



MACQUARIE CHRISTIAN STUDIES INSTITUTE
UNIT OUTLINE

1. Unit Code and Title:

MCSI 815 [IN719] Religions of the World within Contemporary Society

2. Credit Points:

4 Credit Points at 800 level

3. Name of Unit Convenor and Key Teacher:

Dr. John P. Dickson, B.Th. (Hon 1), Moore Theological College, Sydney; Ph.D., Department of Ancient History, Macquarie University, Sydney. Honorary Associate: Department of Ancient History (Macquarie University).

4. Unit Description / Calendar Entry:

In an increasingly multi-cultural and pluralistic society students work, play and live alongside others whose religious tradition is different. This unit assists students to gain an appreciation of the rich Christian and other religious traditions which have shaped their own lives and the lives of others in the Australian and global community. It develops competency in understanding the Australian and global religious context and the scholarly study of 'religion'. It engages in unbiased reflection on the faith traditions of the world community. It applies a theological framework to the challenge of pluralism in the modern Christian context.

5. Alignment with the MCSI Vision:

- Develops competency in understanding the Australian religious context and the scholarly study of 'religion'.
- Engages in unbiased reflection on the faith traditions of the world community.
- Applies a theological framework to the challenge of pluralism in the modern Christian context.

6. Pre-requisites / Co-requisites / Exclusions:

Exclusions: MCSI 215, MCSI 315, IN 437, EM 421

7. Unit Objectives:

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- (a) Discuss the nature of 'religion' and its contribution to life in Australia and the world from the perspective of modern sociology and philosophy.
- (b) Compare the beliefs and texts of the five religions studied and the ways in which these beliefs are manifested in work and everyday life.
- (c) Describe the historical context and connectedness of the major religions.
- (d) Evaluate modern Christian responses to the problems and potentialities of religious pluralism poses for Christian belief.

8. Unit Content /Lecture Topics

- a. **What is 'religion' and how do we understand it?** The insights of philosophy and sociology.
- b. **Hinduism** Historical origins of Indian religion up to the time of the Vedas. Beliefs, texts and practices of 'classical' Hinduism.
- c. **Buddhism:** Origins of Buddhism, life of the 'Buddha' and his relation to Hinduism. Beliefs, practices and sects of Buddhism.
- d. **Judaism:** the birth of a 'nation' and of a religion. Beliefs, texts and sects of Judaism.
- e. **Christianity:** from Jesus to the New Testament. The history and beliefs of the Christian 'church'.
- f. **Islam:** Muhammad from Mecca to Medina and back again. Beliefs, practices and sects of Islam.
- g. **Religious pluralism as a 'problem' for Christianity:** the challenge of multiple claims.
- h. **Jesus as a 'problem' for religious pluralism:** the nature of Christian truth claims.
- i. **Problems and potentialities:** the "touchpoints" between Christianity and other religions: areas of potential harmony and disagreement.

9. Assessment:

- a. Seminar participation(10%)
- b. 3500 word research essay comparing AND contrasting any two of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. Reference to primary texts is essential. (40%).
- c. Exam (2 hours): Students will be given a selection of scriptural passages from the five course readers. They will choose 4 passages from four different Faiths (one of which must be Christian) and write a brief exposition of the text being careful to explain also how the themes contained in it relate to the broader beliefs of the religion. (30%)
- d. Because this unit is being presented in the same class as undergraduate students, postgraduate students are required to show evidence of reading of journal articles which are not expected to be read at undergraduate level. As students prepare for assignments they will need to show that they have read 250 journal pages and submit an analysis of what has been read in the form of a brief essay or a reading report of 1,500 words. (20%)

10. Details of Presentation:

- a. standard format of 2 hours class contact per week over 13 weeks.
- b. *intensive or alternate mode* format. These formats involve 26 hours of class contact offered in block periods of varying size that extend up to 10 weeks (typically seven days of 3 hours per day followed by another day of 5 hours after 7 weeks) . Students are given adequate time to reflect on the material presented in class before submitting major assignments. 500 pages pre-reading is required.
- c. Distance (online) mode that includes all or some of the following: weekly online discussions/tutorials, teleconferences, and on-campus sessions.
- d. In all formats, teaching will include lectures, seminars, presentations, student-led case studies, tutorials, reading and reflection exercises, and audio/video components.

11. Suggested reading

- a. Biardeau, M., *Hinduism: the Anthropology of a Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- b. Bowker, J. (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- c. Esposito, J. L., *Islam: the Straight Path*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- d. Harvey, P., *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- e. McGrath, A. E., *An Introduction to Christianity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- f. Neusner, J., *The Way of Torah: an Introduction to Judaism* (sixth edition). Belmont: Wadsworth, 1997.
- g. Newbigin, L., *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989.
- h. Smart, N., *The World's Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- i. Taliaferro, C. C., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- j. Zaehner, R. C., *Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Primary Texts

- a. *Babylonian Talmud*, book 1 (vol. 1), tractate *Shabbat 7* (Translated by Michael L. Rodkinson. Boston: Boston New Talmud Publishing Company, 1903
- b. Carter, J. R. et al, *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha Sutta Pitaka* . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000
- c. Goodall, D., *Hindu Scriptures*. Berkeley: University of California, 1996.
- d. Gotshalk, R., *Bhagavad Gita: Translation and Commentary*. Delhi: Banarsidass, 1985,
- e. *Hadith*. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (trans.), *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Sahih Al-Bukhari: Arabic-English*. Riyadh (Saudi Arabia): Maktaba Dar-us-Salam Publishers and Distributors, 1994.
- f. Horner, I. B., *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, vols. 1, 2, 3 London: The Pali Text Society, 1989
- g. O'Flaherty, Wendy B. *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.
- h. *Quran*. Majid Fakhry (ed. and trans.), *An Interpretation of the Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings, a Bilingual Edition*. New York: New York University Press, 2004.
- i. Rahula, W., *What the Buddha Taught . Sutta Pitaka*. New York: Grove Press, 1974,
- j. *Siddur* or Jewish Prayer Book (The Complete ArtScroll Siddur. New York: Mesorah Publications, 2001
- k. Smart, N. and Hecht, R., *Sacred Texts of the World: a universal anthology*. New York: Crossroad, 2002
- l. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985
- m. *The Bible* New International Version. International Bible Society, 1984
- n. *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988
- o. *The Works of the Emperor Julian* vol. 3. Loeb Classical Library 157
- p. W. Schneemelcher (ed.), R. McL. Wilson (trans.) *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*. vol. 1. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991
- q. Warren, H. C., *Buddhism in Translation (Sutta Pitaka)* . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1900