

SCTR 19: Religions of the Book Fall 2009

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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 significant role in and potential for interreligious dialogue.

Texts and Course Materials:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition, NRSV with Apocrypha.

The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, trans. ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana, 1996.

Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

F. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*,

New Edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

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 Drahnann 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.

Calendar:

Week 1:

Course Overview and Introductions

I: Traditions of Abraham

Abraham in the Hebrew Bible

Readings: Genesis 1-12:3

Week 2:

Abraham in the Hebrew Bible

Peters, 1-11

Genesis 22 in Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: Translation and Commentary* (ERes)

Abraham in the Hebrew Bible

Readings: Genesis 12-21

Delaney, 5-11; 35-68

Week 3:

Abraham in Jewish Traditions

Readings: *Lamentations Rabbah*, Proem 24; 1:16 (ERes)

Delaney, 111-135

Abraham in Christian Interpretations

Readings: Matthew 1:1-17; 3:1-10; 22:23-40; Galatians 3:6--4:31; Hebrews 11:1-22

Delaney, 137-160

Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, VIII (ERes)

Week 4:

Abraham in Muslim Interpretations

Readings: Qur'an 2 (Al Baqarah):122-141; 6 (Al An'am):71-110;

37 (Al Saffat):1-113

Delaney, 162-185

The Promise and the Heirs

Reading: Peters 7-11 (Review); 11-40

Week 5:

Midterm Exam #1

II: The Scriptures Lived

The Jewish Scriptures: Canon and Contexts

Readings: Ezra 7:1-14; Exodus 1-2; 14-15; 2 Samuel 5-7;

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Essays, 453-456; 507-514

Week 6:**Written and Oral Torah**

Readings: Exodus 19-20; Numbers 15: 37-41; Deuteronomy 5-6

Mishnah: Pirkei Avos, Selections (ERes)

Peters: 67-71; 85-88

The Christian Scriptures: Canon and Contexts

Readings: Mark 1-16

The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Essays, 456-460

Peters, 89-94

Week 7:**Christian Biblical Ethics**

Readings: Matthew 13; 22-25; 2 Corinthians 8-13; 1 Thessalonians 5

John R. Donahue, "The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching: Will this Engagement Lead to Marriage?" (ERes)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (ERes)

The Qur'an

Readings: Qur'an 1 (Fatihah); 17 (Al Isra'); 43 (Al Zukhruf)

John L. Esposito, "Muhammad and the Quran: Messenger and Message," *Islam: The Straight Path*, 1-31 (ERes)

Week 8:**The Qur'an and Islamic Life**

Readings: Qur'an 4 (Al Nisa'); 5:1-26 (Al Ma'idah); 41 (Fussilat):33-54;

58 (Al Mujadilah)

Peters, 94-102

John L. Esposito, "Religious Life: Belief and Practice," *Islam: The Straight Path*, 88-100 (ERes)

Hadith of Abu Musaul-Ashari, Abu Umamah and Abu Hurairah (ERes)

III: Communities that Worship**Benei Israel**

Readings: Exodus 12, Psalms 92-99

Passover Haggadah, Selections (ERes)

Peters, 41-49; 103-106

The Body of Christ

Readings: Matthew 26:1-29; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Liturgy of the Hours, Selections (ERes)

Peters, 49-56; 107-110

Week 9:

The Umma

Readings: Qur'an 2(Al Baqarah):142-221; 7(Al A'raf)204-206; 56(Al Waqi'ah):75-80;
73(Al Muzzammil):1-8; 97 (Al Qadr):1-5

Peters, 56-66; 110-113

Michael Cook, "The Koran as Worship" in *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*,
77-88 (ERes)

Midterm Exam #2

Week 10:

IV: Prophecy in Dialogue

Prophecy in Jewish Traditions

Readings: Amos 1-9

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, Volume 1, 3-38 (ERes)

Christian and Qur'anic Perspectives on Prophecy

Readings: Matthew 16:13-27; Acts 9:9-30; 1 Corinthians 14

Qur'an 11(Hud):25-49; 20(Ta Ha):8-76; 26(Al Shu'ara):123-227; 48(Al Fath):27-29

Mahmoud Ayoub and Daniel Madigan, "Jesus and Muhammad" in *Bearing the Word*,
ed., Michael Ipgrave, 87-99 (ERes)

Exam Week:

Submission of Final Essays