Soci 385 Religion and Society

DRAFT VERSION FROM FALL 2020: DATES NOT ADJUSTED FOR SPRING

Fall, 2020 Instructor: Lester Kurtz

Office Hours (G548 or online); Monday-Wednesday 1:30-3:00pm & by appointment Email: [lkurtz@gmu.edu](mailto:lkurtz@gmu.edu)

Providing an important study for understanding today’s headlines, "Religion and Society" surveys the world’s major religious traditions and introduces scholarly methods for the study of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective, with a sociological bent. It explores the nature of religious beliefs, rituals, and institutions, both historically and in the contemporary context. Of particular interest will be the way in which faith traditions form and change over time as they become increasingly cosmopolitan, and the relationship between those traditions and daily life, political and social conflicts, ethics, and the globalization of culture and society.

**TEXTS**

Lester Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective.* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 2015). Available free electronically through the GMU library at <https://tinyurl.com/y4t9j79o> or for purchase - **fourth edition** - see options at <https://tinyurl.com/y87xp5xk>. Readings not in this book are available on Blackboard or linked in the syllabus.

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| **Date** | **Topic** | **Assignments** |
|  | **i. Global Religious Life** |  |
|  | **ii. A Sociological Tour** |  |
|  | Types of Religious Traditions |  |
|  | South Asian Religions |  |
|  | East Asian Religions |  |
|  | Greek Religious Traditions |  |
|  | West Asia: Judaism |  |
|  | Christianity | 30 sept – 2 Oct. Chuseok |
|  | Islam | **5-6 Oct. Quiz 1** |
|  | Indigenous Religions |  |
|  | ***III. Religion in Everyday Life*** | Extra credit 1 due |
|  | Identity & Social Structure |  |
|  | Taboo Lines & the Ethical Life |  |
|  | **iv. Modernism, Multiculturalism** |  |
|  | Crisis of Modernism |  |
|  | Culture Wars | **11-12 Nov. Quiz 2** |
|  | Complementary Religious Movements | **Ritual Analysis Proposal Due 16 Nov.** |
|  | **v. Gods and Bombs** |  |
|  | Religious Conflict & Dialogue |  |
|  | Gods and Bombs |  |
|  | Aesthetics of Peace |  |
|  | Last class | **Ritual Analysis &**  **Extra Credit #2 Due** |
|  | When the final exam is  Scheduled by the university | **Quiz 3** |
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1. **RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE**

**GLOBAL VILLAGE**

**24 August**

**A. Social Scientific Perspectives on Religion**  
Gods in the Global Village, 1-23  
Randall Collins, "The Sociology of God." Pp.   
 30- 59 in Sociological Insight, by R. Collins   
 (NY: Oxford, 1982).

**26 August**

**B. Metaphors and Methods**

Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (selection)

Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols"

**C. The Three Pillars**

*Gods in the Global Village,* 23-44.

Somé, Malidoma Patrice. Ritual: Power, Healing and Community. Portland, OR: Swan/Raven, 1993) pp. 93-115.

Rumi, “Moses and the Shepherd,” *The Essential Rumi,* tr. Coleman Barks (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1977), 165-168. Available online at <http://elizaphanian.blogspot.com/2006/03/moses-and-shepherd-rumi.html>

**II. THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS:   
A SOCIOLOGICAL TOUR**

**2 September**

**A. Types of Religious Traditions**  
Gods in the Global Village, 45-53

**7** **September**

**B. South Asian Religions: Hinduism and Jainism**  
Gods in the Global Village, 53-69  
 "Krishna's Epiphany," Bhagavad Gita, XI, (selections)

Shakunthala Jagannathan, Hinduism (Bombay:   
Vakils, Feffer & Simons, 1984), pp. 63-81.

**9-16 September**

**C. East Asian Religions: Buddhism**  
*Gods in the Global Village*, 69-76

"To Each Generation the Tathagata Announces His Name and Declares that He Has Entered Nirvana." Saddharmapundarika, XV, 268-7 *Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, edited by E. A. Burtt. (NY: New American Library Mentor, 1955), pp. 43-47.

"The Bodhisattva's Infinite Compassion," Shik shasamuiccaya, 280-2 ["Vajradhvaha-sutra"]  
*Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, edited by E. A. Burtt. (NY: New American Library Mentor, 1955), pp. 27-32, 36-43.

**14 September**

**D. Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto**  
Gods in the Global Village, 76-83

Confucius, *The Analects* (selections)

**16 September**

Chuang Tzu "The Pivot." Pp. 42-43 in *The Way of*

*Chuang Tzu,* Thomas Merton, ed. (NY: New Directions, 1964)

*The Sayings of Lao Zi*, ed. by Tsai Chih Chung; tr. by Koh Kok Kiang and Wong Lit Khiong. (Singapore: Asiapac, 1989), 36-52.

Chuang Tzu, "The Fasting of the Heart." Pp. 50-

53 in *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Thomas Merton, ed. (NY: New Directions, 1964).

Hardacre, Helen. “Introduction.” Pp. 1-17 in *Shinto* Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016. Available online at [DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190621711.001.0001](https://tinyurl.com/y4ntp8my)

**Quiz 1**

**21 September**

**E. Ancient Greek Religion**

*Gods in the Global Village*, 87-93

**F. Judaism**

*Gods in the Global Village*, 93-101

Abraham Heschel, "The Sabbath" (from Judaism, Ed. by Arthur Hertzberg (NY: Braziller, 1962), 118-19.

**23-28 September**

**G. Christianity**

Gods in the Global Village, 87-93

Rohr, Fr. Richard. “What Do We Do with the Bible?” Center for Action and Contemplation, January 6, 2019.<https://cac.org/what-do-we-do-with-the-bible-2019-01-06/>.

Christian Scripture Selections

**30 September Moon Harvest Festival**

**[Informal ritual ethnographies? No class]**

**5-7 October**

**H. Islam**

*Gods in the Global Village*, 110-128 (finish the rest of chapter 3)

**7 October**

Selections from the Qur’an in *The Essential Koran,* translated and presented by Thomas Cleary (Edison, NY: Castle Books), 44-49, 82-93

Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, “Mercy: The Stamp of Creation”

Rumi, “What Jesus Runs Away From,” in *The Essential Rumi,* tr. Coleman Barks (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1977), 204-5; “Joy at Sudden Disappointment” *The Essential Rumi,* 168-171; “Moses and the Shepherd,” available online at <http://theislamicmonthly.com/moses-and-the-shepherd/>

**12 October [“Indigenous People’s Day” (USA)]**

**I. Indigenous Religions**

*Gods in the Global Village,* Chapter 4

Kim, Andrew Eungi. “Nonofficial Religion in South Korea: Prevalence of Fortunetelling and Other Forms of Divination.” *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 3 (2005): 284–302. Available online at <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512557>.

**III. RELIGION & EVERYDAY LIFE**

**14 October**

1. **Identity and Social Structure**

Readings

Gods in the Global Village, 151-171

Huang, Grace Hui-Chen, and Mary Gove. “Confucianism, Chinese Families, and Academic Achievement: Exploring How Confucianism and Asian Descendant Parenting Practices Influence Children’s Academic Achievement.” *Science Education in East Asia*, 2015, 41–66. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16390-1_3>.

**19 October**

"Muhammad as Model and Guide" (from Islam, ed. by John Alden Williams [NY: George Braziller, 1962], pp. 84-87).

Lawrence Lucas, Black Priest/White Church (NY: Random House, 1970), pp. 11-41.

Shakunthala Jagannathan, Hinduism (Bombay: Vakils, Feffer & Simons, 1984), pp. 54-62.

Colossians 4

**21 October**

1. **Taboo Lines, Ethics, Sexuality, & Economics**

Gods in the Global Village, 171-210

Exodus 20-21

2 April Statement: Realizing the World We all Want and Spiritual Leaders’ Statement

Baba Metzia 85a from Judaism, ed. by Arthur Hertzberg (NY: Braziller, 1962), 200.

Jesus, "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5)

*Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha,* edited by E. A. Burtt. (NY: New American Library Mentor, 1955), pp. 58-61.

**26 October**

Max Weber, Economy and Society (NY: Bedminster, 1968), 592-607

Purushottama Bilimoria, Christopher Key Chapple, & Peter Wong Yih Jiun, with assistance of Maxine Haire**, “**Eastern Ethical Traditions.” *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, Lester R. Kurtz, ed. Elsevier, 2008.

**28 October**

**IV. MODERNISM AND MULTICULTURALISM**

**A. The Crisis of Modernism**

Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 6.

Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, tr. by W. D. Robson-Scott (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, [1927]), selections.

Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction." Pp. 11-23 in T*he Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. by R. C. Tucker (NY: W.W. Norton, 1972).

**2 November**

Max Assimeng, "Crisis, Identity and Integration in African Religion." Pp. 97-118 in Identity and Religion, ed. by Hans Mol (London: Sage, 1978).

**9 November**

L. R. Kurtz, "The Politics of Heresy." American Journal of Sociology 88 (1983):1085-1115.

**11-12 November Quiz 2**

**11 November**

**B. Culture Wars**

Riane Eisler, "Dark Order out of Chaos: From the Chalice to the Blade." Pp. 42-58 in *The Chalice and the Blade* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

Ernesto Cardenal, ed., The Gospel in Solentiname (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 70-86.

Ch’oe Kil-song, “The Origins of the US Army’s Korean Comfort Women”[Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact](http://www.sdh-fact.com/) <http://www.sdh-fact.com/book-article/590/>

**16 November**

**C. Religious Syncretism and Complementary**

**Religious Movements**

Gods in the Global Village, Ch. 7

Charles Prebish, "Reflections on the Transmission of Buddhism to America." Pp. 153-172 in Understanding the New Religions, ed. by J. Needleman and G. Baker (New York: Seabury, 1978).

Mary Jo Neitz, "In Goddess We Trust." Pp. 353-372 in In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America, ed. by T. Robbins and D. Anthony (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1990).

Tissa Balasuriya, "Appendix: Extract from the Statement on the Consultation on African and Asian Spirituality, Colombo, 18-25 June 1992." Pp. 131-143 in *Any Room for Christ in Asia*? ed. by Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo. (London: SCM Press, 1993) (Winter, 1967)

**V. GODS AND BOMBS**

**18 November**

1. **Religion Conflict & Dialogue**  
   Gods in the Global Village, Ch. 8

**23 November**

Lester R. Kurtz, “Warriors and Pacifists: Dilemmas, Paradoxes, Alternatives,” Chapter 16 in *The Warrior and the Pacifist: Competing Motifs in Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity,* edited by L. R. Kurtz. New York: Routledge, 2018.

**16 November**

1. **Gods and Bombs**

Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), Ch. 1.

*Afra Jalabi,* Making Peace with Islam: The Muslim as Peacemaker 195-215 in *The Warrior and the Pacifist: Competing Motifs in Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity,* edited by L. R. Kurtz. New York: Routledge, 2018

**27 May**

Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Nonviolence" and "Love vs. War and Dictators." Pp. 152-162, 325-336 in *The Essential Gandhi*, ed. by Louis Fischer (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

**1 June**

**B. Aesthetics of Peace**

Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Power of Nonviolence." Pp. in A Testament of Hope, ed. J. M. Washington. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

**3 JUNE RITUAL ANALYSIS DUE**

**3 June Last Class Session - Extra credit #2 Due**

## [Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-awraham-soetendorp) “Retrieving G-d's Hidden Rays of Light: A Global Partnership Is Emerging.” *Huffington Post* 15 Aug. 2010. Available at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-awraham-soetendorp/retrieving-the-hidden-ray_b_680412.html>

Lester Kurtz, “Dalai Lama Darshan” ***Ahimsa Nonviolence*** 1 (September-October 2005): 439-443. Available online at <http://works.bepress.com/lester_kurtz/>

Chuang Tzu, "The Useless"

**TBA (final exam time) QUIZ 3**

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the course, participants should have a basic knowledge of the central beliefs, rituals, and institutions of the world’s major faith traditions and an ability to use sociological tools to study and analyze them, as well as to understand the dynamic inter-relations between religion and society.

Each participant will (1) observe a **religious ritual** and write an analysis of it (including writing a proposal for that research project); (2) take **three online quizzes**; (3) write a series of 10 short reflection papers related to their ritual analysis paper, some of which can be included directly in the final paper, and (4) participate in a 30-minute group **class presentation** introducing one of the world’s major religious traditions.

More information will be made available early in the course. In calculating the course grade, each assignment will be weighted as follows:

Assignment Percent

Quiz #1 10

Quiz #2 10  
 Quiz #3 10

Reflection papers 10

Class presentation 10

Research proposal 15  
 Ritual analysis 35

[Class Participation extra credit]

**CLASS PROTOCOLS**

Mutual respect and flexibility are the basic guidelines for this course – or, perhaps more appropriately, let’s treat each other according to the Golden or Silver Rule – “**Do unto others as you would have them do until you**” or “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.”

That’s really all we need. But to elaborate on their meaning:

* **Treat everyone with respect and care** – remember that there is a lot of stress in the pandemic, so be respectful and thoughtful. Treat everyone’s ideas as worthy and their selves as important and valid. Let’s create as much of a community as possible in this difficult situation.
* If someone you recognize in the class is not participating, reach out to them. If there is no response, please let me know.
* **Bring your laptops to class** when we met face to face so we can experiment with participatory discussions while socially distanced.
* **Turn on your camera** when you are online, either in class or when working with a group. We are all gaining valuable skills about how to live and work in an online environment – take advantage of it and contribute to your own and everyone else’s uplift and learning.
* **Keep in touch** with me if you have questions, struggles, suggestions or complaints.

**QUIZZES**

The quizzes for the class will consist of multiple choice questions on major issues presented in readings and class discussions and are not comprehensive. They will be taken online, posted on Blackboard in the assignments folder. The first quiz will include material from readings and class presentations from the beginning of the semester until the class day before the exam; the second exam will include material from after first quiz until the date of the second, and so on until the last class day for the third quiz.

**REFLECTION PAPERS**

Reflection papers are due almost weekly for a minimum of 10 (during the 15 weeks of the semester). Although you will get feedback, your grade for this assignment will be based on the following scale:

10+ papers A

8-9 papers B

6-7 papers C

4-5 papers D

These reflections should provide analysis of class readings and discussions, as well as scholarly sources related to your ritual analysis paper. Some of them may therefore be incorporated into that paper at the end of the term, especially those related to the faith tradition you are studying and the sources for your background research. **The first five must be submitted by 30 October and the additional five by 9 December.**

**CLASS PRESENTATIONS**

Groups from the class will make 30-minute presentations in class that introduce basic beliefs, rituals, and institutions each of the major religions. We will organize these groups during the second class session based on your preferences.

**RITUAL ANALYSIS**

The ritual analysis for the course project or for extra credit should analyze a worship celebration in a tradition other than the author's own - **please see the guide posted on Blackboard**. The paper has two components – a literature review and an ethnographic element. Because of the pandemic, most will have to do a “virtual ethnography,” that involves finding an online ritual that answers the questions we are trying to answer (see more details in the ritual analysis guide on Blackboard).

Look for ways in which the religious group's worldview and key myths are acted out in the community's ethos. Examine the ritual in terms of the characteristics of rituals discussed in class: What problem(s) do(es) the ritual solve? How is it rooted in the experience of the community performing it? What social and doctrinal boundaries are marked out, and what evil is denounced? How are social structures reinforced by the ritual? Note how the ritual addresses the major themes of the course. If possible, analyze the effects of the participants' social status, ethnicity, gender, etc., on the content and form of the ritual.

The assignment will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of the description of the ritual (the tradition, what was done, who participated, the setting and its symbolic props, etc.) and the analysis of it (discussion of its sociological significance, identification of the problem the ritual addresses, the beliefs, institutions, ethical implications, etc. embedded in the ritual). Some arrangements will be made for members of the class to attend a religious ritual together, if interest warrants our doing so and it becomes safe before the end of the COVID Semester #2.

**EXTRA CREDIT OPTIONS**

Participants are encouraged to do a maximum of two extra credit projects which give you a chance to explore sources and experiences we do not have time to cover formally in the course -- and to improve your grade. Most projects should take the form of a short paper that analyzes (rather than simply summarizes) speeches, films, books, articles, or other events appropriate to the course. You may also use a major essay topic for an exam in which you do not write the essay, or to analyze a ritual that you do not use for your course project. You are especially encouraged to undertake interviews or attend worship celebrations of religious traditions other than your own. Papers should provide a critique and application of issues and ideas discussed in the course. Readings, films, etc. that are an assigned part of the course are not, of course, acceptable for extra credit.

**DUE DATES:** 14 October and 7 December

You may, or course, turn them in prior to the due dates, but not before the last class day

**LENGTH: 1,000-1,500 words**

**GRADING:**

You will be given 3-5 points on a 100-point scale for each paper that meets the requirements of the assignment. The points will be added to a quiz score.

**Official Mason Nation**

**Special Syllabus Supplement for COVID-19:**

**Fall 2020**

In the interest of everyone’s safety, students and faculty must follow these guidelines during the Fall 2020 semester.

1. Use the basement entrance to enter and exit Mason’s building. Your temperature will be screened each time you enter the building. Allow additional time before class to complete the entrance screening procedure. Carry your student ID card with you at all times and be ready to show it when you enter and exit the building. Do not prop doors or let others enter the building through doors on the ground floor.
2. Wear a face mask at all times. Remain 6 feet apart from others. Clean your seat and desk space with disinfectant wipes before you begin class. Use hand sanitizer regularly, and avoid shaking hands or other forms of physical contact. Do not share pens, pencils or other personal items. Limit your use of the elevators, and use stairs to travel between floors of the building. Students are expected to purchase their own masks for personal use.  Disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer will be available in each classroom.
3. Classrooms are marked to indicate appropriate seating to allow for social distancing. Only sit in allowable seats, and maintain current set-up of classroom furniture. If you are asked to re-arrange classroom furniture by your professor for in-class exercises, return furniture to its original position when you are finished.
4. Observe these rules at all times during the class period and while in Mason’s building or other public areas of the campus.  This includes during class breaks, in small group work (in or out of class), meetings with your professors during office hours, tutoring sessions at the Academic Resource Center, socializing in common areas, or any other activities on campus.
5. Make sure windows and doors remain open during the class period to promote circulation of outside air.  Classrooms without windows have mechanical systems that vent air, but doors should be kept open at all times.
6. The safest option for studying is to study alone in your dorm room or at home.  If you must study in the building, alone or in groups, observe these rules at all times.
7. All faculty and students must abide by these rules in the classroom. If you see others who are not observing the rules outside the classroom, you may report this to your instructor, student affairs or academic affairs.
8. Do not enter the Mason building or come to class if you have symptoms such as fever, chills, sore throat, persistent cough, shortness of breath or other respiratory difficulties.  If you must miss class for this reason, send an email immediately to the professor prior to the beginning of class. You will not be penalized for missing class for this reason, but you may be asked to provide documentation that you sought medical diagnosis or treatment.  You are responsible for making up any missed assignments or tests as a result of your absence.
9. Students who come to class with visible signs of illness will be asked to leave the classroom immediately and seek assistance from the IGC Health Clinic. Faculty will report your name and symptoms to the Office of Student Affairs ([mksa@gmu.edu](mailto:mksa@gmu.edu)) to confirm that you have sought medical assistance.
10. Failure to comply with any of these guidelines may result in disciplinary action through the Student Code of Conduct.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

GMUK is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification. Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at <http://ods.gmu.edu>. We want to accommodate your challenges and encourage your academic success.

**FREE SPEECH/VIOLENCE-FREE ZONE**

**The classroom should be a space where everyone and their ideas are respected.** All participants should speak and act freely in the classroom, but with respect for others and the standards of academic pursuit of truth. As a faculty member, I am required by university policy to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason Korea's Deputy Title IX Coordinator pursuant to University Policy 1202 and 1412. If you would like to speak confidentially with the Mason Korea student counselor, please see

<https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/mksa/services/counseling/> for more information. For more information about what Title IX is, please see

<https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/mksa/services/tix/>.

**OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES**

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER

The GMUK Academic Resource Center can look at your papers and problems to improve your academic achievement in the area of Writing, Mathematics, Accounting, Statistics, and Economics. You are invited to utilize the faculty and student tutor services at a variety of stages in your academic activities, checking to see that your project specifically meets the directions specified by your instructor. While tutors are ‘fixing’ your writing or projects, they do help you become conscious of particular error patterns that emerge in your work. For more information, please contact Professor Eunmee Lee, director of Academic Resource Center ([elee45@gmu.edu](mailto:elee45@gmu.edu), office #521)

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Access the George Mason University library resources at  <http://library.gmu.edu/> and the IGC library at <http://lib.igc.or.kr/>. See the sociology subject guide and contact information for our librarian, Andrew Lee, at <https://infoguides.gmu.edu/sociology>.

COUNSELING AND WELLNESS SERVICES

Your wellbeing is important to GMUK and to me. Please let me know if you are having personal issues that affect your performance in the course. If you would like professional guidance in working through them, please see information about free professional counseling services available to GMUK students at

<https://masonkorea.gmu.edu/mksa/services/counseling/>

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.