

<b>RELIGIONS OF THE BOOK SPRING 2008</b>
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**Instructor:** Mary Criscione, RSM, PhD

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**Office:** Bannan 351

**Office hours:** TTH 10:45-11:45 am and by appointment

**Course description:** An introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this course will consider their shared and unique histories, 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, Hagar”

**Textbooks:** The following books are required:

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

### SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

- Apr 1**            **Introduction: Abrahamic religions**  
historical timeline: composition and canonization of biblical traditions, reception of Qur'an.
- Apr 3**            **Introduction: Sacred texts (scriptures)**  
devotional vs. critical reading; history and "sacred history"  
    • Peters, "Introduction" and "Epilogue"
- Apr 8**            **Biblical roots: Abraham's story of covenant and trust**  
    • Bible, Genesis 12-25 (chapters 12-25)
- Apr 10**          **Qur'an: Abraham as model of submission, fidelity**  
    • **Meaning of Qur'an**, Sura 2: 122-141; Sura 3: 64-120; Sura 6: 71-110; Sura 37: 1-182  
*Test 1 distributed*
- Apr 15**          **Children of Abraham: Jews**  
Brief overview: history of Judaism; Exodus, Torah, prophecy, wisdom traditions; rabbinic Judaism, Talmud, synagogue  
    • Peters, pp. 7-31  
    • Exodus 1-15, 19-23  
    • Deuteronomy 6  
    • Micah 4:1-5, 6:1-8
- Apr 17**          **Children of Abraham: Christians**  
Brief overview: history of Christianity; New Testament, creeds, movements, schisms, reforms.  
    • Gospel of Mark  
    • Matthew 5-7  
    • Luke 15  
    • 1 Corinthians 12-15  
*Test 1 due*

- Apr 22**      **Children of Abraham: Muslims**  
 Brief overview: history of Islam; Muhammad, Qur'an, Mecca, global expansion, Shia, Sunni, Sufi
- Qur'an, Sura 1, Sura 2:1-141, Sura 20:116-123
  - Peters, pp ix-xiii, 31-40, 56-66, 75-84
  - Article from Time Magazine: Shia/Sunni in Iraq
- Site visit choice and contact information due*  
*Test 2 distributed*
- Apr 24**      **Scripture and Tradition**  
 Interpretation and adaptation/appropriation of sacred texts; other influential writings besides scripture; teachers and interpretive keys
- Peters, pp 85-102, and additional readings
- Apr 29**      **The Worship of God**  
 Ritual, prayer, liturgy; adoration and veneration; private, familial, and congregational practices
- Peters, pp 103-115, and additional readings
- Test 2 due*
- May 6**      **Site Visit Reports, Discussion**
- May 8**      **Exclusivism, Universalism, Mysticism**  
 Claims of divine preference; universal mission and inclusion; union with the Holy
- Select passages from Bible and Qur'an
- Test 3 distributed*  
*Research group time*
- May 13**      **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?
- May 15**      **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
- Research group time*
- May 20**      **Justice and Compassion**  
 Jewish, Christian, Muslim action for justice and human rights today; care for the earth as divine creation
- Reading: justice, mercy, and moral monotheism
- Test 3 due*

- May 22**      **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 27**      **Fundamentalism**  
Traditional patriarchy and women; issues of power, identity, and control
- Readings: women and fundamentalism
- May 29**      **Research Group Presentations**
- June 3**      **Research Group Presentations**
- June 5**      **Last class, Final Exam distributed**  
Possible futures for the children of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar; final thoughts and continuing questions
- June 12**     **Final Exam due by noon (no class meeting)**