.” You might benefit by being an insider to one of these traditions when we take up an account that comes out of it, and you are most welcome to share that perspective at that time. You may also benefit—and help the group—in other ways if you are an outsider. In any case, this course does not aim to have you convert to or from any particular faith, nor to disabuse you of any and all. It assumes, instead,

- that religion has been a very important domain for thinking about the big questions in life and for undertaking (for better or worse) massive efforts to change the world according to its lights;
- that understanding religion well is thus crucial for understanding different lands and cultures and historical action—and ourselves.

Our aim is simply to enhance that understanding via reading and informed on-shore experience. I have chosen the genre of auto/biography because it provides an inviting channel into the different worlds we will be encountering on this voyage, and into our own critical self-understanding.

This course does require you to confront your set of basic convictions and to reflect on them quite consciously as we proceed. If you end up confirmed in your core convictions, that’s fine—hopefully, they will be better informed, more nuanced, and more deliberately chosen than simply absorbed from your upbringing. If you come away with more doubts about your inherited tradition or another—or all others—that’s fine too, so long as the same conditions apply. Likewise, if you’re inclined to change from one to another, or from none to one.... The only non-negotiable is that you show respect for any and all of them, that you try to see the world from inside the person and tradition we’re studying at the moment so that you can render their beliefs in a way that they would recognize as authentic.

Along the way you will be required—and always encouraged—to visit houses of worship of various faiths. To prepare for that, please read the relevant chapters of Stuart Matlins and Arthur Megida, eds., *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook*, found in the Ship’s library. Be attentive to the particularities of dress code, demeanor, photography, and conversation that might apply to these site visits. **Always** be sure you have permission before you photograph or otherwise record an individual, artifact, or religious ceremony.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Thomas Kaufmann
TITLE: *A Short Life of Martin Luther*
PUBLISHER: Eerdmans
ISBN #: 978-0802871534
DATE/EDITION: 2016/paperback

AUTHOR: Fatima Mernissi
TITLE: *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*
PUBLISHER: Perseus Books
ISBN #: 978-0201489378
DATE/EDITION: 1995/1st edition, paperback

AUTHOR: Desmond Tutu
TITLE: *No Future without Forgiveness*
PUBLISHER: Image
ISBN #: 978-0385496902
DATE/EDITION: 2000 paperback

AUTHOR: Louis Fisher
TITLE: *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*
PUBLISHER: Signet
ISBN #: 978-0451531704
DATE/EDITION: 2010/Reprint edition, paperback

AUTHOR: Claude Anshin Thomas
TITLE: *At Hell's Gate: A Soldier's Journey from War to Peace*
PUBLISHER: Shambhala
ISBN #: 978-1590302712
DATE/EDITION: 2006/Reprint edition, paperback

AUTHOR: Vivian Jeanette Kaplan
TITLE: *Ten Green Bottles: The True Story of One Family's Journey from War-torn Austria to the Ghettos of Shanghai*
PUBLISHER: St. Martin's Griffin
ISBN #: 978-0312330552
DATE/EDITION: 2004/Reprint edition

AUTHOR: Shusaku Endo
TITLE: *The Samurai*
PUBLISHER: New Directions
ISBN #: 978-0811213462
DATE/EDITION: 1997/Reprint edition

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Bremerhaven, Germany — September 9

B1—September 12: *Introduction*

Review of syllabus, assignments, and grading. Discussion of the purpose of the academic study of religion: not proselytization or debunking but empathic and critical understanding. Opening discussion of the dynamics between personal experience, setting, and events: not utter autonomy or determinism but creative interaction.

PART I

Our first two texts invite us to consider the dynamics of religious psychology. Martin Luther, connected to our German point of embarkation and the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation, exemplifies the drama of radical reversals and the public tumult that can result from them. Fatima Mernissi, by contrast, grew up in a cloistered world of women characterized by solidarity and striking imagination—and by a gentle calm markedly different from the fearful impressions many people have of her Muslim faith today. That faith is strong in her native Morocco and West Africa, which we will be circling as we read her memoir.

B2—September 14: *Martin Luther: anxious soul in an anxious society*

The character of Luther's dramatic religious innovations in light of the pressures of his upbringing and of the religious, political, and social circumstances in Germany c. 1500.

READING: Kaufmann, ch 1-2

Barcelona/Valencia, Spain — September 15-18

B3—September 20: *Martin Luther and a divided public*

How Luther dealt with success and resistance: pastor, preacher, professor, monk-become-husband, the best-selling author of the 16th century, the Peasants' War, his screeds against the Roman Catholic hierarchy and Jews, and his theological and institutional legacy.

READING: Kaufmann, ch 3.

SUBMIT PAPER #1: In 500 words, trace the contours of your own religious/spiritual/philosophical story to date. Is it marked more by radical change or general continuity—or something in between? Is it a series of peak moments or steady flow—or both? What do think are the important frontiers of decision or movement that lie ahead for you? This paper will serve as a 'base-line' for comparison in the final paper of the course.

B4—September 22: *The "Harem": Calm amid the Storm?*

Brief review of Moroccan history from Muslim caliphate to pawn of European colonialism; its status in World War II, the time of Fatima Mernissi's memoir. Description of the rationale behind and various functional modes of the "harem."

READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, chs 1-8

No Class — September 23

B5—September 25: *Social Segregation and Inner Power*

The dynamics of sequestration—women’s rivalry, solidarity, and the power of imagination—and their possible role in equipping the author for her future as an eminent Muslim feminist.

READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, chs 9-16

Tema, Ghana — September 27-30

B6—October 1: *Stasis and Change*

How change comes to a supposedly static setting. How does this aid our understanding of Arabic lands in their continuing upheaval today? Discuss possible themes for the next writing assignment.

READING: Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, chs 17-22

PAPER #2—due October 4. Compare Mernissi and Luther’s stories in terms of calm vs. turbulent religious experience. Bring in the roles of historical setting, gender, life-expectations, etc., if and as they help enrich your understanding of these trajectories. 1200 words

PART II

Our second pair of readings highlights the role of religion in lives of political actors who changed the world. The Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu took a lead role in sustaining South Africa’s peaceful transition from the white-racist regime of apartheid to an equitable multi-cultural society. He did so out of his Christian faith. Likewise, deeply informed by Hindu scriptures, Mohandas Gandhi led the dramatic movement for Indian independence from the British Empire with a philosophy, strategy, and tactics that have inspired many followers, including Martin Luther King, Jr. We will be revisiting these men and movements as we circle South Africa and move on to India.

B7—October 4: *Apartheid, Resistance, and Liberation*

Review of salient points of South African history as the setting of Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

READING: Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, chs 1-5

SUBMIT PAPER #2

B8—October 6: *The TRC at work*

The personal, political, and theological factors at work in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

READING: Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, chs 6-8

Cape Town, South Africa — October 7-12

B9—October 14: *Living with Partial Success*

What the TRC did—and did not—accomplish. The progress and problems of South African society post-apartheid. Personal satisfaction and suffering under these conditions. Whether the TRC is and should be exported to other settings.

READING: Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, chs 9-11

No Classes — October 16

B10—October 17: *Gandhi's Life: India, England, South Africa, India*
READING: Fisher, *Gandhi*, chs 1-17

Port Louis, Mauritius — October 19

B11—October 20: 'Soul-Force': *the core of Gandhi's teaching*
READING: Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance*, Section 1

No Classes — October 22

B12—October 23: *Did Gandhi Succeed?*
READING: Fisher, *Gandhi*, chs 18-34

Cochin, India — October 25-30

No Classes — October 31

B13—November 1: *From Life to Book to Screen*
How different genres of story-telling affect what is told, what can be told, and how it is received.
WATCH: "Gandhi," d. Richard Attenborough (1982)

SUBMIT PAPER #3: How did their theology, or set of religious concepts and convictions, shape the political lives and contributions of Desmond Tutu and Mohandas Gandhi? Reflect on the strategies they were thereby led to pursue and both the achievements and the limitations those entailed. 1200 words

PART III

Our third pair of case studies involve ordinary people undergoing extraordinary trauma and finding their way out of it via communities defined by religious heritage and purpose. Claude Anshin Thomas was badly seared by combat in Vietnam as an American Marine and eventually found healing and a new vocation as a Buddhist monk. Vivian Jeanette Kaplan recorded the memoir of her mother, one of the thousands of Jewish refugees who fled from Nazism to Shanghai in the 1930s and lived through World War II in the ghetto that the Japanese occupiers created there. The Field Class and related assignments for this course fall in this section.

B14—November 3: 'Why Were We in Vietnam?'
The author's experience against the settings that created the Vietnam War: the USA's succession to Britain in global preeminence combined with the Cold War mentality at home.
READING: Thomas, *At Hell's Gate*, Preface, chs 1-3

Yangon, Myanmar — November 4-8

B15—November 10: *On Suffering and the Good*

Buddhist ethical teachings as part of a conceptual system and as experienced.

READING: Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, pp. 8-43

No Classes – November 11

B16–November 13: *The Monastic Life*

From contemplative discipline fuels activism—the recovering warrior as a witness for peace.

READING: Thomas, *At Hell's Gate*, chs 4-6

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – November 14-18

FIELD CLASS—November 15: “Witnessing War, Recovering Faith”

B17–November 20: *Prelude to the Holocaust*

The rise of fascism in the disappointments after World War I. The trauma of anti-Semitic violence and displacement. READING: Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, chs 1-16

No Classes – November 21

B18–November 23: *The Jewish Presence in China, Old and New*

Jewish communities along the Silk Road and in 19th-century treaty ports. Shanghai in the 1930s as a harbor for Jewish refugees from Nazi regimes. Jewish life in its wartime ‘ghetto.’

READING: Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, chs 17-29

Tobias, *Strange Haven*, ch 6

Shanghai, China – November 24-29

FIELD WORK ASSIGNMENT (see below). **FIELD CLASS REPORT** is due no later than **B20—December 8**.

B19–December 1: *Home in the Diaspora*

Survival in Shanghai, the Holocaust in Europe, North America as the new promised land.

READING: Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, chs 30-38

Kobe, Japan – December 2-6

B20–December 8 *Discussion of student projects*

B21–December 10: *Discussion of student projects*

CONCLUSION

B22–December 12: *Jesuit Missions in the Counter-Reformation*

A comparison of *The Samurai's* world with that of Luther. The suppression of Christianity under the early Tokugawa regime. READING: Endo, *Samurai*, pp. 1-100

B23–December 14: *The Politics of Conversion*

The interaction of personal belief with the Spanish Empire's concerns of commerce, authority, and power. READING: Endo, *Samurai*, pp. 100-200

Honolulu, Hawaii – December 16

B24–December 17: *Convictions and Returning Home*

As we return to the USA, reflections on how the samurai of Endo's story returned to their homelands and the testing of religious convictions they underwent there. Personal application for all members of the class? READING: Endo, *Samurai*, pp. 200-75

Study Day – December 19

B25–December 20: SUBMIT PAPER #4 (1500-1750 words)

Briefly analyze (2 pp.) *The Samurai* as an external and internal pilgrimage: a journey in the material world with all its pressures, enticements, hardships, and expectations, and simultaneously an exploration of the inner world of religious conviction and the forces to which it are subject, With that in mind, write about your own journey into religious understanding which you have undergone on this semester's voyage. (3-4 pp.) Here are two options; there are more. In either case, it will be helpful if you have kept a journal on the voyage that you can now consult to refresh your memory and track your progress.

1. Re-read your first paper. How would you alter it or add to it now? Did you encounter the frontiers you identified there? with what results? Or did you meet the entirely unexpected? What would you say are your new frontiers going forward?
2. Describe your reaction to some of the characters in *The Samurai*. Did you like/identify with them or not? Why or why not? What other characters have you met this term that you have found the most compelling or attractive? Explain.

If you would like to pursue another option, please discuss it with me before you begin work on it.

San Diego, California – December 23

FIELD WORK

Semester at Sea field experiences allow for an unparalleled opportunity to compare, contrast, and synthesize the different cultures and countries encountered over the course of the voyage. In addition to the one field class, students will complete independent field assignments that span multiple countries.

Field Class attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field class. Field Classes constitute at least 20% of the contact hours for each course, and are developed and led by the instructor.

Field Class & Assignment

The Field Class for this course will take place on Saturday, 18 November, in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Class title: The Vietnam War: Memory & Recovery

The Field Class for this course will be a guided tour of important sites in and around Ho Chi Minh City that relate to the American war in Vietnam. Having just read the account of Claude Anshin Thomas, a US Marine, of his participation in and recovery from that war, we will tour the Cu Chi tunnels, the War Remnants Museum, and the Xá Lợi Pagoda, a site of important anti-government protests in 1963. At the pagoda we will also observe and hear about the religious practices discussed in Thomas's book as his mode of overcoming the war's traumas.

The objectives for this tour will be

- to witness the sites and consequences of American war-making at one of its seminal 20th-century points.
- to encounter and reflect on the role that religion—especially Buddhism and Christianity—played in the onset and understanding of that war.
- to learn concretely how religious conversion and practice can work in overcoming the traumas of war and promoting work for peace.

Independent Field Work

1. Students will also visit the sites and memorials of the Jewish community that formed in Shanghai from the late 1930s to the late 1940s as a place of refuge from Nazi oppression in Europe. This entails a half-day tour including the Peace Hotel, the Hongkou district, and the Ohel Moshe Synagogue & Jewish Refugee Museum. These all figure in Vivian Jeanette Kaplan's *Ten Green Bottles*, the account of the Shanghai ghetto that we will have read prior to arriving in Shanghai.

Assignment: Students will create a **project** that reflects upon the Ho Chi Minh City and Shanghai tours as these enhance, alter, and/or challenge the picture of these places gained from the readings. This project can take the form of a typical course paper, or a photographic essay, or something else appropriate to the demands of the assignment. (Please clear your 'something else' with me prior to undertaking work on it.) The project must be completed and submitted no later than December 8 (B20). The projects will be presented in class on that day and on December 10 (B21) for discussion. Absorbing and reflecting on *everyone's* field experience will certainly enrich the learning we all glean from this part of the course.

2. Students are strongly urged to keep a **journal** detailing and reflecting on their on-shore experiences at the various stops along the voyage. As an aid to memory and a record of your own "pilgrim's progress," this material will add precision and depth to the personal assessment required in the final course paper. Ideally, journal entries should comment on how first-hand impressions compare to the learning and expectations gleaned from the course reading done prior to arrival at that port/country. How did the on-shore experience confirm, deepen, or correct what was imparted by the book? And how did it contribute to your ongoing reflections about your religious/spiritual/philosophical outlook?

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Class participation: regular attendance; informed contributions to class discussion.
15%

2. Paper #1, due September 20 (B3): autobiographical reflection. 10%
3. Papers #2, 3, and 4: due October 4 (B7), November 1 (B13), and December 20 (B25), respectively. Comparative analysis of assigned readings and class discussion. Papers #2 & 3: 15% each; Paper 4: 20%.
4. Field work project: due no later than December 8 (B20); 25%.

Students are strongly urged to keep a **journal** detailing and reflecting on their on-shore experiences at our various ports of call. As an aid to memory and a record of your own “pilgrim’s progress,” this material will add precision and depth to the personal assessment required in the final course paper. Ideally, journal entries should comment on how first-hand impressions compare to the learning and expectations gleaned from the course reading done prior to arrival at that port/country. How did the on-shore experience confirm, deepen, or correct what was imparted by the book? And how did it contribute to your ongoing reflections about your own religious/spiritual/philosophical outlook?

GRADING SCALE

The following Grading Scale is utilized for student evaluation. Pass/Fail is not an option for Semester at Sea coursework. Note that C-, D+ and D- grades are also not assigned on Semester at Sea in accordance with the grading system at Colorado State University (the SAS partner institution).

Pluses and minuses are awarded as follows on a 100% scale:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory/Poor</u>	<u>Failing</u>
97-100%: A+	87-89%: B+	77-79%: C+	Less than 60%:
93-96%: A	83-86%: B	70-76%: C	
90-92%: A-	80-82%: B-	60-69%: D	

ATTENDANCE/ENGAGEMENT IN THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Attendance in all Semester at Sea classes, including the Field Class, is mandatory. Students must inform their instructors prior to any unanticipated absence and take the initiative to make up missed work in a timely fashion. In the event of a conflict regarding this policy, individuals may appeal using established CSU procedures.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Semester at Sea provides academic accommodations for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, in accordance with ADA guidelines. Students who will need accommodations in a class, should contact ISE to discuss their individual needs. Any accommodation must be discussed in a timely manner prior to implementation.

A memo from the student’s home institution verifying the accommodations received on their home campus is required before any accommodation is provided on the ship. Students must submit this verification of accommodations to academic@isevoyages.org as soon as possible, but no later than two months prior to the voyage.

STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The foundation of a university is truth and knowledge, each of which relies in a fundamental manner upon academic integrity and is diminished significantly by academic misconduct. Academic integrity is conceptualized as doing and taking credit for one's own work. A pervasive attitude promoting academic integrity enhances the sense of community and adds value to the educational process. All within the University are affected by the cooperative commitment to academic integrity. All Semester at Sea courses adhere to this Academic Integrity Policy and Student Conduct Code.

Depending on the nature of the assignment or exam, the faculty member may require a written declaration of the following honor pledge: "I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."

RESERVE FILMS FOR THE LIBRARY

TITLE: "Gandhi,"
DIRECTOR: Richard Attenborough
DATE: 1982

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

AUTHOR: Sigmund Tobias
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Chapter 6: "A Yeshiva Student in Shanghai"
BOOK TITLE: *Strange Haven: A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Shanghai*
DATE: ISBN-13: 978-0252076244; 2008
PAGES: 60-74

AUTHOR: M. K. Gandhi
CHAPTER TITLE: "What Satyagraha Is"
BOOK TITLE: *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*
DATE: ISBN-13: 978-0486416069 (2001)
PAGES: 3-36

AUTHOR: Peter Harvey
CHAPTER TITLE: "The Shared Foundations of Buddhist Ethics"
BOOK TITLE: *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*
DATE: ISBN-13: 978-0521556408 (2000)
PAGES: 8-43