

<p style="text-align: center;">SCTR 19 - RELIGIONS OF THE BOOK: JUDAISM, ISLAM, AND CHRISTIANITY</p>

Instructor: Mary Criscione, RSM, PhD (criscionejc@yahoo.com)

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 8:55-9:55 a.m Kenna

Course description: Religion and politics, violence and nonviolence, gender and justice, tradition vs. modernity—these issues make headlines throughout the world today and set the context for our study. An introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this course will look at where these monotheistic “cousins” stand with regard to such contemporary concerns. We will consider the shared and unique histories of these three religions, and their particular emphases and practices. Central to our study will be the way that *sacred writing (scripture) functions as a normative, formative, and transformative influence* in each of these communities of faith. Questions of cultural context and interpretation, of tradition and innovation, of authority claims and inspiration will characterize our inquiry. Particular attention will be given to religious extremism and fundamentalism as well as to the liberating energies evidenced in each of these traditions. Women’s participation and practice in the historical and contemporary communities will be emphasized throughout this study.

Course objectives:

This course aims to introduce students to **critical appreciation** of religious texts and traditions, both ancient and contemporary: “**critical**” in terms of using scholarly analysis, and “**appreciative**” in terms of respectful understanding. By the successful completion of this course students should be able to:

- Explain and illustrate the difference between devotional and critical reading
- Demonstrate how to “read in context” (both social-historical and literary context) in interpreting texts and traditions
- Articulate the continuing power of sacred texts within communities today
- Define religious fundamentalism and illustrate its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim manifestations
- Explain the concern with social justice evidenced in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts and practices
- Appreciate the diversity of spiritual paths and traditions among the “children of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar”

Textbooks: Required

- Esposito, John L., et al., *Religions of the West Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*.
- *New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version)* or some other English version with the instructor’s approval.

Grading: Regular attendance is **mandatory** in order to pass this course. Unexcused absences will result in lowered grades, and four unexcused absences will lead to an F.

Written assignments, tests = 25%

Class participation = 20%

Site visit report = 15%

Group research project = 15%

Final exam (take-home) = 25%

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

- Mar 31** **Introduction: Western Abrahamic religions**
historical timeline: composition and canonization of biblical traditions, reception of Qur'an; devotional vs. critical reading; history and "sacred history"
- Apr 2** **No class meeting**
Reading/writing assignment: the religious quest yesterday and today
- **Esposito, ch 1**
 - **Written response (due 4/7 beginning of class)**
- Apr 7** **Foundational myth: Example - Abraham's story of covenant and trust, submission and fidelity; community identity, tradition and morality**
- **Bible, Genesis 12-25 (chapters 12-25)**
 - **Meaning of Qur'an, Sura 2: 122-141; Sura 3: 64-120; Sura 6: 71-110; Sura 37: 1-182**
- Apr 9** **Judaism**
Brief overview: history of Judaism; Exodus, Torah, prophecy, wisdom traditions
- **Esposito, ch 3: 75-114**
- Test #1 distributed*
- Apr 14** **Judaism**
Rabbinic Judaism, Talmud, synagogue; modern and postmodern Judaisms
- **Esposito, ch 3: 114-145**
- Apr 16** **Judaism**
Scripture as formative, normative, and transformative
- Exodus 1-15, 19-23
 - Deuteronomy 6
 - Micah 4:1-5, 6:1-8
- Test #1 due**

- Apr 21** **Christianity**
 Brief overview: history of Christianity; New Testament, creeds, movements.
 • Esposito, ch 4:147-181
Test 2 distributed, Site visit choice and contact information due
- Apr 23** **Christianity**
 Schisms, crusades, reforms, modernity and postmodernity
 • Esposito, ch 4: 181-211
- Apr 28** **Christian scripture**
 • Gospel of Mark
 • Matthew 5-7
 • Luke 15
 • 1 Corinthians 12-15
Test #2 due
- Apr 30** **Islam**
 Brief overview: history of Islam; Muhammad, Qur'an, Mecca, global expansion, Shia, Sunni, Sufi
 • Esposito, ch 5: 213-259
Test #3 distributed
- May 5** **Islam**
 Islamic modernism and fundamentalism; Islam and globalization
 • Esposito, ch 5: 259-297
Research group time
- May 7** **Islam**
 Qur'an and its interpretation/application
 • Qur'an: Sura 1, Sura 2:1-141, Sura 20: 116-12
Test #3 due
Research group time
- May 12** **Site Visit Reports, Discussion**
Test 3 distributed
- May 14** **Holy War, Holy Peace**
 Traditions of vengeance and destruction, divine wrath; traditions of peace and communal wellbeing, forgiveness
 • Select passages from Bible and Qur'an
 • Debate: is the God of the Book a God of war?
Research group time

- May 19** **Justice and Compassion**
A just and merciful Deity demanding justice and mercy in response;
concern especially with the poor and vulnerable
- Select passages from Bible and Qur'an
 - Readings: justice, mercy and moral monotheism
- Research group time*
Test 3 due
- May 21** **Fundamentalism**
Western science, reason, and empire: admirers and detractors; threat to
faith vs. complement to faith; tradition vs. innovation
- Readings: reacting to science/modernity; postcolonialism
- Research group time*
- May 26** **Research Group Presentations**
- May 28** **Research Group Presentations**
- June 2** **Final Exam distributed**
Possible futures for the children of Abraham/Ibrahim, Sarah, Hagar;
concluding thoughts and continuing questions
- June 4** **Last class meeting; final exam discussion**
- June 10** **Final Exam due by noon (no class meeting)**