

## Religions in the World

### Take Home Mid-Term Examination

This exam consists of **two parts**, each of which should be no longer than 1000 words. The **clarity and precision** with which you express yourself are extremely important. Be sure in each of your essays that you have 1) a clearly stated **thesis**; 2) a clearly structured **argument**; and 3) sufficient **evidence** to support that argument. This last point is particularly crucial: you must pay close attention to the **actual texts** upon which you are writing, and **use them** to flesh out and “enliven” your discussion. Avoid general, summary-type answers. Please pay attention to **spelling and grammar** (read your essay aloud several times).

This is an open book exam, and you may consult and use any of the materials assigned for the class, including your lecture notes. In citing these sources, a simple parenthetical reference will suffice. If you choose to use any other sources - you may, but it is neither necessary nor expected - please give me the full citation the first time you quote the source, and then an abbreviated form thereafter. Please avoid internet sources.

**A word of caution:** These two questions are huge, expansive, and could be the topic of several very long books. I’m well aware of this, and do not expect you to say everything possible on the topic. Rather, I want you to **limit and focus** your discussions, and offer up a **critical analysis**, rather than a sweeping summary.

And, finally, **I am your reader**, and you should assume that I know what you are talking about; in other words, **cut to the heart of the issue**, and avoid generalizations. And please, try not simply to repeat what we have covered in class; I want to see **evidence of your thought on the matter**.

For in situ students, please submit your essays in hard copy, stapled separately, with your name on each page. For online students, please submit your essay in Word, if possible, via email (do not send as a pdf, please).

You must choose two of these parts on which to write.

#### Option One

Although individual faith is an essential component of contemporary Christianity, the concept of community, and how communities are formed and maintained, are equally important for understanding Christian religious experience. In Peter Brown’s *The Cult of the Saints*, one of the things we see is the way in which the early Christian community defined itself, not simply in terms of faith or belief, but in terms of practice. Write an essay in which you discuss the various practices and ideas related to the cult of the saints that figured in the constitution of the Christian community, and situate this discussion in what you see as the larger trends in community and identity formation in the tradition as a whole. In thinking about how to structure your essay, do not feel that you need to analyze the entire book, but rather try to focus your discussion as much as possible (you would do well, for instance, to focus on a single chapter of Brown’s book).

#### Option Two

Elie Wiesel once described his own mission as making the world more human, not more Jewish. As he expresses it in the body of *Night* – and not in the Introduction or Nobel Prize speech - explain how Wiesel struggles throughout his wartime experience with the problem of theodicy, that is, the problem of reconciling his faith in god as just, caring - and able to enter into and engage with the world - with the profound suffering of the Jewish people. Does he lose his faith? How does his image of god change? Does he decide there is no god? Does he lose his own humanity? How does Wiesel’s struggle fit into the larger context of the history of Judaism and Jews in the world?

### **Option Three**

For Farid Esack, what is the essence of being a Muslim? How does this differ from the stereotyped image of the Muslim one sees on Fox News?