Hindu Traditions In Dialogue  
RELS 5311 (2011 – First Term)

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Venue: (to be announced)  
Time: Friday, 7:00 - 9:30pm

Course Description
From ancient times to the present, what we now generally call “Hindu” traditions have dominated the Indian religio-cultural landscape. With India’s current rapid rise to global significance, students of religion and culture should appreciate salient features of this rich and vibrant world of thought and practice.

This course introduces Hindu traditions (characterized in particular by elaborate veneration of various divinities [such as Shiva, Krishna, and Shakti]; the practice of various forms of yoga [spiritual self-discipline]; and profound realization of ultimate reality [e.g. as eternity-knowledge-bliss]) through the lens of “dialogue,” taking this term in its broadest sense, to show how dynamic interaction – on various levels – is a defining and central characteristic of these traditions. Never in isolation, Hindu religious traditions have been and continue to be engaged in both “intra-religious” and “inter-religious” dialogues, both person-to-person and through written texts and other media. This course will also serve as an opportunity to explore the newly developing field of comparative theology.

Course Contents
This course is designed for students with no prior knowledge of Hindu traditions (sometimes generalized with the umbrella-term “Hinduism”) to open up this constellation of religion and spirituality both historically and thematically. The roots of Hindu traditions stretch back at least three thousand years, and since then they have reshaped themselves in relation to other, apparently competing, traditions. Indeed, it is from within the matrix we now call Hinduism that Buddhism originally arose; and similarly Jainism developed arguably in opposition to certain practices and thought associated with Hinduism. Several centuries later South Asia encountered a radically different religious worldview in the form of Islam, and in modern times (from Europe and especially Great Britain) the subcontinent was confronted with yet another constellation of religious ways, that of Christianity (in various forms). All these encounters involved varieties of exchange—sometimes confrontational, often textually polemical, but in the broadest sense always dialogical.

This course will trace important contours of these dialogues, focusing on recent and current dialogical reflection and interaction, especially between Hindu and Christian traditions, but also between Hindu and Buddhist, Hindu and Jain, and Hindu and Islamic traditions, as well as reflection and interaction among the various—sometimes quite disparate—Hindu traditions. We will be concerned to investigate obstacles, opportunities, and creative ideas for furthering positive
dialogue, in recognition of the accelerated pace of global interaction among peoples, including South Asians as they spread and settle increasingly throughout the world.

**Lecture Schedule**

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<th>Week #</th>
<th>Title / General Theme</th>
<th>Specific Topics</th>
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| 1      | Introduction           | Prospects, challenges, expectations . . .  
--What is “Hinduism”?  
--What is meant by (inter)religious dialogue, and how can this approach help us to understand both Hinduism and interreligious dialogue?  
--historical and thematic approaches  
*Reading for next week:* Knott, chs 2 & 3. |
| 2      | What are “Hindu” traditions?  
--Introducing the *Bhagavad-gita*, a key Hindu text  
--Important narratives of divinity and practices of sanctification  
*Reading for next week:* Holt, ch. 1; Bh.gita, ch. 4 |
| 3      | Early “dialogues” – Hindu / Buddhist / Jain traditions (part 1)  
--“brahmanical” & “shramanical” worldviews  
--doctrinal points of departure: self versus no-self; multiple divinities, one divinity, no divinity.  
--institutional, social, economic, & political considerations  
*Reading for next week:* Parrinder, chs. 6 & 9 |
| 4      | Early “dialogues” – Hindu / Buddhist / Jain traditions (part 2)  
--differing models of (divine or not divine) “perfection”: Krishna, Buddha, Mahavira  
--varied tellings of each others’ stories  
*Reading for next week:* Vroom, ch. 3 |
| 5      | Hindu traditions encountering each other (Vaishnava – Shaiva – Shakta)  
--more retellings: accommodate and subordinate!  
--the Puranic literature: The Bhagavata Purana (a rich text of narrative and Krishna-centred theology)  
*Reading for next week:* Bryant, ch. 10 (Martin)  
(resource will be supplied) |
| 6      | Hindu encounters with Islam (part 1)  
--early history (c. 900 to c. 1500 AD)  
--later history (c. 1500 to c. 1750)  
--the rise of Sikhism: synthesis or distinct religion?  
*Reading for next week:* Bakker (resource will be supplied) |
| 7      | Hindu encounters with Islam (part 2)  
--modern challenges & their genealogy  
--locations of common ground  
*Reading for next week:* Acharya (ch. tba) |
| 8      | Hindu encounters with Christianity (part 1)  
--historical overview  
--the British “Raj” and Christian missions in India  
*Reading for next week:* Coward, “Foreword” (Panikkar) |
| 9      | Hindu encounters with Christianity (part 2)  
--Hindu resistance and accommodation (the Brahma Samaj)  
--Rammohan Roy to Vivekananda |
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<th>Reading for next week: Cornille, ch. 10 (Clooney)</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Hindu encounters with Christianity (part 3) &amp; comparative theology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>--Mahatma Gandhi</td>
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<td>--Bede Griffiths</td>
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<td>--Francis Clooney</td>
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<td>Reading for next week: Cornille, ch. 5 (Barnes)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Hindu encounters with Christianity (part 4) &amp; comparative theology</td>
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<td>--contemporary Comparative Theology</td>
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<td>--Christian interpretations of Bhagavad-gita; Hindu interpretations of the Bible</td>
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<td>Reading for next week: Hatcher, ch. 3</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Hindu encounters with modernity &amp; secularism</td>
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<td>Eclecticism and modern Hindu discourse (Hatcher)</td>
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<td>Reading for next week: review Coward</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Looking back, looking ahead</td>
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<td>--the Hindu “diaspora” (e.g. in Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>--the opportunities and challenges of dialogue</td>
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<td>--dialogue as spiritual practice</td>
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**Learning Outcomes**
- Students will (in their presentations and writing assignment) discuss and explain how and why specific “dialogical encounters” between Hindu and another religious tradition gives us insight into the possibilities and challenges afforded by differences in worldview.
- Students will (in their presentations and writing assignment) apply their understanding of issues (such as differences in articulating the nature of God or ultimate reality; soteriological expectations and presuppositions) noted in specific Hindu and other traditions, to the wider field of interreligious dialogue.
- Students will demonstrate awareness of the complex nature of Hindu traditions as being largely a product of ongoing “dialogue” in its broadest sense.
- Students will show competence in English language reading, writing, and speaking, as the course is conducted entirely in English.

**Learning Activities**
As a post-graduate level course, the format of classes will be the “seminar,” which calls for all attendees to participate in discussion. It is essential that assigned reading is done before each class, so that everyone can participate actively in the discussions. The instructor will also be lecturing, especially in recognition that students may have no prior knowledge of Hindu traditions.

**Assessment Scheme**
Students will be asked to fill out and sign a “learning contract,” and this will be the main basis for assessment. Specific requirements will be the following (more details will be provided on these requirements in class):
- Attendance and active participation in classes (20%)
- An oral class presentation and an oral response to one classmate’s presentation (20%)
- A book (or article) review (20%)
- A term paper (40%). Writing assignments will be submitted electronically via the VeriGuide system (see https://veriguide2.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/cuhk/ and log-in).

**Learning Resources**
Readings may include excerpts from the following items (do not be frightened by the number of titles here. The reading load will be manageable! Assignments will be given from week to week, as we see how we are progressing.)


**Additional Resources, useful for research:**

This list provides a basic starting point for further reading and research for writing assignments. Other titles may be suggested by the instructor: please consult with him.


Goodman, Hananya, ed. *Between Jerusalem and Benares : comparative studies in Judaism and Hinduism*


Feedback for Evaluation
Towards the middle of the term, students will be asked to submit a short written report to comment on the course and make suggestions for both the revision of syllabus and change of methods of conducting the class. Students' comments and feedback on the course through emails or personal meeting with instructor are always welcomed and encouraged.

Method for Posting Course Announcements:
We will use the “MOODLE” Internet-based system to make announcements for all, to make certain reading materials available, and to maintain a forum for students to discuss any topics related to the course. Students may also send emails to the instructor or other students through this class email. Questions and discussions related to the course are encouraged.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism
Please read and be aware of the University's policy on academic honesty and plagiarism, available at this location: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academicichonesty/. The general principle in academic work is that we 'give credit where credit is due', happily recognizing the work of others in the academic community and never claiming or implying that others' ideas or writing are our own. As mentioned above, writing assignments will be submitted electronically via the VeriGuide system (see https://veriguide2.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/cuhk/ and log-in).