Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy – MA in Practical Philosophy Programme

Course Title: Understanding Religion
Course Code: PHI512
Recommended Study Year: -
No. of Credits/Term: 3
Mode of Tuition: Lecture and Tutorial
Class Contact Hours: 2 hours lecture per week
                  1 hour tutorial per week
Category in Major Programme: Value Philosophy
Prerequisite(s): -
Co-requisite(s): -
Exclusion(s): -
Exemption Requirement(s): -

Brief Course Description
This course aims at providing students with perspectives to understand the varieties of religious phenomena from magic to monotheism, and to think about issues like the relation between reason and religion, religious tolerance, and the role of religion in life. It should also contribute to the students’ understanding of the religions of other peoples and cultures. This course attempts to introduce the students the main issues concerning religion, to widen their scope in the understanding the nature of religion, and to provide them more perspectives for analysing religious phenomena.

Aims
This course attempts: (i) to introduce the students the main issues concerning religion, (ii) to widen their scope in the understanding the nature of religion, and (iii) to provide them more perspectives in analysing religious phenomena.

Learning Outcomes
On successful completion of the course:
1. Students will acquire basic understanding of the main issues concerning religion.
2. Students will be able to reflect on different religions with different philosophy schools of thought.
3. Student will be able to engage in philosophical discussion on criticizing and evaluating different philosophical approaches towards religion.

Indicative Content
1. What is religion: The nature of religious phenomenon
2. Myth and religion
3. Monotheism and the idea of God: Judaism and Christianity
4. Polytheism and other religions without god: Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism
5. Death, Soul and Immortality
6. Sects, heretics, magic, superstition
7. Philosophy of religion
8. Religion and society
9. Religious conflict and dialogue
10. Religion and morality: can religion lead to morally good behaviour?
11. Atheism and the future of religion: materialism or spirituality?

Teaching Method
Lecture and Tutorial
Measurement of Learning Outcomes
1. Students will give oral presentations on assigned readings. They are expected to summarize, paraphrase and respond critically to the arguments in these texts.
2. Students will write a philosophical essay, the topics of which correspond to the contents of the lectures. They are expected to present their interpretations and criticisms effectively.
3. The examination will assess students' understanding of the main issues concerning religion and religious issues concerning philosophy.

Assessment
60% Continuous Assessment
40% Examination

Required Readings

Supplementary Readings
Armstrong, Karen A History of God: From Abraham to the Present, the 4000-year Quest for God (London: Mandarin, 1994)
Thomas, Keith Religion and the Decline of Magic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
Rohde, Erwin Psyche; The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks tr. B. Hillis (London : Routledge and K. Paul, 1950)
秦家懿, 孔漢思 《中國宗教與基督教》; 吳華譯 (香港: 三聯書店, 1989) (Küng, Hans & Ching, Julia Christianity and Chinese Religion)