

SCTR 19: Religions of the Book

Spring Quarter 2017

Monday, Wednesday 3:30 to 5:15

Professor J. Pinault

Classroom: Kenna 212

Office: Kenna 323C

Office hours: Tuesday 3:00 to 5:00

and by appointment

email: jpinault@scu.edu

Course Description

Experiencing the Divine through regular reading of sacred texts was not a feature of the ancient Mediterranean world in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were born. But it became the key to Judaism's survival and expansion, beginning with the destruction of the first temple and the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE, and it provided a model for the meteoric rise of Christianity in the first century CE and Islam in the seventh century CE.

In this course we'll explore and analyze key scriptural writings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to understand the essential beliefs and practices of each of these Abrahamic faiths.

In addition, along the way, you'll meet figures whose words will help you make sense of the turbulent world around you and, as you reflect, give you the chance to explore more deeply your own spiritual landscape.

This spring we will pay particular attention to the following questions: How did people during the time when these faiths originated experience the Divine? How were ethics and religion connected--or not? What did people believe about the afterlife?

SCTR 19 and Santa Clara University's Core Curriculum.

SCTR 19 is a RTC (Religion, Theology, and Culture) level 1 course. Santa Clara University's 2016-2017 Core Curriculum Guide, p. 11, lists the following **CORE CURRICULUM GOALS** for RTC 1 courses: "Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection."

The Guide also offers the following **LEARNING OBJECTIVES** for a first-level course in the RTC sequence:

"1.1 Describe and compare the central religious ideas and practices from at least two locally or globally distinct cultures or communities.

1.2 Use critical approaches to reflect on their own beliefs and the religious dimensions of human existence."

With these guidelines in mind, I would hope that in this course through reading and analyzing the rich collection of primary sources from a variety of scriptural, cultural, and historical contexts you will form a nuanced picture of the origin and development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the first millennium of the Mediterranean world and come to appreciate what is distinctive about each faith. And having become a participant in this complex intellectual tradition, you will be able to evaluate critically what you read about religion and be able to respond knowledgeably in writing or orally in current and future discussions about religion. I would also expect that from the close analysis of our course readings at home and in class, in discussions and in papers, you will hone your ability to analyze and compare complex historic documents. Finally, it is hoped that the readings and class discussions in SCTR 19 will lead to a thoughtful reexamination of your own beliefs and help you with your own ethical choices.

Class Format

Reading

The first step in the process of entering into the thought-world of this course is reading carefully the works on the syllabus. You are responsible for reserving time and energy for your reading assignments (not, for example, waiting until an hour before class). I expect you to underline important passages in your books and handouts and to jot down responses and ideas

in the margins. Bring all these materials to class to refer to during the discussion.

Because it's crucial that we all be on the same page, literally, when we are discussing texts, I am requiring you to use only the paper-copy editions and translations listed in the textbook section and available in the Santa Clara Bookstore.

Review your thoughts before class and write them down--that way you'll more easily remember your insights and contribute to the discussion in class. If you still have questions about the readings after class, come see me during office hours. Remember, your first responsibility in this course is keeping up with the reading.

Reading assignments in a variety of genres, including scripture, myth, epic poetry, philosophical dialogues, and contemporary journalism, will build up the historical and cultural context for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and show you how these religions interacted with this matrix. Engaging with these challenging texts will expand your knowledge of global cultures and foster religious reflection.

Learning how to read ancient texts is not easy. It is my hope that working with these texts in this course will give you the confidence to return to them again and again over the years.

Another aspect of these texts that we will be considering is the technology involved in their creation--what were the materials on which they were written and what were the writing systems used to record the thoughts of people separated from us by a span of several thousand years.

(CORE CURRICULUM GOALS: Global cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** 1.1, 1.2)

Note-taking

For note-taking you will need to bring pens and pencils and paper or a notebook to class. That way you will be able to indicate easily the main points and connections in the class discussion and oral reports, rather than

trying to produce a perfect transcript. Variations in handwriting--size, use of capitals, or, perhaps, color of ink or pencil--and signs--like arrow--will help you recall quickly the relative weight of ideas and connections between them when you are reviewing and studying. I also encourage you to write (lightly in pencil) in your texts to record your reactions and to use Post-its to flag important pages of your texts and notebook, as well as to jot down ideas about the readings and discussion between classes.

Class format

After the first class, we'll quickly review our discussion from the previous meeting, as a way of leading into the new topics to be covered. On the board you'll find key terms that will serve as an outline for the class. As soon as you come in, copy them down and get out the reading for the day and your notes. To provide the historical and theological context for each primary reading, I will either give you a short introductory briefing or for some classes assign introductory material from our secondary sources, Raymond P. Scheindlin's A Short History of the Jewish People and Justo Gonzalez' The Story of Christianity. Most of each class, however, will be spent in discussing the assigned primary reading.

Please make sure that you have completed the assigned readings in time for class. Also bring your books and photocopied materials and notes so that you will be ready to participate.

Class participation

Class participation is an important part of your final grade in this class--20%. From the preceding description of the class format, you can see that the success of this course depends on your being prepared by having read the assignment (as described above) and having jotted down notes on points that you thought important, intriguing, or problematic and your responses. Then together we can create a good discussion--but this can only happen if you participate in class discussions, using your notes.

How much you get out of this class will depend on your active participation in class. In addition, contributing to the discussion stimulates new ideas--both for you and for your classmates. If fellow classmates don't know the answer, help them out by speaking up. And if you don't know the answer, ask and that will get the discussion going, so that everyone will understand.

Plan to contribute to the conversation every class. And know that I will be calling on you, even if you do not raise your hand (“a cold call”). This is not personal, but in your life to come you’ll be asked to contribute ideas in professional and non-professional settings. The cold calls in this class will help you get over any discomfort in speaking up when called. Remember, we create this class together.

And I learn from your questions and comments. For this reason, you’ll see me regularly jotting down your name and questions/comments as you contribute during class. (**CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:** Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OBJECTIVES** 1.1, 1.2)

Writing assignments

After careful reading and discussion, the next step in understanding these readings is to reflect on them in writing. **Written assignments will consist of one ungraded essay and two graded essays, each worth 20%--together worth 40% of your final grade.**

We’ll start with an ungraded essay that will give you a chance to introduce yourself to me and let me get to know you as a thinker and a writer. **Please note, failure to submit this assignment at the beginning of the second class will result in the lowering of your final grade for this course by at least one step (e.g., from B- to C+).**

All writing assignments must be typed, double spaced, 14-point type, and submitted in hard-copy (paper) format. I do not accept email or on-line submissions, except in emergencies. Please include on each page of your essay a header with your name, a brief essay title, and the relevant page number. All work must be your own (See section below, “**A reminder about academic honesty.**”)

With the first graded essay assignment, I’ll be handing out my “Guidelines for a Successful Academic Essay.” Study it carefully. If you are new to developing a thesis or have any questions about proving your thesis or linking paragraphs or any other points covered in the Guidelines, I strongly encourage you to meet with me. I will be glad to read your rough draft, focusing on your thesis, your arguments and evidence to support your thesis, and the presentation of your ideas. Please take the time to proof

your essays for grammatical mistakes, typographical errors, and careless wording, as these can negatively affect your grade.

For the first graded essay, I will allow you to revise and resubmit your essay. For subsequent essays, I only allow rewriting for an F grade.

The ungraded essay will ask you to analyze an ancient Mediterranean text (a selection from Homer's Iliad) to begin to understand how people with polytheistic systems of religion experience the Divine. This will help us understand the development of monotheism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the tensions between these religious traditions and the polytheistic religious and cultural matrix of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian world from which they emerged.

The second part of this essay will ask you to reflect on your own religious or philosophical world view, however you define this for yourself (whether in terms of denominational religious affiliation, unaffiliated spirituality, self-identification as an agnostic, skeptic, atheist, freethinker, etc.). (**CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:** Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OBJECTIVES** 1.1, 1.2)

The first graded essay. On the basis of the Iliad passage you analyzed for the ungraded essay, the first graded essay will ask you to identify the values that you see in the culture around us today (using evidence from print and digital sources). Then you will identify and analyze values in the Hebrew scriptures (the selections from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy we discussed in class) that contrast with these values. You will need to meditate on these contrasts to develop a thesis regarding the values of each tradition and the application of these values to our society and to your own life. (**CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:** Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE LEARNING OBJECTIVES** 1.1, 1.2)

The second graded essay will ask you to analyze a pair of extraordinary ancient texts from two religious cultures in conflict. The first is the historical (203 CE) personal journal of Vibia Perpetua, a young Roman citizen, nursing mother, and Christian convert. She was imprisoned at the age of twenty two while awaiting a violent death in the arena at Carthage (a Roman city in north Africa), all because she admitted and held fast to her

belief in the Christian faith. Perpetua's prison journal is the earliest surviving Latin text written by a woman and describes in vivid detail her trial, conditions in prison, and her visions concerning the afterlife and her upcoming death as a martyr in the arena--which took place on the birthday of the Emperor Septimius Severus' son Geta. The second text is Book 6 of Virgil's epic poem the Aeneid, left unfinished at the author's death in 19 BCE, a tremendously popular work of Roman literature that every young Roman learning Latin would have read. In Book 6 of the Aeneid the mythic epic hero Aeneas makes his way through the underworld in search of his dead father to learn how he should fulfill the chief Roman god Jupiter's commandment that he found the city (later empire) of Rome.

Although, at first glance, these two texts would seem to have little in common, consider that Perpetua, born into and raised in a Roman family and given a Roman education, would have been shaped by Roman values and lived as a Roman most of her life (She was arrested as a catechumen and only baptized shortly before being taken to prison). This assignment will give you an opportunity to analyze and ponder how complex the ties were between early Christianity and its Roman matrix. You'll need to develop a thesis that accounts for the similarities and differences you notice between these two texts. Consider, too, how religion in general and your own belief system in particular is affected by popular cultural values. (**CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:** Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** 1.1, 1.2).

Tests

Tests at the middle of the quarter and at the end will stimulate you to keep up with assigned readings and to reflect more deeply on the texts we have discussed in class. These tests are based on our classroom discussions of the readings. **Each test is worth 20% of your grade; together the two texts will determine 40% of your final grade.**

The format of our tests will consist of identifying and discussing the significance of key passages from our reading and class discussions. Before the test, you will have a study sheet with approximately eight passages that may appear on the test. From the passages on the study sheet I will select a smaller number, which will appear on the actual test,

and from these you will be able to choose three to write on. For each passage you choose you will be asked to write, first, a paragraph, identifying in detail that passage and, second, a short essay, analyzing its significance. This will involve comparing and contrasting the ideas in the passage to earlier and later essential concepts and themes we have discussed in class throughout the quarter. In this essay you will have a chance to evaluate and apply insights from our study of these passages to open-ended questions facing contemporary society. (**CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:** Global Cultures, Critical Thinking, Complexity, Religious Reflection; **CORE CURRICULUM LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** 1.1, 1.2)

Evaluation and weight of assignments

Your grade for the course will consist of the following elements:

Class participation	20%
2 tests, each worth 20%	40%
2 graded essays, each worth 20%	40%

Grade scale:

A	= 96 - 100%
A-	= 90 - 95%
B+	= 86 - 89%
B	= 80 - 85%
B-	= 76 - 79%
C+	= 70 - 75%
C	= 66 - 69%
C-	= 60 - 65%
D+	= 56 - 59%
D	= 50 - 55%
D-	= 46 - 49%
F	= 45 or less

How to Understand these Grades:

F: unacceptable. With regard to writing assignments, this is the only grade for which I permit a rewrite. The highest grade I will give a rewrite, however, is D.

D: acceptable, even if unsatisfactory.

C: adequate; satisfactory.

B: good; impressive work.

A: outstanding. Indicates work that excels in meeting the standards of thoroughness, creativity, and sustained and thoughtful engagement with the assigned subject matter.

Class participation, attendance, absences, late papers, and your grade

ONLY STUDENTS WHO ATTEND THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS ARE ELIGIBLE TO TAKE THIS COURSE. NO STUDENT WHO MISSES THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS WILL BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE IN THIS COURSE.

TO HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF RECEIVING A PASSING GRADE FOR THIS COURSE, YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL THE COURSE REQUIREMENTS--THAT MEANS, TAKING ALL THE TESTS AND HANDING IN ALL THE REQUIRED ESSAYS.

Please note that missing class will hurt your final grade for the quarter. More than one unexcused absence over the course of the quarter will lower your **final grade** one step for each missed class (e.g., B becomes B-).

Of course, illness or personal circumstances may arise that make your absence unavoidable; if this occurs, please let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss your situation and how to help you stay on track. Also, don't forget to provide me with an appropriate written excuse from the proper source. (But be aware that a note from the Cowell Student Health Center does not automatically excuse your absence.) If you know in advance that you must be away, please notify me of this before class. If you suddenly and unexpectedly miss class for any reason, you must

contact me immediately (via email or a visit to my office) to explain why you missed class. This will not excuse your absence, but it will let me know you take your responsibilities seriously and plan to continue in our course. This is a courtesy to me, and I value courtesy.

(NB: Whenever you email me, be sure to include the following in the subject line: your name, our course title, topic of email, and date).

Note that I take attendance at the beginning of each class. If you are not present by the time I finish recording the day's attendance, I will consider you late. For the purpose of computing final grades, I use the formula: three late attendances equal one unexcused absence.

All papers must be handed in on time. The grade for a late paper will be lowered one step for each day it is late (e.g., B- becomes C+).

Regarding the ungraded first essay, failure to submit this assignment at the beginning of the second class will result in the lowering of your final grade for this course by at least one step (e.g., from B- to C+).

A reminder about academic honesty

Santa Clara University is committed to fostering a culture of integrity. Its Academic Integrity Pledge, which applies to all students, states:

"I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge as a member of the Santa Clara University Community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code." (Santa Clara University 2016-17 Undergraduate Bulletin, p. 467)

Accordingly, please make sure that all written work for this class is your own. This means you should not look at the work or notes of anyone in the class, even "to get ideas," or work together on any writing project with anyone in the class before checking with me first. If you use anyone's published or unpublished ideas or phrasing (even if you change a word or two or rephrase a whole sentence or paragraph), you must acknowledge your source. If you do not, you are being academically dishonest. And the penalties will be severe. Your paper will receive an F and you will receive

an F for the course. I will also report the incident to the Office of Student Life and contact the Dean of Student Life to discuss further action.

Do not refer to any outside source for the papers you write in this course; you are not being asked to do original research. Rather, I am interested in hearing your own ideas as you analyze, compare, and contrast the complex readings we are working with in this course.

Performance feedback.

I will be giving you extensive and detailed written comments on your essays. These are designed to help you become a more confident and independent writer. This is just the starting point. You will need to study my comments, think about how to apply them to your next essay, and come to see me in my office to make sure you have a strong thesis, are able to make a convincing case for it, and are absorbing all the criteria in my “Guidelines for a Successful Academic Essay”, which I will hand out with the first graded essay assignment.

In regard to class participation, I urge you to meet with me to discuss how to participate more effectively.

Disability accommodation policy

If you need academic accommodation for a disability, you must contact Disabilities Resources (Benson Center, room 216 (408) 554-4109) as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodation with the University. Leave enough time, as they will require you to provide appropriate documentation before you can register and receive accommodation. If you have already arranged an accommodation through Disability Resources, please let me know the first class and then come discuss with me during office hours how we can implement it during the quarter.

Policy on personal media in the classroom

Out of respect for others and for the material (I expect you to show the same reverence towards these ancient texts as you would towards ancient works of art in a museum), please make sure all laptops, tablets, smart phones, cell phones, pagers, etc. are turned off and out of sight during

class. Use of any such device will result in your being counted absent for that day. For note-taking you will need to bring pens and pencils and paper or a notebook to class. Students with special needs, who need to use one of these devices to take notes, must bring me the required forms from the Disabilities Resources Office.

Food Courtesy

Always try to fortify yourself before class. If you do need a snack or drink, make sure it does not generate noise or odors and that you clean up after yourself. Any violation will result in your being counted absent for that day.

Classroom civility

In order for everyone to feel comfortable with the material being discussed in class, it is crucial that we all practice being courteous and gentle with each other in our words and tone. We are all pilgrims in this course.

Texts

primary texts:

Hebrew and Christian scriptures: The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha (Oxford World's Classics). Oxford University Press, 2008.

Islamic scriptures: 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, translator and commentator, The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an. Amana Publications (pocket size).

secondary texts:

Raymond P. Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People. Oxford University Press, 1998.

Justo L. Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, revised and updated, vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation, 2010.

All other readings will be handed out in photocopied format either before the class in which they are to be discussed or during it.

The books listed above are available in the Santa Clara Bookstore.

Course Syllabus

(All reading assignments listed under each class date below are meant to be prepared for that class. Please make sure that you have completed the assigned readings in time for class. Also bring your books and photocopied materials and notes so that you will be ready to participate.)

Week One

Monday, April 3

Introduction to course: review of syllabus; discussion about what religion is and how one goes about the academic study of religion; looking at the temporal and geographic parameters of our course; background and key terms for the ungraded written assignment.

Ungraded written assignment, due Wednesday, April 5. (Note that this is an ungraded assignment, but if you do not submit your completed essay at the beginning of class, Wednesday, April 5, your **final grade** for the course will be lowered at least one step (e.g., from B- to C+), and your **final course grade** will be lowered an additional step for each day this assignment is late.)

This ungraded written assignment (due Wednesday) will give you the opportunity to introduce yourself to me as a writer. Aim not for length, but for clear thinking and writing. The following section headings will provide a rough outline, and the questions that follow will help you get started with each section:

- I. Summary of a passage from Homer's Iliad (text attached to this syllabus). In your own words, as briefly and clearly as you can, describe what is depicted--that is, who does what to whom. Do not analyze, compare, or contrast in this section.
- II. Analysis. Analyze how the Greek gods in this passage interact with humans. What are the powers of each of the Greek gods mentioned? What are their limitations? How do Chryses, the Trojan priest of Apollo, Achilles, and the Greek (Achaean) army experience the Divine through them? Imagine hearing this passage recited year after year at a religious festival. How would it shape your understanding of your

relation to the gods and how you felt about them? Analyze why Achilles gets so angry with Agamemnon. What is at stake? What does he value most? Least? Why is he fighting? Who has the most power in this society? The least?

- III. Brief description of your previous experience, impressions, and/or knowledge of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, please include a statement in which you identify and briefly reflect on your own religious or philosophical world view, however you define this for yourself (whether in terms of denominational religious affiliation, unaffiliated spirituality, self-identification as an agnostic, skeptic, atheist, freethinker, etc.).

Please make sure not to use any outside sources-- this is not a research paper--I want to hear your ideas and get a sense of your signature style! Length of assignment: 500 to 1,000 words, typed, 14-point type, double spaced (and hard-copy, please--unless it is an emergency, I do not read electronic/digital submissions).

Wednesday, April 5

The Near Eastern context for Judaism. Discussion of the Jewish creation stories in Genesis. Compare the interactions between Homeric gods and humans and the relationship between the Hebrew God and humans.

The difference between primary and secondary sources; the difficulties involved in working with ancient primary sources, including the Hebrew, Christian, and Muslim scriptures. Differences between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible. **Ungraded essay due (text of the passage in the Iliad for your essay attached to the end of this syllabus)**

Reading due for class, April 5: The creation, Genesis, Chapters 1-2; the story of Adam and Eve, Genesis 3-5 (all in your Oxford KJV Bible).

Week Two

Monday, April 10

Does the pattern of evil continue? How does God respond to what his created humans do? The age of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. In the readings, note how the Hebrew people experience the Divine.

Reading due for class, April 10: Genesis 6 (Noah and the flood); 11 (the Tower of Babel); 15-17 (God's invitation to Abraham); 22 (Abraham and Isaac); and 39-41 (Joseph in Egypt), (all in your Oxford Bible).

Wednesday, April 12

Experiencing the Divine through the events of the Exodus and through the Laws of Moses. How the Hebrew people came into the Holy Land. The age of Judges.

Reading due for class, April 12: Raymond Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 1-10; Exodus 20-23; Leviticus 4- 6.16; 11-12; 14-15; 18-19; Numbers 19.11- 22; Deuteronomy 6.4-5; 21. 22-23; 22.22-29; 25.5-6 (Oxford Bible). From your reading, how do you think the Hebrew people experienced the Divine through the events of the Exodus and through the Laws given to Moses by God? According to Scheindlin, what are the different theories about how the Hebrew people came into the Holy Land? As you read these selected laws given to Moses in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy,

First graded essay assigned.

Week Three

Monday, April 17

The age of Kings and Prophets. What does "prophet" mean to you? How do Nathan and Elijah and Micah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel function as prophets? The Hebrew world view meets those of its neighbors: Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians; the Babylonian exile and return, the beginning of the second Temple period. Is the Babylonian exile a national disaster or the impetus for religious redefinition?

Reading due for class, April 17: Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 11- 23; 2nd Samuel 11 and 12; I Kings 17.8-24; Micah 3.8-12; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 29.1-14; 30-31; Ezekiel 37 (Oxford Bible).

Wednesday, April 19

Jews and Greeks and Romans: the challenges and opportunities of Hellenization and the diaspora. Persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Reading due for class, April 19: Scheindlin, A Short History of the Jewish People, pp. 25-39; First Maccabees, 1-3; 4.1-25, 36-61; Second

Maccabees, 6 and 7 (Oxford Bible) What differences in presentation and style do you notice between the First and Second Books of Maccabees?

Week Four

Monday, April 24

Emerging ideas about the apocalypse, resurrection, and messiah; Jewish participation in the world of Hellenistic ideas about the soul and afterlife; Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots; the Dead Sea Scrolls and community at Qumran.

Reading for class, April 24: Scheindlin, pp. 39-49; Ecclesiastes 3.1-21; Daniel 12 (Oxford Bible); Josephus on the Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. (handout).

Wednesday, April 26

Jesus of Nazareth's ministry and teaching, part I

Reading due for class, April 26: The Gospel of Mark 1-8;(Oxford Bible).

As you read, answer the questions on the study sheet I will hand out to help you analyze the text.

April 28: Last day to withdraw from a class without a W.

Week Five

Monday, May 1

Jesus of Nazareth's teaching, part II; the transfiguration; Jesus in Jerusalem; his trial; his crucifixion.

Reading due for class, May 1: Mark 9-16; Psalm 22; Luke 16.19-31 (Oxford Bible).

Wednesday, May 3

What did Jesus' followers experience after his death? What did Paul experience on the road to Damascus? What do you make of these experiences?

Paul's understanding of Jesus and the first Christians' attempt to live together in a community: Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Reading due for class, May 3: Justo L. Gonzalez, "The Church in Jerusalem," in The Story of Christianity, pp. 25- 30, and "Mission to the Gentiles, The Story of Christianity, pp. 31-39; The Book of Acts 1-4; 9-11.1-18; 15.1-29; Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (before you start reading,

go over the study sheet to orient yourself with the themes discussed in this letter) (Oxford Bible).

Week Six

Monday, May 8

The Christian apocalyptic tradition. Review the ideas about the Apocalypse we have seen in Hellenistic Judaism and in Mark. What is new here in Revelation?

Christian feminism. Review the role of women in Mark and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Do you see any similarities between their interactions with Jesus and Paul in these texts and the way Thecla acts in the following selection from the Acts of Paul and Thecla?

Reading due for class, May 8: Selections from Revelation (the Revelations of St. John the Divine), 1, 2.10, 4, 5, 6, 7, 21 (Oxford Bible). Selections from the Acts of Paul and Thecla (handout).

Wednesday, May 10

First test

Week Seven

Monday, May 15

Christian martyrdom in the Roman world. From the evidence in her journal, how did Perpetua experience the Divine? How was her view of the afterlife shaped by Jesus' teaching in Mark and Luke? By Revelation? Do you see any similarities between St. Thecla and St. Perpetua?

Reading due for class, May 15: the prison journal of St. Perpetua of Carthage (handout).

Second graded essay assigned.

Wednesday, May 17

Is the body our enemy? Asceticism and Gnosticism in the Greco-Roman world and Christianity's response.

Reading due for class, May 17: “The Deposit of the Faith” (Introduction to Gnosticism, Docetism, Marcion, and the orthodox Christian response; text of Apostles’ Creed), in Gonzales, The Story of Christianity, pages 69-81; “Abstract of Main Gnostic Tenets,” in Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion; introduction and text of Apocalypse of Peter (VII,3), from The Nag Hammadi Library (these last two on handouts)

As you read the Apocalypse of Peter, try to determine who is speaking and to whom. From the text, what is Jesus like? Does he differ from the Jesus you encountered in the Gospel of Mark? In what ways?

May 19: Last day to drop classes with a W.

Week Eight

Monday, May 22

The Great Persecution; the battle of the Milvian bridge and the conversion of Constantine; the Edict of Milan and its consequences; the Council of Nicea; and the rise of Monasticism.

Reading due for class, May 22: “The Great Persecution and the Final Victory,” in Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, pages 119-126; “The Arian Controversy and the Council of Nicea,” in Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, pages 181-192; text of the Nicene Creed (handout); “The Monastic Reaction,” in Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, pages 157-179; St. Benedict’s ethical goals for spiritual growth and living in a Christian community, from The Rule of St. Benedict (handout).

Wednesday, May 24

The Jahiliyah: the world view, religion, and society into which the prophet Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah was born.

Reading for class, May 24: David Pinault, “The Story of Islam,” Commonweal, March 24, 2017, pp. 14-18 (handout).

Second essay due.

Week Nine

Monday, May 29

Life of the prophet Muhammad and basic teachings of Islam.

Reading due for class, May 29: Qur’an, Chapters 96, 112, 1, and 55.

Wednesday, May 31

Chain of the Prophets.

Reading due for class, May 31: Qur'an, Chapter 7.

Week Ten

Monday, June 5

Jesus, Mary, and Christianity in Islam.

Reading for class, June 5: handout in class.

Wednesday, June 7

Second test

Background, directions, and text of a passage from the Iliad for your ungraded essay, due next class, Wednesday, April 5:

By way of background:

In the Greco-Roman world into which Christianity was born, there was not question about whether Gods (Divine powers) existed--just whether they were friendly or hostile and what their powers were. Some of the most important deities were the Olympian gods: Zeus, associated with the clear sky, wielder of lightening-bolts, and ruler of all the Olympian gods (Jupiter or Jove to the Romans); Hera, his wife (Juno to the Romans); Poseidon, ruler of the sea (Neptune to the Romans), Hades, ruler of the underworld (Pluto or Dis to the Romans); Ares, (Mars to the Romans), associated with warfare; Athena, associated with warfare, manual skills and crafts (Minerva to the Romans); Aphrodite, goddess of sexual love and passion in gods, humans, and animals (Venus to the Romans); Artemis, virgin goddess associated with aiding women in childbirth, protecting animals; Phoebus Apollo (also Apollo to the Romans), associated with the sun, poetry, healing disease as well as creating epidemics. There are many, many more major and minor gods and goddesses--all with their own cults, stories, and temples or modest shrines or spots in nature where they were worshipped, but this should get you started.

Although there was no one official account of these gods' origins and natures, everyone would have been familiar with stories about the gods. The most important story cycle was that of the Trojan war, a cataclysmic confrontation between the Greeks (also called Achaeans) and the inhabitants of the prosperous city-state of Troy, on the northern coast of what is today Turkey--dated by both the ancient Greeks and modern archeologists to the late Bronze age, approximately 1200 B.C.E.

The cause, according to myth, was the abduction of Helen, wife of one of the chief Greek warlords by a Trojan prince, Paris (inspired by the goddess Aphrodite, who had offered Paris the most beautiful woman in the world (Helen) if he chose her as the most beautiful goddess in a sort of beauty contest with Hera and Athena. This judgement of Paris led to the war--Helen was taken (or went willingly, depending on different traditions) to Troy, and her husband Menelaus assembled an alliance of allies and armies from all over Greece, led by his brother Agamemnon, to sail to Troy, destroy the city, rescue Helen, then return to Greece.

There were many epic poems about these events, but the best and only entire remaining two are Homer's Iliad and Odyssey--composed orally, and written down in the eighth century (700's) B.C.E. These poems tell only limited portions of the story. The Iliad, for example, covers events in the ninth and last year of the war, focusing on the wrathful anger of the chief Greek warrior hero Achilles and his withdrawal from battle after the commander-in-chief Agamemnon takes away his battle prize, the beautiful young woman Briseis--which humiliates and enrages Achilles. Attached is the passage recounting why Agamemnon acts as he does and what happens next.

Directions for your essay:

First, give a brief summary as clearly and concisely as you can, of what happens in the attached passage from the Iliad. Do not analyze, compare, or contrast in this section.

Second, analyze how the Greek gods interact with humans. Analyze what kind of power each of these gods has as well as what their limitations are. How do Chryses, the Trojan priest of Apollo, Achilles, Agamemnon, and the Greek army (the Achaeans) experience the Divine through these gods?

Imagine hearing this passage recited year after year at a religious festival. How would it shape your understanding of your relation to the gods and how you felt about them? Analyze why Achilles gets so angry with Agamemnon.

Third, give a brief description of your previous experience, impressions, and/or knowledge of Christianity. In addition, please include a statement in which you identify and briefly reflect on your own religious or philosophical world view, however you define this for yourself (whether in terms of denominational religious affiliation, unaffiliated spiritually, self-identification as an agnostic, skeptic, atheist, freethinker, etc).

Please make sure not to use any outside sources-- this is not a research paper--I want to hear your ideas and get a sense of your signature style! Length of assignment: 500 to 1,000 words, typed, 14-point type, double spaced (and hard-copy, please--unless it is an emergency, I do not read electronic/digital submissions).

Text of a passage from the Iliad on the following five photocopied pages.