

SCTR 119: Law in Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Winter 2010

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SCTR 119: T/TH 9:55-11:40
Office Hours: T/TH 11:45-12:45
and by appointment

Course Description: The sentiment, “I’m into spirituality but not into organized religion,” actually has long antecedents in the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This course focuses on the centrality of the law in the scriptures, beliefs and practices of the three monotheistic traditions and on how the relationship between the absolute claims of the law and the inspiration of believers has been negotiated. Our objective is not so much to survey the legal teachings of each religion but rather to consider: To what extent--how adequately--do sanctioned moral acts and ritual practices enable the devout Jew, Muslim and Christian to encounter God? Within Judaism, we will consider the significance of covenant in the Written Torah; the central position of the Oral Torah in Rabbinic culture; and the enduring vitality of Torah in Medieval philosophical, early Hasidic and contemporary Jewish thought. Our study of Islam will take up, in turn, the development of Sharia (Islamic law) out of the teachings of the Qur’an and the traditions of Muhammad; the challenge that Sufism was originally deemed to pose to observance of the law; and the success of the revered teacher and writer Al-Ghazali in reconciling these two approaches to Muslim piety. Turning to Christianity, we will focus on the plurality of attitudes to the law manifest in the New Testament—both within the Gospels and within Paul’s writings--and consider how moral discourse expressed in terms of a tension between “law” and “spirit” often characterizes Christian reflection to this day.

Required Texts:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition, NRSV with Apocrypha
The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, trans. and commentary by ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali
Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, edited by Barry W. Holtz
The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali, translated by W. Montgomery Watt
Course readings on ANGEL

Handouts also occasionally provided in class

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Active Class Participation (20%). Assigned readings for a given class are to be completed in advance so that all enter class prepared to discuss and to learn from each other’s engagement with the reading. Only two unexcused absences from class permitted without reduction in grade.

Midterm Exams (50%). There will be two midterm exams, with essay questions drawn from the readings, lectures and focus questions for class discussion. Each essay is scored on points, with the total assigned according to the following evaluative criteria:

- accuracy of the essay's content as drawn from the readings and lectures: 35%
- cogency with which the essay's thesis is argued: 35%
- clarity of presentation within the essay: 30%

Final Paper (30%) A final paper on an issue of law across two of the three traditions, or on one of the meta-questions of religion that arises in the course, chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. The criteria for evaluation will again be the accuracy of the paper's content, the cogency with which the thesis is argued and the clarity of presentation.

As a third level course, this course is directed to giving students the opportunity to bring together their core and disciplinary knowledge, their acquired analytic skills, the intellectual challenge of current issues, and the meta-questions that will invoke ethical and ontological concerns.

Academic Integrity:

There are probably few original insights remaining in the study of scripture. What one does is to enter a conversation, bringing to bear one's own experience and passions on the rich legacy of scholars and sages of the past, and to move the conversation along. Thus, there is nothing wrong with drawing on the work and contributions of others *as long as those contributions are appropriately cited by use of quotation marks, footnotes and bibliographies*. This course fully follows the Academic Integrity Protocol of the University's Office of Student Life.

CALENDAR

1/5 Introductions to the course and to each other

Law in Judaism

1/7: Written Torah: "Biblical Law," Edward L. Greenstein, in Holtz, 83-103

1/12 Oral Torah: Mishnah Berakhot 1; "Talmud," Robert Goldenberg, in Holtz, 129-155

1/14 Oral Torah: "Talmud," Robert Goldenberg, in Holtz, 155-175

1/19 Maimonides and Torah: "Medieval Jewish Philosophy," Norbert Samuelson, in Holtz, 261-285

1/21 Torah in Hasidism: "Teachings of the Hasidic Masters," Arthur Green, in Holtz, 361-401

1/26 "Oral Torah for an Oral People," Arthur Waskow (ANGEL)

1/28 Midterm Examination #1

Law in Islam

2/2 Sharia: "Islamic Law," John Esposito (ANGEL)

2/4 Sufism: Qur'an 24:35; "Sufism: The Mystic Path of Love," John Esposito (ANGEL)
The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali 9-25.

2/9 *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, 26-66

2/11 *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* 67-127.

2/16 "Law and Ethics in Islam," Fazlur Rahman (ANGEL)

Deadline for Submission of Final Paper Proposal

2/18 "The Shari'ah and Changing Historical Conditions," Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ANGEL); "A Syrian Muslim Woman Speaks Her Mind," Bouthania Shaaban (ANGEL)

Law in Christianity

2/23 Gospel of Matthew, ch. 5; "Jesus and the Law," Geza Vermes (ANGEL)

2/25 Galatians 1-3; "Circumcision and Revelation; or, The Politics of the Spirit," Daniel Boyarin (ANGEL)

3/2 Romans 9-11; "Letter to the Romans," Paul Gager (ANGEL)

3/4 Midterm Examination #2

3/9 "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," Martin Luther (ANGEL); "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience," Martin Luther King, Jr. (ANGEL)

3/11 "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics," Karl Rahner (ANGEL)

3/16 Submission of Final Papers