

SCTR 19: Religions of the Book Winter 2010

Instructor: Michael Castori, S.J.
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SCTR19: T/TH 8:00-9:45 AM
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:

This course offers an introduction to Judaism, Christianity and Islam through study of their central texts, traditions and practices. We begin the course with a paradox: religion, that which in its literal sense “binds” or “fastens together,” is also that which often violently divides our world. As we examine the sacred texts of Jews, Christians and Muslims (Hebrew Bible, New Testament and Qur’an), and various methods of interpreting them, our focus will remain on what is shared and what characteristically distinguishes between the monotheistic faiths. In Part I of the course, we consider traditions of Abraham in the scriptures and the contrasting yet related ways in which they became foundational for each of the three religions. Parts II and III look more comprehensively at how the content, reception and interpretation of scripture have served over the centuries to establish the identity, modes of worship and ethical norms of Jews, Christians and Muslims. In Part IV, we examine the call of prophecy and its role in and potential for interreligious dialogue.

Texts and Course Materials:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, NRSV.

The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, trans. ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications.

F. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*. New Edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Phyllis Trible and Letty Russell, eds.: *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Perspectives*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Course Readings on ERes.

Learning Objectives for Core Courses in Religion, Theology and Culture:

- *Learning Objective #1:*
Students will be able to describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from several traditions, or within one, and from at least two globally distinct regions. In this course, students meet this objective through careful study and discussion of assigned readings and through thoughtful synthesis demanded by the midterm exams and final essay.
- *Learning Objective #2:*
Students will be able to use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence. The final essay in particular is directed to this objective.

Specific Goals for this Course:

- To gain knowledge of the content and role of scripture in the belief systems, practices and ethical norms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam
- To discover a diversity of perspectives, both within these religious traditions and between them, on how sacred text is to be interpreted
- To encounter through close reading of the Bible and the Qur'an some of the overarching questions of religion
- To discern how a text relates to the evolving social and historical contexts in which it is received
- To learn by and delight in informed dialogue with our texts and with each other

Course Requirements and Assessment:

Attendance and Active Class Participation (250 points, or 25% of final grade): This is essential if all of us are to achieve the learning outcomes desired. In this course, we will be raising some of the grand, enduring questions of religion--the nature of revelation, the suffering of the innocent, the identification of true prophecy--questions for which there are no simple answers and which can only be addressed by careful study and reflection in dialogue with each other. Focus questions will be given with each set of readings in order to facilitate this reflection. Thus, the readings for a given class should be completed in advance so that we enter class prepared and able to learn from each other's engagement with the texts. No more than two unexcused absences without a resulting loss of grade.

This course component is directed to both Learning Objective #1 and Learning Objective #2.

Midterm Examinations (500 points, or 50% of final grade): There will be two midterm exams (each 250 points). Questions will be in essay form and drawn from the focus questions for class discussion and from the lectures. 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%

This course component is directed primarily to Learning Objective #1.

Final Essay (7-9 pages; 250 points or 25% of final grade): An essay commenting on two or three texts of your choosing (selected in consultation with the instructor) which are drawn from the scriptures of at least two of the three religious traditions. Your commentary should explain the texts' original historical and social contexts (the world behind the text and the world of the text), highlight ways in which they have been interpreted in the past, identify the relationship(s) that you have found between them, and view them in light of ongoing questions of religion that have arisen for you in the course. The final essay is scored on points, with the total assigned according to the following evaluative criteria:

accuracy with which the texts are explained in light of their present and past contexts: 35% (87.5 points possible)
cogency with which the texts are compared to each other and related to larger questions of religion: 35% (87.5 points possible)
clarity of presentation: 30% (75 points possible)

This course component is directed to both Learning Objective #1 and Learning Objective #2.

Overall Grade Scale:

93.5-100: A	76.7-79.9: C
90.0-93.4: A-	73.3-76.6: C
86.7-89.9: B+	70.0-73.2: C-
83.3-86.6: B	66.7-69.9: D+
80.0-83.2 B-	63.3-66.6: D
	60.0-63.2: D-

Conferences: After the first midterm, each student will meet with the instructor to review his or her performance and to discuss possible texts for the final essay.

Course Evaluation:

Students will evaluate the success of this course by means of a mid-quarter survey and with narrative and numerical evaluations at the end of the term.

Academic Integrity:

There are probably few, if any, 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 or bibliographies*. This course fully follows the Academic Integrity Protocol of the University's Office of Student Life.

Disability Accommodation Policy:

To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in The Drahnmann Center in Benson, room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodations.

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