

Global Religions in Context (IS XXX)

Dr. Charles Farhadian
Department of Religious Studies
Westmont Global Semester
Credit Hours: 4
Fall of 2025

CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of global religions, including histories, texts, and philosophies from countries around the world, this course examines the expression and experience of various major religions in their local and global contexts. Focus will be on South Asian Religions, Mediterranean and West Asian Religions (EMWAR), Islamic Studies, and Christianity, focusing on the religious practices and formations that span the globe. Keeping an eye on origins as well as configurations of global religions, the course will consider competing and complementary value systems and worldviews that circulate worldwide through channels of religious faith and practice. The course approaches religious traditions empathetically while upholding Christian uniqueness. Since this is a travel course, students will be exposed to readings, discussions, and interactions as observers and sometimes participants of global religions. This is a General Education course that satisfies the "Thinking Globally" component of the curriculum. There are no prerequisites for this course.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this course, students should expect to be able to:

1. Describe the similarities and differences between the global religions.
2. Analyze the contributions of religions to society, culture, and to personal and communal betterment. Analyze drawbacks to how religions might curtail these domains.
3. Analyze Christian uniqueness in the context of global religions.

BOOKS

All or selections of the following books are required E-Texts (must be purchased for a Kindle-compatible device), or selections will be digitized for students.

In addition to the books listed below, handouts will be provided on Canvas.

General books to provide brief overviews and global extension of religions:

Nile Green, *Global Islam: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

China

Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Contemporary Issues in Asia and the Pacific) (Stanford University Press, 2010).

Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Vietnam

Reg Reimer, *Vietnam's Christians: A Century of Growth in Adversity* (William Carey Publishing, 2011).

Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (Anchor, 2017).

Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (University of California Press, 1993)

Philip Taylor, *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007).

India

Heather Elgood, "Exploring the Roots of Village Hinduism in South Asia," *The Archeology of Hinduism* (Routledge, 2004).

Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Living Water and Indian Bowl, Dayananda Bharati (William Carey Publishing)

Saudi Arabia

Krithika Varagur, *The Call: Inside the Global Saudi Religious Project* (Columbia University, Columbia Global Reports, 2020).

Karen Elliot House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines – and Future* (Vintage, 2013).

Israel/Jordan

Michael Scott-Baumann, *The Shortest History of Israel and Palestine: From Zionism to Intifadas and the Struggle for Peace* (The Experiment, 2023).

Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (IVP, 2020).

Greece

Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity* (Penguin, 2015).

Turkey (short visit)

A. Özdemir, *Visible Islam in Modern Turkey* (Palgrave, 2000).

Mehmet Bardakci, et al., *Religious Minorities in Turkey: Alevi, Armenians, and Syriacs and the Struggle to Desecuritize Religious Freedom* (Palgrave, 2017).

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

C. Xueting Ni, *From Kuan Yin to Chairman Mao: The Essential Guide to Chinese Deities* (Weiser Books 2018).

David Rundell, *Vision or Mirage: Saudi Arabia at the Crossroads* (I. B. Tauris, 2021).

Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Zondervan, 2018)

Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah or Jesus?* (Zondervan, 2016)

Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Oneworld Publications, 1999).

A. Yuet Chau, *Religion in China: Ties that Bind* (Polity Press, 2019).

Douglas Jacobsen, *Global Gospel: An Introduction to Christianity on Five Continents* (Baker Academic 2015).

Charles Farhadian, *Introducing World Christianity* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

Charles Farhadian, *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Calvin Institute of Christian Liturgical Studies) (Eerdmans, 2007).

Fenggang Yang, *Christian Social Action and Rule of Law in Chinese Societies* (Studies in Christianity in China) (Lehigh University Press, 2021).

David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

Mary Lou Codman-Wilson and Qin Zhou, *Supracultural Gospel: Bridging East and West* (William Carey Publishing, 2022).

P. De Neui (ed.), *Emerging Faith: Lessons from Mission History in Asia* (William Carey Publishing, 2020).

Miriam Adeney, *Refugee Diaspora* (William Carey Publishing, 2018).

Geoff Hartt, M. Ortiz, M. Böhm, *Ambassadors of Reconciliation* (William Carey Publishing, 2023).

Tenzin Lakhpa, *Leaving Buddha: A Tibetan Monk's Encounter with the Living God* (Whitaker House, 2019).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation (10%). Attendance is mandatory and subject to the policies of Westmont College. Failure to appear for any examination will result in an “F” for that examination. Attendance involves not only physical presence, but also active participation in class, discussions, and fieldtrips. Students will be lead in-class discussions and provide handouts.

Handouts should be formatted as follows: a) write name of article and author on top of page, along with name of presenter; b) provide a 1–2-page summary of the article; you may use narrative, bullet points, or a combination. Be sure to highlight quotations that are important; c) provide 2-3 questions at the bottom of the page for possible class discussion; d) make enough copies for our entire class for your day’s discussion. These handouts will serve as a review packet for the examinations.

2. One Paper (15%). The paper will be graded on the basis of content, grammar, style, and presentation (see *Grading Information* and *Instructions for Paper Formatting* sections below). Rules regarding plagiarism will be strictly enforced. Papers should be 1500 words in length. Please italicize all book titles (except for names of sacred texts) and foreign words. Note: as a reminder, backup all your work, especially your papers, as extensions will not be given due to computer problems.

Commented [CF1]: SLO: students will be able to describe and analyze the dynamics of a particular religion across cultural and regional boundaries; demonstrate through writing substantial engagement of trans-regional connections.

3. Case study presentation (15%). Students will work in pairs to present a case study to the class once toward the end of the semester. The case study will compare and contrast religions and cultures in at least two locations in which we have ventured. Further details on this assignment will be provided in class.

Commented [CF2]: SLO: students will be able to describe, analyze and compare a feature of Christianity and religion across cultural and regional boundaries; explore the ethical demands for Christians in light of these differences and similarities.

3. Two Examinations (30%). Each examination counts for 15% toward your course grade.

Commented [CF3]: The first examination will require the demonstration of knowledge of trans-regional connections of religions as well as inclusion of multiple perspectives arising from these connections; e.g., how does culture and status as majority or minority religionist impact the self-understanding and practice of religious people?

4. Final Examination (30%).

The second examination will evaluate students' knowledge of the global processes that help to give shape to the various world religions.

GRADING SCALE

The final grade for all assignments, exams, discussions, educational experiences, and attendance and participation, will be determined by the following:

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|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 100-95: A | 89-86: B+ | 79-76: C+ | 69-66: D+ | Below 60: F |
| 94-90: A- | 85-83: B | 75-73: C | 65-63: D | |
| | 82-80: B- | 72-70: C- | 62-60: D- | |

Commented [CF4]: The final examination will require students to evaluate the impact of global processes on the world religions as well as to describe how a Christian ethic provides guidance and resources to engage an increasingly modern, globalized world.

GRADING INFORMATION

Grading criteria include correctness, completeness, precision, depth, grammar, presentation, and coherence of your answer. The importance of the argument is also important in evaluating papers. The following is a brief explanation of how I distinguish among grades.

100-90%: Superior work that involves something more than mere competence. This work entails depth of analysis, imaginative insight, careful synthesis of the material, and an attention to detail that hints at a nuanced and subtle analysis. This level work requires superb grammar, presentation, and content. This level of work is distinguished from lower levels by its qualitative difference.

89-80%: Good work that is solid, on target, and competent. It does not mislead. This level work states the important points and explains them adequately and competently. Work at this level attends carefully to the assignment, fulfilling each component of it. In examinations this requires answering the question in full. In papers it means exploring a carefully delineated topic or text as carefully and as fully as space allows.

79-70%: Acceptable but flawed work. This work may be flawed in different respects: missing the target, not quite seeing the point, misunderstanding what the question asks for, struggling for clarity. The work still demonstrates a grappling with the material and ideas in a plausible manner. In examinations, such work may make ambiguous points or use imprecise terms and concepts. Such work typically does not construct arguments well or misses some crucial points implied in the question. This level of work still evidences a general sense of the issues and a capacity to think about them. This level essay frequently is quite short in length.

69-60%: Unacceptable but passing work. This work usually demonstrates only a rudimentary awareness of the issues or problems, but even this is often confused by acute writing difficulties or an inattentiveness to the question. This level essay is typically quite short.

59-50%: Unacceptable and unpassable work.

INSTRUCTION FOR PAPER FORMATTING

1. In the upper left-hand corner type your name, the date, the course number, and the number of words in the paper. Never use a cover sheet.
2. Two lines down, centered, type the title of your paper; use Times New Roman 12-point font.
3. Follow MLA formatting.
4. Set your line spacing to double.
5. Use one-inch margins on all sides.
6. Do not use contractions (unless in original quotation). (Don't.)
7. Place page numbers in the lower center of all pages, except the first.
8. Italicize book titles and non-English words (no need to underline)
9. Write the paper as though the reader knows nothing of the material. You will need to define terms.
10. Email the paper directly to me in either WORD or PAGES format (not PDF).

OTHER

1. Westmont College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students who have been diagnosed with a disability are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the Office of Disability Services. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your equal access to this course. Please contact Seth Miller, Director of Disability Services (310A Voskuyl Library, 565-6286) or visit the website for more information: <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability>.

2. Writers' Corner at Westmont, the campus writing center, is an academic support service free for all students. Peer tutors are available to help you with invention (getting started), arrangement (getting organized), style, genres of writing, thesis statements, paragraph development and structure, integrating sources, and common citation styles. One-on-one tutorials are held in Voskuyl Library (VL 215). Open hours are typically from 4-11 p.m. on Monday through Thursday and from 6-11 p.m. on Sunday. Drop-ins are welcome, though keep in mind that the writing center will be busier during peak times of the semester (before mid-term and each holiday break) as well as later in the evening (9-11 p.m.). For more information, visit the writing center website: (<http://www.westmont.edu/academics/departments/english/writers-corner.html>). Please keep the international time zone differences in mind as you engage their office.

3. Role will be taken at the beginning of each class period. Failure to appear for an examination will result in an “F” for that examination.
4. Lectures may not be recorded, unless with the permission of the professor.
5. Please check Canvas for handouts.
6. Please do not use computers or cell phones in class. If you need to use your cell phone, please leave the classroom or wait until break. Be fully human.
7. Please contact the professor if you have any questions or concerns: farhadian@westmont.edu.
8. Be happy in class. (Countless people around the world would give up everything to be sitting in your seat to learn. You will see many of these eager students in our travels.)

Reading Schedule

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|---------------------|---|
| Week 1 | |
| China | <i>Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule: “Regulating Religion under Communism”; “The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion”; “The Shortage Economy of Religion under Communism”</i> |
| Week 2 | |
| China | <i>Constructing China’s Jerusalem: “Putting Christianity and Capitalism in Their Place”; “The Rise of ‘Boss Christians’ and Their Engagement with State Power”; “Conversion to Urban Citizenship: Rural Migrant Workers’ Participation in Wenzhou Christianity”</i> |
| Week 3 | |
| Vietnam | 1. <i>Vietnam’s Christians: A Century of Growth in Adversity</i> 2. <i>When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman’s Journey from War to Peace</i> |
| Week 4 | |
| Vietnam | Philip Taylor, <i>Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam</i> (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007). |
| Week 5 | |
| India | 1. Heather Elgood, “Exploring the Roots of Village Hinduism in South Asia,” <i>The Archeology of Hinduism</i> (Routledge, 2004) 2. Gavin Flood, <i>An Introduction to Hinduism</i> (Cambridge University Press, 1996) |
| Week 6 | |
| India | <i>Living Water and Indian Bowl</i> , Dayananda Bharati (William Carey Publishing) |
| Week 7 | |
| Saudi Arabia | <i>The Call: Inside the Global Saudi Religious Project: “Introduction”; “Oil Money in the Indonesian Archipelago”; “The Intolerance Factory”; “Rebel Imams”; “Many Calls”</i> |
| Week 8 | |
| Saudi Arabia | Karen Elliot House, <i>On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines – and Future: “Fragile”; “Al Saud Survival Skills”; “Islam: Dominance and Divided”; “Females and Fault Lines”; “The Young and the Restless”; “Princes”; “Endgame”</i> |
| Week 9 | |
| Israel | Jerusalem University College curriculum: Course, “Special Course: Jesus and Contemporary Religions” |
| Week 10 | |
| Israel | Jerusalem University College curriculum: |

Commented [CF5]: Discuss similarities and differences between Chinese religions and Western perspectives

Commented [CF6]: Discuss the relationship between Chinese and Western relationships between Christianity, society, and politics

Commented [CF7]: Discuss how Vietnamese Christianity encourages movement toward modernity and similarities and differences with Western understandings; Demonstrate understanding of modernity’s impact on trans-regional connections.

Commented [CF8]: Read and discuss various forms of Hindu tradition, urban and rural, making comparisons with student knowledge of Christianity in the West

Commented [CF9]: Looks at how indigenous Indian Christianity challenges Western understandings

Commented [CF10]: Explores connections between nation making, religion, and culture, referencing earlier travels

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| | Course, "Special Course: Jesus and Contemporary Religions" |
| Week 11 | |
| Israel | Jerusalem University College curriculum: JUC extension to Jordan |
| Week 12 | |
| Greece | <i>The Orthodox Church</i> : "Holy Tradition: The Source of the Orthodox Faith"; "God and Humankind" |
| Week 13 | |
| Greece | <i>The Orthodox Church</i> : "The Church of God"; "Orthodox Worship I-III" |
| Week 14 | |
| Debrief | Selections from Frederick Buechner, Henri Nouwen, and others |

Commented [CF11]: Explores similarities and differences between Western and Eastern forms of Christianity, particularly in relationship to community identity and history.

Commented [CF12]: Students learn about trans-regional connections by discussion of similarities and differences between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western forms of Christianity, as well as the connections between sites of investigation and biblical writers.

Commented [CF13]: Focused time of processing personal, intellectual, and spiritual development through the semester, making explicit connections between student growth and the reflexivity experienced and learned throughout the course. Attention will be paid to comparative experiences and learning between different countries. **Explore the Christian (ethical) responses to our semester** together in light of what we have learned about global religions in various contexts; e.g., How will students live differently as Christians given what they have learned? How will they treat others, the natural world, and themselves differently? How will they respond using their God-given gifts and talents?