

**SRS 3140: DIVINE IMAGES AND SACRED STORIES:
ART, MYTHOLOGY, AND RELIGION**

Prof. Emma Anderson

September-December 2016 (3 credits)

Tuesdays, 11:30 – 1:00 pm,

Fridays 1:00 pm- 2:30 pm

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Professor:

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Course Description:

For millennia, humanity has related some of its most central religious and cosmological ideas through divine images and sacred stories. Before widespread literacy, image and oral narrative were the preferred methods to communicate religious ideas to large groups, and to preserve them across time. Through their art and sacred narrative, ancient cultures left us vivid reminders of who they were and what they believed and valued. Illiterate medieval Christians studied the iconography of their local churches to gain an understanding of the key theological tenants of their faith. Buddhist adherents developed intricate stories concerning the previous lives of Siddhartha Guatama, the Buddha. Hindus transmitted the exploits of the gods and goddesses in their epics and visually captured them in wood and stone. Aboriginal cultures in the past and present have utilized both visual and narrative forms to communicate the central themes of their diverse traditions.

Other religions, however, such as Judaism and Islam, regard depiction of the divine image in paint or plaster as an impious attempt to limit the inexpressible, unknowable divine nature. Thus, even given the dynamism of human creativity – expressed visually, orally, and textually - communicating religious realities remains a difficult task, and one which often attracts allegations of impiety, even sacrilege.

This course is an in-depth thematic exploration of divine images and sacred stories across the spectrum of the world's *living* religious traditions. In exploring religious art and narrative, we will ask questions such as: How do religious symbols become “real” for believers? How have traditions envisioned or narrated the ineffable? Do religious images, used in worship, merely symbolize the sacred, or do they actually enkindle divine presence? How do religious myths respond to the mysteries of human genesis, suffering, fear, and capacity for triumph and transcendence? Class readings, imagery, lectures, guests, writing assignments, and a class field trip to the National Gallery of Canada and Notre Dame Basilica will encourage students to experience, compare, and analyze the visual and narrative worlds of humanity's diverse religious traditions, past and present.

This course thus privileges all-too-often-neglected source materials in the study of religion, images and stories, arguing that, as they have been integral to popular religious experiences, they should also be a key resource for scholars seeking to understand the spiritual realities of believers. Creativity, imagination, and attention to the experiences of religious traditions' ordinary adepts (rather than just their authority figures) are key emphases of this course.

Required Texts:

Course-Pack. The packet of course readings is available for purchase at Rytect Printing, 404 Dalhousie, (613) 241-COPY. Though the course pack is expensive, **all of the readings necessary for the course are in it, and all of them are “required readings.”** Moreover, most of the books from which the readings are drawn are on (4 hour) course reserve at Morisette Library. I encourage you to consult these important texts for your research papers or for further reading on subjects that interest you. Students are also encouraged to consult/review the image slides used in each class, which will be posted after each class session on Web CT (aka Virtual Campus).

Evaluation:

The Importance of Participation and Creativity:

Since this is a course examining the religious imagination – visual, verbal, and textual – it is both appropriate and important to use **your own** creativity. I very much hope for students’ ***engaged participation*** in all aspects of this course. The more you give, the more you get. So please feel free to:

- Ask questions or make comments in class!
- Take what we are doing (in and outside the classroom) as a springboard for your own adventures in the religious sites, shrines, temples, synagogues, and mosques of the National Capital Region! Get out there! Take pictures! Ask questions! Explore! Look! Listen!
- Test the theories regarding art, mythology, and religion that we are exploring in the course against your own perspectives and experiences, and those of others. Find out what your family members, fellow students, or local religious adherents or leaders think/feel about the issues we are discussing in class by interviewing them!
- Push the boundaries! Should you have a creative idea you wish to propose for a unique way to approach your assignments for this course (such as making a short documentary film instead of writing an essay, etc.), please come and see me about it during office hours!

Evaluation Rationale:

This course is deliberately “front loaded” with a full 60% of students’ grades being earned before the add/drop date of November 18, 2016. This both allows students a very clear idea of their progress in the course, allows them to incorporate critiques of the first assignment in to subsequent assignments, and takes full advantage of the energy and enthusiasm that come with the beginning of term (while avoiding the burnout that all too often accompanies the end of semester). Given this, students should take a “running start” at the semester’s work.

Examinations:

1) MIDTERM EXAMINATION

15% of final grade, Tuesday, November 1, 2016.

The midterm exam (which will be held the class immediately following the Reading Week, so as to give students the time to study), will focus on material covered in the first half of the course. The midterm will be composed of a multiple choice/fill-in-the-blanks section, a short essay section, and a long essay section. The last two sections will have choice of questions to be answered. Study review questions will be placed on WebCT and a comprehensive in-class review session will precede the midterm on **Friday, October 21, 2016.**

2) FINAL EXAMINATION

- **Part I of the Final Exam** will be written **Tuesday, December 6, 2016**, during the last class of the semester (**10% of final grade**). This section will be comprised of multiple choice/fill in the blanks and short essay sections.

- **Part II of the Final Exam:** The “Take Home” portion of your exam is due one week later, on **Tuesday, December 13, 2016** in either hard copy or electronic form (**30% of final grade**). The long essay section of the exam is, effectively, your Sacred Stories Research Paper (for details, see below). Part II of your final exam **MUST** be submitted on or before noon of Tuesday, December 13, 2016. **Please note that this is a hard**

deadline: no late exams will be accepted. Hard copies may be turned any time up until the deadline at my office (102 William Commanda Building, ICAS) or left with the Secretariat at ICAS. Alternatively, you may submit your essay electronically to my email address: eanderso@uottawa.ca. As with the midterm examination, final examination review questions will be posted on WebCT and a comprehensive in-class review session will take place on **Friday, December 2, 2016.**

Writing Assignments:

1) Robert Orsi Reaction Paper (20% of final grade).

A hard copy of the assignment is due **in class** on **Tuesday, October 4, 2016.** Students must write a formal response paper of five (5) pages engaging the thought of Robert Orsi, a major thinker in the field of Religious Studies. Students have the choice of responding to two different writing prompts (posted on Web CT) which bring Orsi's thinking into dialogue with those of other theorists and with the student's own experiences. Please note that your five (5) pages must be typed (double spaced). The page count **does not** include your title page, notes, or bibliography). This essay is worth 15% of your final mark, with your questions for Robert Orsi (see below) comprising the final 5% of the assignment.

A critical part of this assignment will be the opportunity to question Prof. Orsi himself when he comes to visit our class on Friday, September 30th, 2016. Students are required to prepare three to five (3-5) questions that they would like to pose to him. Students must turn in their typed questions at the end of class, together with a brief paragraph, which they will compose in-class, which must reflect on whether (and how) questioning Prof. Orsi and listening to his responses has changed their understanding of or evaluation of his theories about religious images, power, presence, and context.

2) Divine Images Research Paper (25% of final grade).

Due **in class** on **Tuesday, November 8, 2016.** Students must write a formal research paper on the religious imagery of one (or more) religious traditions, focusing on a specific theme or idea. Please note that, while class lectures focus only on living religious traditions, students are not so limited (those wishing to explore the ancient religions of Greece, Rome, Egypt, or pagan northern Europe should feel free to do so). Students are encouraged to start thinking about their essay topic **immediately.** Please note that **students MUST obtain permission for their topic from the professor prior to starting their project,** speaking to her after class or during office hours. Students are encouraged to include and refer to **specific** images in their assignment and to include high quality color reproductions of them in an appendix included with their assignment. Your imagination and creativity are encouraged in this project! Students may wish to tour local houses of worship (or cemeteries) or to photograph the eclectic religious expressions of individuals and families (such as yard shrines or roadside memorials). Students may also choose to interview religious adherents and/or authorities about their perceptions of or ritual engagement with divine images. Your essay should be eight (8) double spaced typed pages, **not including** your cover page, bibliography, or appendix of illustrations. Students who wish to tackle themes, theories and ideas which are also covered in class are reminded that this is a **creative research assignment,** and thus that their research must go **well beyond** what has been explored in class. Students' essays **MUST NOT** simply be a resume of their course notes.

3) Sacred Stories Research Paper (a.k.a.: Part II ("Take home") section of Final Examination)

Students must write a formal research paper exploring sacred stories. Students have a choice of two alternative approaches to this assignment:

1) Students can chose to explore how one particular myth or story in a particular religious tradition (or traditions) has evolved over time, in a process of creative adaptation, addition, and deletion known in Judaism as "midrash." For example, one might chose to explore how the familiar story of Adam and Eve has been interpreted from its initial roots in ancient Hebraic oral narrative through its medieval Christian appropriation, through into the 21st century use of the familiar shorthand of apples and snakes, nudity and seduction in (ostensibly secular) pop culture.

2) Alternatively, students may choose to compare and contrast how different religious traditions have treated similar ideas or concepts. For example, one might choose to compare and contrast Hindu conceptions of deities that have both human and animal characteristics with those of the religion of ancient Egypt. One might explore the striking similarities (and divergences) in Babylonian, Jewish, and indigenous myths of a global flood. In either case, **students must obtain the permission of the professor before starting their essay.** Please note that **students are NOT permitted to utilize the same theme for both their imagery and their sacred stories papers.** Because this Research Paper is, effectively, the second part of the final examination, **no late papers will be accepted.** This essay should be eight (8) double spaced typed pages, **not including** your cover page, notes, bibliography, etc.

Policy on Late Papers:

Please note that this policy applies to the Orsi Paper and Divine Images Papers only, the Sacred Stories essay **MUST** be turned in on time. Students who fail to turn in their papers **in class** on the deadline will automatically receive a **two (2) point** (out of a possible 100) **deduction.** This deduction applies even if the paper is turned in on the same day, but not in class. **A further 2 points will be deducted for each day that the paper is late.** Late papers should be turned into my office at 102 William Commanda Hall (the Institute of Canadian and Aboriginal Studies). With the exception of your Sacred Stories essays (Part II of your Final Exam), I **will not** accept work turned in by email. All work must be submitted in hard copy.

Compassionate Considerations:

Please note that these penalties **do not apply** to students suffering from documented ill health, accident, or family emergency. Students who are experiencing chronic health problems or serious family issues (such as the serious illness or death of a family member) which may affect their ability to respect set deadlines during the term are encouraged to obtain documentation and to consult with the professor **early in the term.** Please don't keep serious issues to yourself if they are affecting your performance in the course, but rather come and see me.

Help is Available:

I am always available to help students with anything to do with this course. Please see me after class or come to my Office Hours, directly after class on Fridays (the exceptions are on Friday, September 23rd (class field trip day) and Friday, October 14 (when I am absent, attending a conference in Montreal).

Students who habitually struggle with academic writing are encouraged to contact the mentors at the Academic Writing Help Center, a service of the Student Academic Success Service (for more info, please see <https://sass.uottawa.ca/en>). SASS also runs helpful workshops on all aspects of student academic success. Students who have documented learning disabilities are encouraged to register with Access Services (another branch of SASS) to receive formal accommodation of their particular disability.

Beware of Plagiarism:

Please note that plagiarism (the unattributed use of the work of others) is absolutely unacceptable and may result in failure of the course and additional academic penalties.

Course Map:

DIVINE IMAGES

Section I: The Nature and Function of Religious Images

Friday, September 9:

Introduction

Human experience, in both the past and present, repeatedly demonstrates the incredible power of religious image and narrative. Divine images and sacred stories arguably constitute the predominant way in which human beings have encountered and continue to encounter ultimate reality. In largely pre-literate cultures, the vast majority of the devout engaged with the divine through gazing upon religious images or listening to sacred stories. Despite this fact, religious art and mythology remain neglected topics in many religious studies curricula. This class will introduce students to the key themes, questions, and ideas of the course, overview the assignments, and address student questions.

Tuesday, September 13 and Friday, September 16:

The Power of Presence: The Divine in the Image

Religious art, in many cultures, is more than simply a depiction or portrait of the divine. Rather, it is something which in some mysterious way actively *contains or encodes* the divine presence. Many religious images are seen as miraculous in their origin, or as containing mysterious curative properties. In this section of the course, we will explore how a variety of religious cultures have envisioned the power of “presence.” We will also explore how a variety of theorists have positioned the power of this felt presence in either the individual viewing or interacting with images or in the institutional context in which these images are viewed.

Readings:

- 1) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005, “Introduction” and “Visual Practice and the Function of Images,” p. 1-21 and 48-74.
- 2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, “The God in the Image,” p. 27-33.
- 3) Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, “The Many Names of the Mother of God,” p. 48-72.

Tuesday, September 20, 27 (23rd is Field Trip):

Engendering Presence: How Sacred Images “Work”

How do religious adherents interact with divine images in such a way to enkindle a sense of holy presence within them? Why are some of the most powerful rituals involving religious images and artefacts so *corporeal* (so implicating of the human body)? How does the memorialized presence of the holy, often symbolized or captured in an image, act so as to sacralise natural elements such as earth, or water? This class will pose these important questions, exploring the elaborate ceremonies of many religious traditions. Sometimes the divine is ceremonially invited to enter the man-made image through the symbolic “opening” of a statue’s eyes or the insertion within the image of a relic. But in other cases, the identity of the image’s handler is temporarily effaced. In many indigenous cultures, religious artefacts (such as masks) are perceived as having the power to transform their wearer into what they depict. This class will also explore the “catching,” “imitative,” and “replicative” aspects of sacred images and holy sites, such as shrines.

Readings:

- 1) Diana Eck, from *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1985, “Seeing the Sacred,” p. 2-22.
- 2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, “Consecration: Making Images Work,” p. 82-98.
- 3) Robert Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” in David Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 3-18.

4) Lena Gemzoe, "The Feminization of Healing in Pilgrimage to Fatima," in Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelmann, eds., *Pilgrimage and Healing*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 25-48.

Friday, September 23:

Class Field Trip to the National Gallery of Canada and Notre Dame Basilica

This class lecture will be held outside the classroom, at the National Gallery of Canada, 380 Sussex Drive (about a 15 minute walk from the University) and Notre Dame Basilica (just across the street from the Gallery). Visiting both of these very different contexts in which religious art is habitually exhibited will allow us to test out in practice some of the theories put forward by Orsi, Freedberg, and Morgan about the importance of context in how religious art is understood and experienced. There is a cost of \$5.00 for admission to the National Gallery, which will be collected during the weeks preceding the field trip. Please note that there is the possibility that the field trip will extend longer than the course hours, but that students are obliged to be present only from 1-2:30 pm (our regular class hours). Because of the possibility of running late, I am proactively cancelling my usual weekly office hours. During the field trip, please keep a detailed record of your thoughts, experiences, perceptions, and sensations, and notes regarding what questions you would like to ask Professor Orsi, based on your observations and experiences.

This in-class experience is for all SRS 3140 students (though do feel free to bring – paying! – guests along). However, it is particularly essential for students who chose Writing Prompt One for the Orsi assignment (see Web CT/Virtual Campus). Please note that Orsi Writing Prompt Two also involves a site visit (individually and on the student's own time) to the Lourdes Shrine in Vanier (or, with the professor's permission, another imitative shrine of the student's choosing). This individual site visit **must** be conducted sometime before class on Friday, September 30th, 2016 (the date of Prof. Orsi's visit to our class).

Section II: Divine Images as Metaphors for Divine Reality

Friday, September 30, 2016:

Special Guest: Professor Robert Orsi

During this class we are privileged to host Prof. Robert Orsi of Northwestern University (the author of several of our required course pack readings considering the nature of religious imagery). Students are required to prepare for this special class by: 1) having carefully read and analyzed the assigned readings for September 9-30, 2) having participated in the class field trip to the National Gallery of Canada and the Basilica (and/or where applicable, made their own private site visit to the Lourdes Shrine in Vanier) 3) having prepared some or all of the rough draft of their Robert Orsi response paper, and 4) **having put together a typed, printed list of three to five (3-5) questions to ask Prof. Orsi, worth 5% of their final grade, due today.** Students are required to turn in their questions (together with a brief paragraph, which they will compose at the end of class) exploring whether (and if so, how) questioning Prof. Orsi and listening to his responses has changed their understanding of or evaluation of his theories.

Tuesday, Oct 4, 7:

Engendering the Divine: God as Male

Religious traditions envision ultimate reality or divine forces in many different ways. Even while many traditions claim that the divine cannot be envisioned by the human mind, or captured in words or images, there are a number of metaphorical complexes which have powerfully influenced how different traditions have envisioned God, including a pervasive depiction of the divine as male and kingly. Even as religious traditions may formally argue that God is above human sexual divisions (and thus cannot be understood through the human metaphor of gender) God has, in practice, often been envisioned as somehow "male." This association is reinforced by the sex of the founders of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Readings:

1) Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*. New York: Crossroad, 1992, "The Appearance and Disappearance of God in Western Art," p. 93-107.

Tuesday, October 11:

Engendering the Divine: God as Female

In some traditions, such as Hinduism and Roman Catholicism, the holy is often perceived in feminine terms. In this class, we will examine two manifestations of the divine feminine: the Hindu goddess Kali and the Virgin Mary (revered in Christianity and Islam). **Reminder: Your Orsi Paper, worth 15% of your final grade, is due IN CLASS today.**

Readings:

- 1) David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Majavidyas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, "Kali, The Black Goddess," p. 67-91.
- 2) David Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, "Mary: Virgin, Mother, and Queen," p. 215-260.

Friday, October 14:

Class today will be cancelled because the professor is at a conference in Montreal.

Tuesday, October 18:

God as Lover

The gendering of God has a number of important implications: one being that the relationship between the deity and the devotee can be construed as a relationship of lovers. In the sacred poetry of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism, God is often seen as the divine Beloved with whom the believer wishes to unite. From the Hebrew *Song of Songs*, a love poem which was later construed to encode relationship between God and Israel (which was in turn transformed by Christians to represent Christ's relationship with his Holy Church), to the *Gita Govinda*, which urges the Hindu reader to emulate the love between Radha (the passionate female devotee) and Krishna (her powerful and playful godly lover), metaphors of gendered sexuality have decisively influenced human spirituality with the longing and passion.

Readings:

- 1) *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985. "The Song of Songs," p. 1405-1411.
- 2) Barbara Stoler Miller, *Jayadeva's Gita Govinda: Love Songs of the Dark Lord*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 69, 78-85.

Friday, October 21:

First Half of Class:

The Eternal Child: The Divine as an Infant

Many religious traditions envision the relationship between God and the devotee emulating that of a parent and child, with the divine taking on the role of a benevolent (though often strict) parent. But sometimes the relationship is inversed: with the divine presented as an infant, evoking in the believer powerful feelings of love and protectiveness. In Hinduism, the mischievous exploits of the young god Krishna's thievery are recounted with delight. In Buddhism, stories are told of the miraculous birth and childhood of the Buddha. In Christian devotional art, the reality of the Incarnation (God taking on human flesh) is arguably emphasized through images which show Jesus as a vulnerable baby or young child.

Second Half of Class:

In-class Review Session for the Midterm Examination

During the second half of this class we will collectively review for the midterm exam using study review questions that I will post on WebCT/Virtual Campus. The midterm exam, worth 15% of your final grade, will cover key concepts, terminology, and ideas from the first half of the course and will feature multiple choice/fill in the blanks, short essay, and long essay questions. The exam will be held the first class back after the Fall Reading Week, on Tuesday, November 1, 2016, so as to give students time to study.

Readings:

- 1) Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, London: Penguin Books, 1975, “Krishna’s Mother Looks Inside his Mouth,” p. 218-221.
- 2) Douglas Adams Leemy, *The World of Myth*. London: Oxford University Press, 1990, “The Birth of the Buddha” from p. 229-233.
- 3) Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, selections, p. 1-49.

*****University of Ottawa Reading Week, October 22-30 2016*****
*****Please note that there will be NO CLASSES on Tuesday, October 25^h
or on Friday, October 28th, 2016*****

Tuesday, November 1:

Midterm Examination (full duration of class)

Friday, November 4:

Heavenly Messengers: Evolution of the Angelic Ideal

Within the three sister religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, angels, the beloved messengers of God, have had a long and varied career. Celebrated in the Hebrew Scriptures as God’s fearsome servants, these beings wrestled with humans, struck them blind, and informed them of God’s will. Their awesome quality was evident in the first words they are often recorded as speaking: “Fear not!” Certain angels, such as Gabriel or Jibreel, have played a critical role in all three religions. In this section, we will explore the evolution of angels from fear-inspiring, male, and biblical figures to a softer, predominantly female ideal of mercy and protection in the nineteenth century. We will also explore stories and images of Satan or Iblis and his “fallen angels” in Western traditions.

Readings:

- 1) Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Angels*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, “The Image of the Angel,” p. 23-24, 28, 33, 34-38.

Section III: Rejection of Images - Aniconism and Iconoclasm

Tuesday, November 8:

The Ineffable and Unimaginable God: the Aniconic Tradition

While images of the divine, as we have seen, are central to devotion and ritual in many religious traditions, other traditions, such as Judaism and Islam, enforce emphatic taboos upon the creation of divine images. In this class, we will 1) explore **why** these traditions forbid the production of images, particularly of the divine, 2) examine alternative creative outlets in these religious cultures, and 3) consider the important exceptions which often exist, even in religions which are strictly aniconic. Do these (many) exceptions to aniconism mean that, as David Freedberg suggests, aniconism is an unrealized (and perhaps unrealizable) dream, given the human “will to image?” **Reminder: Your Research Paper on Divine Images, worth 25% of your final grade, is due in class today.**

Readings:

- 1) Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, “Prophetic Iconoclasm: Judaism and Islam,” p. 204-227.
- 2) David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, “The Myth of Aniconism,” brief selection, p. 54-60, 65.

Friday, November 11:

“Idolatry” and Iconoclasm

Throughout human history, the power of religious images can be seen in the fury with which they are often destroyed. “Iconoclasm” (the religiously motivated destruction of religious images) is a violent means of

disputing their efficacy or holiness. Those who engage in such activities generally regard them as a defence of “true” religion from the “false.” Iconoclasm is often employed during periods of dissent between warring sects within the same religious traditions, or between battling religions. Religiously motivated destruction and effacement of images is not a thing of the past: it continues into our own time: from the wholesale destruction of massive images of the Buddha by the Taliban in Afghanistan and of ancient Persian masterpieces by ISIS, and in the ongoing popularity of “political iconoclasm:” the deliberate defacing or destruction of toppled political leaders.

Readings:

- 1) David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, “The Violence of Seeing: Idolatry and Iconoclasm,” p. 115-146.
- 2) Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds. *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Images Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002. “The Icon as Iconoclasm,” by Joseph Koerner, p. 164-174.

SACRED STORIES

Section I: Cosmogonic Myths

Tuesday, November 15:

Introduction to Sacred Stories/Creation *Ex Nihilo*: Western “Cosmogonic” Myths

“Myths” in the conventional sense of the term, does little to evoke the sense of meaning, awe, and determined emulation that have sacred stories have commanded over the ages. Nor does it hint at the creativity inherent in the constant evolution of these stories through “midrash” (their imaginative expansion, change, or reformatting). “Cosmogonic” myths, or stories of creation, explain the physical origin and nature of the world, discuss who human beings are (and how they are related to other beings) and often describe how the present world devolved from an original paradise. Cosmogonic myths also often purport to explain the origin of social conventions, including class and gender inequities. Some stories, such as the Jewish/Christian/Muslim myth of the creation of the world and the “fall of man” often cast human sexuality as the disruptive force, whereas in other world religious traditions greed, selfishness, curiosity, or arrogance are blamed. This section of the course will compare how Western, Eastern, and Indigenous traditions have narrated the creation of the world and human genesis, beginning with the Western myth of Genesis, held in common by Jews, Muslims, and Christians, which recounts the creation of the first human couple, and the world’s destruction and remaking in a flood.

Readings:

- 1) William Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, “Myth,” p. 69-91.
- 2) *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, “Genesis 1-3,” p. 3-7, 14-15.
- 3) Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*, “Eve, the Mother of all Living,” p. 15-27.
- 4) Jonathan Goldstein. *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bible!* New York: Riverhead Books, 2009, “Adam and Eve,” p. 13-25.

Friday, November 18:

In Water and in Darkness: Eastern and Indigenous Creation Myths

Eastern and indigenous myths are multiple, and hence less definitive than Genesis and its variants. Eastern religious traditions postulate, variously, that the world was formed from the dissolution of an original giant, the ministrations of a mother goddess, or the combination of elemental energies. Indigenous cosmogonic myths often posit human-animal cooperation in the creation of the world. Thus, whereas Western creation stories establish a definitive hierarchy between people and animals, indigenous creation stories posit their essential similarity and interrelatedness. The beginning times are generally imagined by various aboriginal cultures as a time before divisions were created between humans and animal beings. Many Eastern creation stories (particularly those that describe the creation of women, or posit a female creator) have interesting, sometimes startling parallels with the Eden story in Genesis. Like Genesis, however, Hindu and Chinese creation myths often justify social divisions by presenting them as part of the primordial fabric of reality itself.

Readings:

- 1) Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, “The Primal Man is Sacrificed,” p. 27-28, 36-43.
- 2) Donna Rosenberg, *World Mythology*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Publishing Group, 1999, “The Creation of the Universe and Human Beings,” p. 324-329, 625-641.
- 3) Abe Masao, “Man and Nature in Christianity and Buddhism,” in Frederick Franck, *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School*. New York: Crossroads, 1991, p. 148-156.
- 4) Levy, Jerrold E. *In the Beginning: The Navajo Genesis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Chapter 7, “The Creation,” p. 155-169.

Section II: Ethical Myths: How are We to Live?

Tuesday, November 22:

Radical Obedience in Judaism and Islam

While cosmogonic myths tell one why and how the world has come to be the way it is, ethical myths tell the believer how he or she is to live. Ethical myths recount the experiences of its heroes, adepts, shaman, saints or saviours and narratively encode optimal human relationships and behaviour. Though their analysis of the human condition varies, all religious traditions affirm that it is ameliorable through religious actions. In this class, we will explore how the sacred stories of religious traditions address the central problems of human existence. In both Judaism and Islam, Abraham is seen as the paradigmatic founder who established a covenant with God that would be fateful for both the Jews and Muslims. Of particular fascination to both religious cultures is the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own son to God. This class will explore Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives upon this important story.

Readings:

- 1) *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, “Genesis 22,” p. 31-32.
- 2) Gordon Darnell Newby. *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989, “Abraham, the Friend of God,” p. 65-81.

Friday, November 25:

Transgressive Morality in Hinduism and in the “Jesus Movement”

Typically, Hindus have answered the question, “how are we to live?” with the response that an individual must follow the correct dharma for their age, gender, and caste. However, existing in tension with this mainstream response are stories concerning persons of unusual sanctity who transgress these rules. Often poets, these men and women were driven by their devotion to the divine to act in ways that were often startlingly contrary to conventional propriety and received wisdom. In this section, we will examine these narratives and poems of transgressive morality with an eye to how they both destabilize and affirm Hindu mainstream religious tradition, and compare the lives of Hinduism’s transgressive saints with the incendiary teachings of that infamous Jewish rebel, Jesus of Nazareth.

Readings:

- 1) John Hawley, *Saints and Virtues*, “Morality Beyond Morality in the Lives of Three Hindu Saints,” p. 52-72.
- 2) John Hawley, *Songs of the Saints of India*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. “Poems of Mirabai,” p. 134-140.
- 3) The New Testament, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Chapters 5-7, “The Sermon on the Mount”
- 4) John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995, p. 66-74.

Tuesday, November 29:

Myths of Death and Destruction, Rebirth and Renewal

Different religious traditions envision the end of human life, both individually and collectively, in very different terms. In many religions, there is tension between a conception of the afterlife as a geographical reality and as a spiritual state. Some religious traditions see the afterlife as the site of divine judgement, with radically different fates for the moral and immoral, whereas for others the world to come is one which reunites family members severed by death. Some see spiritual intervention by the living to aid the dead as possible, while others sharply reject the notion. Some contemporary Christians await “the Rapture,” where elect believers will “meet Christ in the air:” saved before the world is plunged into destruction and despair. In short, many religions share a

concept of the end of the world, though they differ greatly in whether this is envisioned as the culminating and final peak of human history, or as merely part of an ongoing - if epic - cycle of destruction and rebirth.

Readings:

- 1) Donna Rosenberg, *World Mythology*, "The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe," p. 291-294.
- 2) Hiroshi Obayaski, "Death as Threat, Death as Achievement," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*. New York: Praeger, 1992, p. 157-166.
- 3) John Bowker. *The Meanings of Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, "Islam," p. 102-117.
- 4) Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995, p. 15-19.
- 5) Tom Perrotta, *The Leftovers*, Toronto: Random House Canada, 2011, p. 1-8.

Friday, December 2:

Conclusion and Comprehensive Review

In our final class, we will together consider and review what we have learned regarding how human beings envision sacred reality through sacred stories and conduct a comprehensive review of the course in preparation for Part I of the Final Examination, to be held during our final class on Tuesday, Dec. 6th.

Tuesday, December 6:

Part I of the Final Examination for SRS 3140 (all class).

Part I is comprised of multiple choice, fill in the blank, and short essay questions. Part I of the exam is worth **10% of your final grade.**

Part II of your Final Examination, your Sacred Stories Essay, is due one week later, in either hard copy or electronic form, by noon on **Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016** (this is a hard deadline). It is worth **30% of your final grade.**