



STUDY RELIGION @ UJ?

RELIGION AS ELECTIVE AND
MAJOR IN THE HUMANITIES

**The Future
Reimagined**



WHAT IS KEY TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION @ UJ?

Religion is inherently and universally part of our human capacity for symbolic thought and cultural expression and therefore essential to study!

Throughout human history, people have looked to religion to find order and meaning in the apparent unpredictability and even randomness and chaos of life. No culture can be understood without understanding its religious beliefs and motivations, or people's behaviour as they express those beliefs in their everyday life.

Cultures throughout history have organised their lives and societies around their religious beliefs, and even modern, apparently secular societies cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of their religious histories and underpinnings. Religion, religious belief, and religious values are therefore present in the foundations of all societies. Any attempt to understand those societies through whichever lens – law, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, myth, psychology, to name but a few – is immensely enriched by an understanding of these religious roots.

The overall aim in the department of Religion Studies is to familiarise students with the major concepts, key theories, current research, and contemporary debates, in relation to the major religions of the world. Our courses draw on the disciplines of Philosophy, Psychology, History, Anthropology, and Theology, to explore the nature of religion, the different notions of the Divine, the role of external structures, rituals, and myth in the creation of meaning. The relationship between Psychology and religious experience forms an important convergence on the fundamental ideas on religion. The focus on the history, ideas, and institutions, are examined within the traditions of African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The diversity within the major religions as well as some of the internal conflicts they have experienced, or are experiencing at present, are given consideration. The classical texts of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Qur'an, and Vedic writings, are analysed to understand the origins of scriptures and the relationship between myths, legends, oral tradition, and faith.

In Africa, the study of indigenous religious practices and beliefs to understand the relevance and legacy of the earliest known African Traditional Religions is debated. Consideration is given to the development of key aspects of later religious traditions in sub-Saharan Africa with special attention given to religious imperialism, the contemporary dynamics of African religion, Christianity and Islam in African, and the coexistence of these religions in post-colonial Africa. The indispensable relationship between religion and politics is referenced through concepts such as justice, human dignity, and human rights. The philosophical debate that concerns the world's major religions such as the nature of a good life, the nature of evil, the existence of suffering and death, and the existence of conflicting religious truth-claims, informs the

discourse. These explorations are broadened to consider how these problems are seen in the modern context and how they can be reconciled. Attitudes towards gender and sexuality in some of the world's major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, and Hinduism, are an intrinsic part of the curriculum in the department. The religious narratives of the various religious traditions and how these may have an impact on the lives of women and other marginalized gender and sexual groups are considered. All major challenges of the secular and post-secular age, eco-theology, the rise of agnosticism, atheism, fundamentalism, religious extremism, the continued search for spiritual meaning outside traditional institutions, and new religious movements, are in the conversation.

MAJORS AND ELECTIVE MODULES TO COMBINE WITH RELIGION @ UJ

Anthropology and Religion: As an inclusive, comparative study of human societies, from their prehistoric origins to the present, anthropology, as well as religion, have sought to describe, classify, and explain human and religious beliefs and practices. Symbolic thinking, unique to human beings, includes art, science, and religious symbolization. Therefore, Anthropology and Religion highlight how different groups develop, symbolize and express their world of meaning. Context is therefore central to any anthropological or religion study. Combining Religion with Anthropology means that the contexts of culture, history, politics, social, environmental, or economic factors may be given as much weight as ritual, theological speculation, or cosmological understandings of the world. The function and worth of Anthropology for Religion Studies is that it can open many doors between today's world in which sacred texts are read and yesterday's world in which these texts developed.

Classical Culture and Mythologies and Religion: Classical Culture addresses cultures and myths, including ancient gods, religions, and cults from ancient societies. It includes studying the cultures that worshipped deities and the temples where they were worshipped. These ancient stories are a window to the collective human soul and the birth of religion, science, and art. Modern scholars of religion utilise ancient myths to understand humanity from a variety of angles, including not only the psychology and religiosity of humans, but also their sociology and anthropology. Taking Religion and Classical Culture and Mythologies would equip students with a strong ground for understanding classical cultures and mythology. Christianity has emerged from these ancient contexts and classical culture had an important and determining influence on the content and traditions of Christianity. The Christian sacred book, namely the New Testament was written in Greek, and knowledge of the Greek language and culture is vital to interpret and understand the New Testament.

Development Studies and Religion: Development Studies and Religion aim at understanding the issues of poverty, inequality, injustices, and changing societies. These challenges in society are addressed by employing development projects, programmes, and policies. This involves the management and evaluation of interventions as well as the relevant contexts. People who are concerned about human rights, social and economic inequalities, and who want to make a difference in the world do well to combine Developmental Studies with Religion Studies to better understand the South African social landscape where a high percentage of people are affiliated with religion or another.

Education and Religion: Teachers who intend to teach school subjects Religion Studies and Life Orientation cannot do without a formal qualification in Religion. The foundations for civilised and responsible citizenship are laid in schools where religions make meaningful contributions to the education and development of school learners. This is an investment in our country's future.

History and Religion: Historical knowledge is the basis for understanding the world. Throughout history, people wanted to gain insight into themselves and their very being as humans. The

study of history has long been connected to the history of religions. For many religions, the very fact of historical study is heretical; for other religions, historical thought is integral to religious practice. We cannot speak about religion without also thinking about its many histories. Historians are particularly interested in the context in which religions initially arose and their subsequent development, especially how they changed when they entered new societies. How have various religious traditions influenced one another in terms of conquest, pilgrimage, trade, conversion? How have they changed over time? What is the relationship between religion and culture, politics, and economics? How have religions contributed to globalisation and knowledge exchanges?

Journalism and Religion: Religions are a common feature in international news. Just think about conflicts in Palestine and Israel, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Horn of Africa, Egypt, the Hindu political nationalism (Hindutva) in India, and the conflict in Northern Ireland involving Catholics and Protestants. Issues of religion are also not absent in the South African public debate. A journalist who is not properly educated in religion cannot professionally cover and report on religious issues and conflicts, or the religious language used by politicians, or on major religious events, wherever they might surface globally.

Philosophy and Religion: Religion and Philosophy are probably the first subjects ever to be discussed and debated on a tertiary level. Philosophy in broad terms is the study of people's thoughts and perceptions of the world in which they live and what it means to them. It seeks ultimate understanding of reality by defining the meaning of existence and being – that is also the fundamental nature of Religion Studies. Philosophy is also the philosophical examination of the themes and concepts involved in religious traditions as well as reflecting on matters of religious significance including the nature of religion itself, alternative concepts of God or ultimate reality, and the religious significance of general features of the cosmos and historical events. Sharing this general endeavour towards discovering meaning, Religion Studies provides depth and specifics of diverse religious expressions towards understanding meaningful life and therefore is a logical combination with Philosophy.

Politics and International Relations and Religion: Politics and Religion involve everything that happens around you every day: at home; in your social life; in your community; in your work; in your country and the world at large. Politics is about who gets what, where and when, and how it affects you. It focuses on domestic politics and international relations issues and the challenges it brings to give solutions to improve the human condition. Therefore, the presence and involvement of religion in public life is a fact that cannot be ignored. The last 40 years witnessed the growth and proliferation of religious individuals and movements with a variety of agendas and programs that place their religious identity at the centre of their political practice. This encompasses both states (for example Iran, India under a BJP government,) and those in opposition aspiring to assume power or at least influence policies. There is often a symbiotic relationship between the secular state and religious organizations. The role of religion has been both positive and negative. The Study of Religion offers a window toward understanding the age-old importance of religion for the geo-politics of the world.

Psychology and Religion: Psychology centers on understanding human behaviour and mental processes towards well-being. It is also about the diverse and dynamic nature of the human brain-mind and, in turn, fosters a deeper understanding of yourself and others. Religion has a deep influence on people's minds, behaviour, and mental processes. Combining Religion with Psychology will enable you to understand these deep-seated processes that influence people's behaviour. The emotional well-being of people does not necessarily imply belief in a supernatural world, but can be sustained by experiencing to be meaningfully part of the bigger scheme of things that we can find in spirituality, through awe and wonder of the life-world we find ourselves in.

Public Management and Governance and Religion: Religion plays a pivotal role in constructing sound value systems; amongst many role players it decidedly contemplates the moral domain, the “ought to” that contributes to a just and fair society.

Sociology and Religion: Religion serves several functions for society. These include giving meaning and purpose to life; reinforcing social unity and stability; serving as an agent of social control of behavior; promoting physical and psychological well-being; and motivating people to work for positive social change. Religion Studies is also using models from sociology (e.g. socio-science criticism) to explain ancient cultures and the developments of various religions. Religion makes use of contemporary societies to reconstruct ancient societies and make approximations about the function of these societies.

Tourism Development and Religion: Religious tourism is regarded as the oldest form of tourism, and it had been a central practice in many religions since it is associated with pilgrimage and this form of practice dates back to thousands of years. Religion offers an opportunity to discover the diverse richness of South Africa’s cultural and religious heritage; religious buildings and gathering sites, participants, liturgies and rituals, and museums all provide a window to this rich tapestry of faith traditions that populate and embellish our national landscape.

SKILLS AND QUALITIES YOU GAIN FROM STUDYING RELIGION @ UJ

Objective analysis and evaluation

The most important skill we offer is to be objective towards highly authoritative traditions, institutions, and scripts. This implies reading religious texts critically, the ability to compare and interpret decisive information from these traditions, formulate questions for contemporary concerns, and give solutions to problems. We guide you to collect and examining information in detail to arrive at a solution, answer key questions, and make informed decisions. These skills make learners courageous and open-minded in their approach to question critical issues.

Some jobs, like counseling and social services, particularly require problem-solving skills and creative thinking to recognize problems and their causes, to identify a range of possible solutions, and then assess and decide the best way forward. Religion is regarded as a tool that can transform human ways of life and thinking (personal, socio, economic, and political). It is a mandate for a radical, structural, and fundamental rearrangement and re-ordering of the essential elements of a society and a nation. Some of the more specific problems we discuss are those with **religion itself**: e.g. Is religion in conflict with science? Is religion just limiting people’s freedom? Can any religion claim having **the** exclusive truth? Does Religion encourage stagnation and immutability and instilling guilt and fear? Who is the divine? Is the divine just?

Discipline: It is also called perseverance or grit: We help you to set long-term goals and prioritize your programmes (study and personal) to maximize your study success. This can also be called organisational and time management skills. You need to know and do what is expected of you. This ranges from organising yourself, being on time, to be responsible. Some jobs need particular disciplinary skills such as being able to persevere with the task and plans until you accomplish them or following strict procedures. To this end, we teach you to be thorough and to focus on the details of a task, to monitor and check work, information, or plans.

Literacy: We emphasize good reading and writing skills. We organize working seminars to assist students in reading as widely as possible on a topic, to ask thoughtful questions, and to exercise their writing skills. This will assist you in jobs that require written communication skills, you will need to write clearly and convincingly – you could be producing or dealing with legal documents or writing articles for a newspaper, magazine, or even a scientific article for a journal. This could include a good standard of spoken and written English, and good knowledge of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Communication: If your job requires verbal communication, you may need to write or give speeches and presentations. You may also require good listening skills, the ability to negotiate or to be persuasive. In Religion we organize student seminars where they present their assignments to their peers and staff members for critical discussions and reflection.

Interpersonal skills: We promote teamwork and communication skills by introducing discussion groups. These include listening and speaking skills, as well as empathy to build friendships and ensure good working relationships. In some jobs, you will need to be able to tolerate waiting, delay, or frustration without becoming agitated or upset, e.g., retail sales and customer services, education and training, medicine and nursing, and service sector roles. These jobs require lots of patience such as dealing with customers or clients who may be upset or unwell, and job roles where you have to explain or repeat information or instructions.

RELIGION @ UJ CURRICULA

The Religion curricula @ UJ are perfectly complete to what the rest of the faculty's subjects are offering:

Religion 1A: Introduction to Religion and the historical development of Christianity and its impact on society

The purpose of this module is to:

- introduce students to various ideas (theories) of what religion is and the scholarly ways of studying it;
- provide a brief overview of Christianity's founders, history, texts, teachings, rituals, spirituality, and the role it played in shaping society.

Religion 1B: The origin, historical development of Judaism and Islam and their social impact

The purpose of this module is to provide a brief overview of the founders, texts, teachings, rituals, spirituality, and history of Judaism and Islam and their role in shaping society.

Christianity and Islam were seminal in the struggle against Apartheid, their role for and against patriarchy, GBV, poverty, etc.

Religion 2A: The origin, historical development of African Traditional Religion and some Eastern Religions and their social impact

The purpose of this module is to provide a brief overview of the founders, texts, teachings, rituals, spirituality, and history of African Traditional Religion and the Eastern Religions and their role in shaping society.

Religion 2B: Religion, Politics and Society

This course is about

- The role that diverse religions have had in shaping the political and economic landscape of societies.
- The relationship between religion, conflict, and reconciliation.
- The tensions between religion and secular society.

Religion 3A: Religion, Gender and Sexuality

We introduce students to some of the major religions' views and attitudes towards sex, sexuality, and gender. It is to provide insight into:

- the connection between sexuality, eroticism, embodiment, and spirituality in diverse religious discourses and ideologies and the impact it has on society;
- the influence of patriarchy and androcentrism in religious beliefs, practices, and symbols in the various religious traditions and how these may impact on the lives of women and other marginalised gendered or sexual groups;

Religion 3B: Religion and Environmental Justice

The purpose of this module is to:

- introduce the contributions of diverse religions to environmental justice;
- raise various religions' participation within premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews and demonstrate how their views influence the religion versus science debate.

CONTACT RELIGION @ UJ

If you need further information, please contact any of the following staff members:

Ms Charlene Louw (secr) clouw@uj.ac.za;

Prof Lilly Nortjé-Meyer (HoD) lillynm@uj.ac.za

Prof Elina Hankela elinah@uj.ac.za;

Dr Shahid Mathee smathee@uj.ac.za;

Dr Clementine Nishimwe cnishimwe@uj.ac.za

