Why Should I Care about Religion?
Why do bad things happen to good people? Is religion irrelevant in our fast-paced technological world? Does the sacred look the same across traditions? How can the study of religion help us understand current events? Is religion a creative or destructive force? How does the study of religion relate to your major? These are just some of the questions that we will explore throughout the semester.

- This course is interested in examining the different expressions, practices and interpretations of religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although no particular tradition will be favored, materials from several traditions will be chosen to exemplify thematic topics in the experience of the Sacred. We will also focus on the tenets of religions, dispelling common misconceptions and assumptions and looking into the emergence of new practices among the post-denominational generation.

How can this course help you advance in your career?
You do not need to be personally religious, majoring in religious studies, or in a field within humanities to benefit from this course. Whatever your academic field is, this course will train you to make important connections between your career and the world of the sacred and the profane. You will be able to understand the complexity of the definitions of religion and secularization, and the role religion plays in local and international affairs.

- Religious illiteracy can greatly impact our ability to understand personal and social motivations behind financial decisions, political engagement, science and technological
advancement, environmental and migration policies, family planning, diet and food production, gender relations, war and terrorist attacks, and more. Whether you notice or not, religion is a universal phenomenon that continues to transform and be transformed by our societies.

- Our approach is interdisciplinary, which means you will be critically reflecting from many fields of study such as anthropology, philosophy, psychology, cultural studies, history, economics, gender studies, among others. This enhances your ability to think critically, communicate effectively, respond sensitively, collaborate with others and creatively resolve conflict.

**COURSE GOALS**

- Foster tolerance of and appreciation for differences in human culture and diverse religious expressions.
- Develop fluency in ancient and contemporary religious history.
- Expand ability to apply different methodologies to the study of religion.
- Create an atmosphere of self-exploration and self-understanding.
- Nurture creative and critical thinking.
- Identify the relevance of studying religion to contemporary life, human thought, and professional development.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Classify and utilize various approaches to the study of religion, including but not limited to ethnographic, psychological, anthropological, ethical, phenomenological, and so on.
- Compare and contrast the key underlying beliefs and principles of the major Eastern, Western, indigenous and shamanic religions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and movement of religious beliefs from ancient to contemporary times.
- Speak intelligently about the relationship between religion and other cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, film, and so on.
- Demonstrate an increased empathetic awareness of religious diversity and differences.
- Correctly distinguish between primary vs secondary sources, insider/ideological vs outsider/academic sources, and scholarly vs journalistic sources.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

1. *Canvas:* All students are required to regularly utilize Canvas for this course. Through this website, students will be able to access course information and materials, upload the assignments, view course announcements, send and receive messages, and access grades.
2. **Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory, and absences will affect your grade. If you know that you will have a conflict, notify the instructor in advance. Timely attendance is also critical, therefore recurrent lateness will affect your participation. *We will have one break during class, and it is important that you return by the time class resumes.*

3. **Class Participation:** It is critical that you come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials. This class requires small group work and critical reflection. Not only will the quality of your participation in class affect your final grade, but also lack of participation will make this a very long class meeting... **DO NOT BE LATE TO CLASS!!!**

4. **Class Facilitation:** You will be required to present weekly readings and facilitate class discussion throughout the semester by yourself as well as in collaboration with one or two of your classmates. At the beginning of each class, designated students will present a short list of questions (2 or 3) based on summaries made from the assigned readings and bring them to class with the intention of using them for the peer review exercise, and to facilitate discussion.

5. **Quizzes:** Quizzes will include key terms from the chapters as well as religious concepts. This is to ensure that the student is reading the text and following the class discussions as well.

6. **Two (2) Film Reports:** These assignments fulfill the Gordon Rule Requirement and are detailed at the end of this document in Appendix I.

*Students are encouraged to make use of FIUs Center for Excellence in Writing at:* [https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/index.html](https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/index.html)

**GRADING CRITERIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSE REQUIREMENTS</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance</td>
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<td>Class participation</td>
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<td>Class facilitation</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Film Report 1</td>
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<td>Film Report 2</td>
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**GRADING GRID**

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**REQUIRED TEXT**

*Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion*

By: James C. Livingston

MLA (7th ed.) citation:

*Additional readings may be assigned by the instructor*

**Gordon Rule Requirement**

As this is a Gordon Rule course, students will be required to write a minimum of two major assignments. Each paper will be at least 1500-2000 words, double spaced – approximately four (4) pages – 12-Pt Font, Times New Roman Font, and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using MLA Style and long quotes should be avoided. Please be aware that papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points).

**Global Learning Objectives**

As a Global Learning course, students will be meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:

- Students will be able to analyze topics in the field of religious studies from multiple perspectives.
- Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions
- Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think creatively about religious issues in the contemporary world.
*This course fulfills the **Gordon Rule requirement**; a “C” or better must be earned to receive credit for this course.

*This course fulfills the **Global Learning Foundations requirement**.

To learn more about Global Learning requirements, please visit: [https://goglobal.fiu.edu/courses/graduation-requirement/](https://goglobal.fiu.edu/courses/graduation-requirement/)

**Plagiarism**

Do you know what plagiarism is? Avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism by asking me, a representative from the writing center or our library to explain. Many students end up plagiarizing material because they do not know what it entails. In short, plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

- A written work that is entirely stolen from another source;
- Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
- Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at [http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm](http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm) if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class. You may not “reuse” papers.

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**Accessibility and Accommodation:** The Disability Resource Center (DRC) collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. The DRC provides FIU students with disabilities the necessary support to successfully complete their education and participate in activities available to all students. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the Center at (305) 348–3532 or visit its office at the Graham Center (GC) 190.

* I do not allow the use of recording devices in my classroom at any time. The only exception to this is if the student requires academic accommodation as stated by the Disability Resource Center. In this case, the student is allowed and encouraged to record the lecture, however, the recorded information is for personal use and “will not be shared, duplicated or disseminated to others” as stated by the disability center.

**This is a Cellphone FREE environment, DON’T TEXT AND LEARN, it’s hazardous to your health!**

***Subject to change. I reserve full right to amend, alter, and otherwise change this syllabus at any time.***
# WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Please Note: Schedule and assignments subject to change by instructor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>COURSE CONTENT: TOPICS AND ASSIGNED READINGS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 1:</strong> AUG 26 - 30</td>
<td><strong>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS!!</strong>&lt;br&gt;8/27: In-depth review and discussion of syllabus&lt;br&gt;· Assign presenters&lt;br&gt;· Preliminary in-class written assignment: open topic&lt;br&gt;8/29 <strong>What is Religion?</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 2:</strong> SEP 2 - 6</td>
<td>9/2: <strong>LABOR DAY – NO CLASSES!!!</strong>&lt;br&gt;9/3: <strong>Ways of Studying Religion</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;9/5: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 3:</strong> SEP 9 - 13</td>
<td>9/10: <strong>The Sacred and the Holy</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;9/12: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 4:</strong> SEP 16 - 20</td>
<td>9/17: <strong>Sacred Symbol, Myth, and Doctrine</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;9/19: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 5:</strong> SEP 23 - 27</td>
<td>9/24: <strong>Sacred Ritual</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;9/26: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WEEK 6:</strong> SEP 30 – OCT 4</td>
<td>10/1: <strong>Sacred Scripture</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;10/3: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #5</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WEEK 7</strong> OCT 7 - 11</td>
<td>10/8: <strong>Society and the Sacred</strong>&lt;br&gt;· Lead discussion of assigned reading&lt;br&gt;10/10: Current event news item&lt;br&gt;· <strong>Quiz #7</strong></td>
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| WEEK 8  | OCT 14 - 18       | 10/15 & 10/17  
*Film Report 1 presentations  
*Film Report 1 due on Canvas by 5pm TH 10/17 |
|----------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| WEEK 9   | OCT 21- OCT 25   | 10/22: **Deity**  
- Lead discussion of assigned reading  
10/24: Current event news item  
- **Quiz #8** |
| WEEK 10  | OCT 28 – NOV 1   | 10/29: **Cosmogony**  
- Lead discussion of assigned reading  
11/31: Current event news item  
- **Quiz #9** |
| WEEK 11  | NOV 4 - 8        | 11/5: **Ethics: Foundations of Moral Action**  
- Lead discussion of assigned reading  
11/7: Current event news item  
- **Quiz #10** |
| WEEK 12  | NOV 11 - 15      | 11/12: **Secularization**  
- Lead discussion of assigned reading  
11/14: Current event news item  
- **Quiz #11** |
| WEEK 13  | NOV 18 - 22      | 11/19: **Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Religion**  
- Lead discussion of assigned reading  
11/21: Current event news item |
| WEEK 14  | NOV 25 - 29      | 11/26:  
*Film Report 2 presentation  
11/28: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!! NO CLASS!!! |
| WEEK 15  | DEC 2 - 6        | 12/3  
*Film Report 2 presentation  
*Film Report 2 due on Canvas by 5pm TH 12/5 |
| FINALS WEEK |      | CHECK FIU ONESTOP FOR FINALS SCHEDULE  
https://onestop.fiu.edu/academic-calendar/ |

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  !!!!!!!!!THANK YOU FOR AN AWESOME SEMESTER!!!!!!!!
The film reports are designed to get you to think and evaluate the religious material presented to you. You may not be familiar with the religion or culture so how can you know if the film is accurate or even fair? Whose voices are we hearing? Who are we not hearing from? Are we being led to form a particular opinion, that of the film maker, or are we left to make our own opinion? Finally, does the film do a good job in helping us to understand a religious or spiritual practice that isn’t our own?

- Any audiovisual recording should be approached critically and respectfully as it is the product of a series of decisions or choices made by its maker(s).

Students should write approximately four (4) double-spaced pages, 1500-2000 words, 12-Pt Font, Times New Roman Font, and it should explicitly address the following 6 points presented below:

1. Write one or two short paragraphs about the central issue or principal target of the film. What was the point of the film? Any film, particularly documentary or nonfiction, has a principal target, an audience in mind, or a central issue that an educated or critical reader/viewer should be able to identify.

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3. As we all know, nobody—in mainstream society or in academia—makes claims about a particular issue without presenting data used as evidence in support of, or to back up these claims or ideas. From watching the film, what can you say about the data used as evidence by the filmmaker(s) to support their claims?
   - Include in your report the types of data used: verbal data (interviews, conversations between various people, etc.); observed actions; primary sources (archival documents, newspapers, books, records); secondary sources (essays or other nonfiction films written/produced by other scholars/filmmakers); participant observation; etc., where applicable.

4. Write briefly about the organization of the film. It will have a particular structure; it presents the argumentation, some background information/history, and the claims, or interpretation of the filmmaker in a particular organized way. We, as educated viewers or “readers” of films, must be able to reflect upon the choices made by a filmmaker to present his or her film in a particular way. The filmmaker’s selection of a particular film structure is connected to theoretical and political considerations and how the maker wants it to be interpreted. Keep in mind that these points are of course closely related. Is the film maker present in the film? Do we see, hear, or otherwise get to experience the human behind the camera making the film?

5. Discuss the film in whatever way you want. Here, you could state why you like or dislike the film, comment upon one of its aspects, or focus most specifically on the relation between the filmmaker’s
claims and the data he or she used as evidence, for instance. Was there anything that surprised you or moved you?

On your review, be sure to write:

- Your name/PID
- The film’s full title
- The geographical area/s where the film is based and the religious or spiritual tradition it is documenting (i.e., Vodou in Haiti, Candomble in Brazil)
- Submit it through Canvas

LIST OF DOCUMENTARIES/FILMS:

**Releasing the Spirits: A Village Cremation in Bali**
Cremation rites are the most elaborate rites of passage performed by Balinese householders. Poor families may wait years before accumulating enough resources to cremate their dead, who are buried in the meantime. In 1978, many more cremations than usual were carried out because of the great purification ceremony Eka Dasa Rudra held at Bali’s main temple, Besakih, in 1979. Religious officials recommended that all Balinese cleanse the island by cremating their dead as part of the preparations for the great Besakih ceremony.

**Barbara and Her in Candombleland**
In the Afro-Brazilian Candomble religion, an initiation tradition centered around possession, the filmmakers concentrate on children who introduce and guide us through this world. The children are anxious to participate in Candomble rituals. Passing from simulation of the representation, the children touch on the possession dance. Many are eager to be possessed. The film explores what Candomble may offer them.

**Jinns and Witchcraft: The Hidden World**
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygg2_SkPJHM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygg2_SkPJHM)
Both the Quran and hadith make reference to witchcraft and the evil eye as well as to supernatural beings known in Arabic as jinn (the origin of the English word genie). To gauge how widespread belief in these supernatural forces is today, the survey asked Muslims separate questions about witchcraft, jinn and the evil eye (defined in the survey as the belief that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen). In most of the countries surveyed, roughly half or more Muslims affirm that jinn exist and that the evil eye is real. Belief in sorcery is somewhat less common: half or more Muslims in nine of the countries included in the study say they believe in witchcraft. At the same time, however, most Muslims agree that Islam forbids appealing to jinn or using sorcery.

**Trembling before G-d**
A documentary built around personal stories of gay and lesbian Hasidic and Orthodox Jews. Portrays people who face a profound dilemma - how to reconcile their passion for Judaism with the biblical prohibitions against homosexuality. Includes interviews with closeted and out gay Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, including the first openly gay Orthodox rabbis, Steven Greenberg.

**Saints and spirits**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOOszdjzZo
A documentary on one group of Moroccan Muslims. Tells how they view their worship of saints and spirits as part of the wider Islamic tradition and shows them visiting shrines in Marrakech and in the Atlas Mountains.

**Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YIO_dxyJio&ts=31s
Although best known as a pioneer of independent experimental cinema, Maya Deren (born 1917 as Eleanora Derenkowsky in Kiev, Ukraine, died in 1961 in New York City) was also a Vodoun initiate, and hence able to take her camera and recorder where few have gone before or since. The film captures the rituals of Rada, Petro and Congo cults, whose devotees commune with the cosmic powers through invocations — ritual offerings, song and dance. The Vodoun pantheon of deities, or loa are introduced as living gods, actually taking possession of their devotees. Also featured are the Rara and Mardi Gras celebrations.

**The Goddess and the Computer**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGE-FSn_aNo
For centuries, rice farmers on the island of Bali have taken great care not to offend Dewi Danu, the water goddess who dwells in the crater lake near the peak of Batur volcano. Toward the end of each rainy season, the farmers send representatives to Ulun Danu Batur, the temple at the top of the mountain, to offer ducks, pigs, coins and coconuts in thanks for the water that sustains their terraced fields. Outsiders have long considered the rituals of Agama Tirtha, "the religion of holy water" an interesting but impractical way to grow crops. Development companies have spent millions trying to improve on the ancient system. With the help of an ingenious computer program, anthropologist Steve Lansing and ecologist James Kremer have shown that the Balinese rice growers have been practicing state-of-the-art resource management. Besides placating the goddess, it turns out, the island's ancient rituals serve to coordinate the irrigation and planting schedules of hundreds of scattered villages. And as a new computer model makes clear, the result is one of the most stable and efficient farming systems on the planet.

**The King Does Not Lie**
This film shows the Afro-Cuban religion, Santeria, whose New World practitioners have too often been maligned out of ignorance and prejudice and even harassed by authorities. In this intimate documentary we see a contemporary Puerto Rican community of "santeros" gather for the initiation of a priest of Shango, the "Thunder god" of the traditional Yoruba religion. As we follow the initiate through a series of ritual events, a new perspective on ancient rites is revealed. The religion originated in Africa and the chants are sung in Yoruba. Rituals like these are the basis of ceremonies performed in churches and
temples of established religions. Sacred stones washed in sacred, leafy waters become the energy for ritual purification and empowerment. The anointment of head, feet and stones with the blood of sacrifice ensures atonement. On the third day the community gathers to witness the divination session in which the initiate receives his new name, "Oba Ko Puro", translated from Yoruba as "The King Does Not Lie." With the name, comes the story of the initiate's transfer of allegiance from an outer/worldly to inner/spiritual authority. Combining ritual narration with poetic translation from Lucumi/Yoruba chants provides the viewer with an understanding of the literal and figurative dimensions of the ceremony.

Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits In Nigeria
Mammy Water is a pidgin English name for a local water goddess worshipped by the Ibibio, Ijaw, and Igbo speaking peoples of southeastern Nigeria. The water goddess traditionally gives wealth and children, compensates for hardships, and is sought in times of illness and need, especially by women. Her various cults are led, predominantly, by priestesses. This acclaimed documentary shows numerous rituals and ceremonies associated with Mammy Water, while devotees provide commentary. This is an important depiction of the strength of traditional religion in contemporary Nigeria and one of the few academically sound investigations of the role of women in an African spiritual movement.

Friends in High Places
https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/watch/friends-in-high-places
"Buddhism and nat worship are like mangoes and bananas" Whether contending with a deceitful daughter-in-law, forecasting financial prospects for a tea shop, or freeing a husband from government detainment, Friends in High Places reveals the central role of nats and spirit mediums in alleviating the day to day burdens of modern Burmese life. "Leprosy isn't as contagious as people's problems," notes one medium, "my clients bring their worries into my home. I don't need to go out on the street to learn how cruel life can be." Yet despite their skills in channeling good luck for others, the life stories of the mediums prove to be as poignant as the stories of those who seek their assistance.

To Serve the Gods
https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/watch/to-serve-the-gods
To Serve the Gods is about the beliefs, rituals and performances of a week-long ceremony given by a Haitian family in honor of its ancestral spirits. We are told at the outset of the film that this sèvis loa only occurs every twenty to thirty years. This particular service takes place in a rural community in southern Haiti, on family land, where relatives have gathered to propitiate gods inherited by their ancestors. This celebration of one's birthright and obligations involve drumming, song, dance, possession, animal sacrifice and sharing of food with the gods and with friends, family and neighbors.

To the Land of Bliss
To the Land of Bliss is an intimate portrayal of the Chinese Pure Land Buddhist way of dying and living. In 1998, the filmmaker/anthropologist Wen-jie Qin returned to her home region in Sichuan Province in southwest China to research the post-Mao revival of Buddhism. During her fieldwork on the sacred mountain Emei, an eminent monk named Jue Chang passed away. People in the community laughed and cried at the departure of their beloved teacher. They gathered to escort his body through a rite of fire and to observe his consciousness rise to a paradise known as the Land of Bliss of Amita
Buddha. The filmmaker captured some of the wonders and mystery from her search with these Chinese Pure Land Buddhists for the door to Amita Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life.

**Seven Young Gods of Fortune: Fertility Rite of Dosojin**

In Shimofukuzawa, Japan, the local men's youth association organizes the annual Dosojin deity festival. The festivities are characterized by paper decorations and pantomime, with sexualized symbols promoting marriage and fertility. Young men of the village play the roles of the seven lucky gods, traditional protectors embodying such blessings as health, prosperity, long life, wealth, respect for Buddhist law, and generosity. Those who have left the village to work in urban areas return every January to take part in the ritual, held for the benefit of newlyweds and for the purification of 42-year-old men, who are thought to be in especial danger from evil spirits. Filmmaker: Yasuhiro Omori
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*There will be a brief 5-10 minute in-class synopsis presentation on the students chosen film the day the assignment is due.

On your review, be sure to write:
- Your name/PID
- The full film title
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**Jinns and Witchcraft: The Hidden World**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygg2_SkPJHM
Both the Quran and hadith make reference to witchcraft and the evil eye as well as to supernatural beings known in Arabic as jinn (the origin of the English word genie). To gauge how widespread belief in these supernatural forces is today, the survey asked Muslims separate questions about witchcraft, jinn and the evil eye (defined in the survey as the belief that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen). In most of the countries surveyed, roughly half or more Muslims affirm that jinn exist and that the evil eye is real. Belief in sorcery is somewhat less common: half or more Muslims in nine of the countries included in
the study say they believe in witchcraft. At the same time, however, most Muslims agree that Islam forbids appealing to jinn or using sorcery.

**Trembling before G-d**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts7bhOau0Wc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts7bhOau0Wc)  
A documentary built around personal stories of gay and lesbian Hasidic and Orthodox Jews. Portrays people who face a profound dilemma - how to reconcile their passion for Judaism with the biblical prohibitions against homosexuality. Includes interviews with closeted and out gay Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, including the first openly gay Orthodox rabbis, Steven Greenberg.

**Saints and spirits**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOOszdjzZo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOOszdjzZo)  
A documentary on one group of Moroccan Muslims. Tells how they view their worship of saints and spirits as part of the wider Islamic tradition and shows them visiting shrines in Marrakech and in the Atlas Mountains.

**Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YIO_dxyJio&t=31s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YIO_dxyJio&t=31s)  
Although best known as a pioneer of independent experimental cinema, Maya Deren (born 1917 as Eleanora Derenkowsky in Kiev, Ukraine, died in 1961 in New York City) was also a Vodoun initiate, and hence able to take her camera and recorder where few have gone before or since. The film captures the rituals of Rada, Petro and Congo cults, whose devotees commune with the cosmic powers through invocations — ritual offerings, song and dance. The Vodoun pantheon of deities, or loa are introduced as living gods, actually taking possession of their devotees. Also featured are the Rara and Mardi Gras celebrations.

**The Goddess and the Computer**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGE-FSn_aNo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGE-FSn_aNo)  
For centuries, rice farmers on the island of Bali have taken great care not to offend Dewi Danu, the water goddess who dwells in the crater lake near the peak of Batur volcano. Toward the end of each rainy season, the farmers send representatives to Ulun Danu Batur, the temple at the top of the mountain, to offer ducks, pigs, coins and coconuts in thanks for the water that sustains their terraced fields. Outsiders have long considered the rituals of Agama Tirtha, "the religion of holy water" an interesting but impractical way to grow crops. Development companies have spent millions trying to improve on the ancient system. With the help of an ingenious computer program, anthropologist Steve Lansing and ecologist James Kremer have shown that the Balinese rice growers have been practicing state-of-the-art resource management. Besides placating the goddess, it turns out, the island's ancient rituals serve to coordinate the irrigation and planting schedules of hundreds of scattered villages. And as a new computer model makes clear, the result is one of the most stable and efficient farming systems on the planet.

**The King Does Not Lie**  
This film shows the Afro-Cuban religion, Santeria, whose New World practitioners have too often been maligned out of ignorance and prejudice and even harassed by authorities. In this intimate documentary
we see a contemporary Puerto Rican community of "santeros" gather for the initiation of a priest of Shango, the "Thunder god" of the traditional Yoruba religion. As we follow the initiate through a series of ritual events, a new perspective on ancient rites is revealed. The religion originated in Africa and the chants are sung in Yoruba. Rituals like these are the basis of ceremonies performed in churches and temples of established religions. Sacred stones washed in sacred, leafy waters become the energy for ritual purification and empowerment. The anointment of head, feet and stones with the blood of sacrifice ensures atonement. On the third day the community gathers to witness the divination session in which the initiate receives his new name, "Oba Ko Puro", translated from Yoruba as "The King Does Not Lie." With the name, comes the story of the initiate's transfer of allegiance from an outer/worldly to inner/spiritual authority. Combining ritual narration with poetic translation from Lucumi/Yoruba chants provides the viewer with an understanding of the literal and figurative dimensions of the ceremony.

**Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits In Nigeria**


Mammy Water is a pidgin English name for a local water goddess worshipped by the Ibibio, Ijaw, and Igbo speaking peoples of southeastern Nigeria. The water goddess traditionally gives wealth and children, compensates for hardships, and is sought in times of illness and need, especially by women. Her various cults are led, predominantly, by priestesses. This acclaimed documentary shows numerous rituals and ceremonies associated with Mammy Water, while devotees provide commentary. This is an important depiction of the strength of traditional religion in contemporary Nigeria and one of the few academically sound investigations of the role of women in an African spiritual movement.

**Friends in High Places**

https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/watch/friends-in-high-places

"Buddhism and nat worship are like mangoes and bananas" Whether contending with a deceitful daughter-in-law, forecasting financial prospects for a tea shop, or freeing a husband from government detainment, Friends in High Places reveals the central role of nats and spirit mediums in alleviating the day to day burdens of modern Burmese life. "Leprosy isn't as contagious as people's problems," notes one medium, "my clients bring their worries into my home. I don't need to go out on the street to learn how cruel life can be." Yet despite their skills in channeling good luck for others, the life stories of the mediums prove to be as poignant as the stories of those who seek their assistance.

**To Serve the Gods**

https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.fiu.edu/watch/to-serve-the-gods

To Serve the Gods is about the beliefs, rituals and performances of a week-long ceremony given by a Haitian family in honor of its ancestral spirits. We are told at the outset of the film that this sèvis loa only occurs every twenty to thirty years. This particular service takes place in a rural community in southern Haiti, on family land, where relatives have gathered to propitiate gods inherited by their ancestors. This celebration of one's birthright and obligations involve drumming, song, dance, possession, animal sacrifice and sharing of food with the gods and with friends, family and neighbors.

**To the Land of Bliss**


To the Land of Bliss is an intimate portrayal of the Chinese Pure Land Buddhist way of dying and living. In 1998, the filmmaker/anthropologist Wen-jie Qin returned to her home region in Sichuan
Province in southwest China to research the post-Mao revival of Buddhism. During her fieldwork on the sacred mountain Emei, an eminent monk named Jue Chang passed away. People in the community laughed and cried at the departure of their beloved teacher. They gathered to escort his body through a rite of fire and to observe his consciousness rise to a paradise known as the Land of Bliss of Amita Buddha. The filmmaker captured some of the wonders and mystery from her search with these Chinese Pure Land Buddhists for the door to Amita Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life.

Seven Young Gods of Fortune: Fertility Rite of Dosojin
In Shimofukuzawa, Japan, the local men’s youth association organizes the annual Dosojin deity festival. The festivities are characterized by paper decorations and pantomime, with sexualized symbols promoting marriage and fertility. Young men of the village play the roles of the seven lucky gods, traditional protectors embodying such blessings as health, prosperity, long life, wealth, respect for Buddhist law, and generosity. Those who have left the village to work in urban areas return every January to take part in the ritual, held for the benefit of newlyweds and for the purification of 42-year-old men, who are thought to be in especial danger from evil spirits. Filmmaker: Yasuhiro Omori