

Religious Studies 208: Introduction to Western Religions

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DESCRIPTION

This is a basic introduction to the three great monotheistic religions of the Western World: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The course presupposes no previous knowledge on your part of these religions, nor does it presuppose that you have any previous background in the academic study of religion.

The course will be conducted as a comparative study of the three Western religions, in which we will discuss and compare the origins, history, theology and modernization process undergone by each. The course will also include a look at the current conflicts within and among these traditions in Europe and the Middle East. Some class time will be devoted to reading original texts of each religion so that you can see how each tradition describes itself in its own words. Reading assignments for each day are meant to give you the background you will need to understand the texts and class discussion. It is important that you keep up with the readings because class discussion will assume you know the basic themes and vocabulary for the days discussion.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. (Jan 18-20) -- INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE: THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Introducing the Bible and the Religious Traditions of the West

Stories of The Founders: Abraham

2. (Jan 23-27) -- JUDAISM I: BEGINNINGS

"Hebrews" vs "Children of Israel" vs "Judaism"

The Study of Religion and of Rabbinic Judaism -- Breslauer, Chapter One

Judaism in the Roman World -- Breslauer, Chapter Two

3. (Jan 30-Feb 3) -- JUDAISM II: CLASSICAL RABBINIC JUDAISM

Rabbinic Judaism -- Breslauer, Chapter Three

Medieval Judaism -- Breslauer, Chapter Four

Kabbalah and Mysticism

4. (Feb. 6-10) -- JUDAISM III: MODERN FORMS OF JUDAISM

Modern Judaisms: Hasidism

Reform -- Breslauer, Chapter Five

Other Denominations

5. (Feb 13-17) -- JUDAISM IV: JUDAISMS FACE THE FUTURE

Zionism and Jewish Nationalism

The Holocaust

Postmodern Judaism – Breslauer, Chapter Six

6. (Feb 20-24) -- CHRISTIANITY I: ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT [First Paper Due: Feb 22]

Jesus – Woodhead, Chapter One

The Earliest Church -- Woodhead, Chapter Two

The Formation and Structure of the Roman Catholicism

7. (Feb 27- Mar.2) -- CHRISTIANITY II: CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND THEOLOGY

The Life of the Medieval Church -- Woodhead Chapter Three

The Mystical and Monastic -- Woodhead Chapter Four

The Protestant Reformation

8. (Mar 5-9) -- CHRISTIANITY III: MODERN FORMS OF CHRISTIANITIES

Christianity Faces Secular Modernity – Woodhead, Chapter Five

American Christianity

Christianities of the World Today -- Woodhead, Chapter Six

March 12-16 Spring Break

9. (Mar 19-23) – CHRISTIANITY IV: CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN LIVES

Fundamentalism and Evangelical Movements

Christianity and the Social Gospel

Current Issues of Gender – Woodhead, Chapter Seven

10. (Mar 26-30) -- ISLAM I: MOHAMMAD AND EARLY ISLAM [Second Paper Due: March 28]

Muhammad and the Beginnings of Islam – Esposito, Chapter 1

The Quran

The Hadiths and the early community

11. (Apr 2-6) --ISLAM II: CLASSICAL ISLAMIC HISTORY, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Early Islamic Empires (Umayyad and Abbasid)

Islamic law (Sharia`) and theology - Esposito, Chapter 3

The Ottoman Empire and the Modern Middle East -- Esposito, Chapter 2

12. (Apr 9-13) -- ISLAM III: ISLAM AND THE MODERN WORLD

Sufiism and Other Forms of Islam

Reformationist and Restorationist Islams -- Esposito, Chapter 4

Islam and Modernity Today -- Esposito, Chapters 5 and 6

13. (Apr 16-20) -- AFRICAN-AMERICAN ISLAM (Nation of Islam)

Article "[Emergence of Islam in the African-American Community](#)"

14. (Apr 23-27) -- WESTERN RELIGIONS TODAY [Third Paper Due: April 25]

Issues of tradition and change (women, dress, worship)

Ecumenism and the Interreligious Dialogue (World Council of Churches, Nostra Aetate, Progressive Islam)

Religion and the West Today (struggles with secularism, atheism, science)

15. (Apr 30) Western Religion or Western Religions?

May 4 -- **FINAL PAPER DUE by 5:00 pm**

GRADING

The course grade will be based on three papers and a final paper or project.

A. PAPERS: There will be three 5-page papers, one at the end of the section of each major religion. The papers will focus on a theme you will choose at the beginning of the semester.

B. FINAL PAPER: The final paper (8-10 pages) will be a comparison of your focus theme as it applies to all three religions.

C. CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: Regular attendance and participation is expected. Attendance and participation will count toward 15% of the final grade.

D. PAPER DUE DATES AND WEIGHTS

When Topic Weight

Feb 22	Judaism	20%
March 28	Christianity	20%
April 25	Islam	20%
May 4 (5:00pm)	Final Exam or paper	25%

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Plagiarism: to steal or pass off as one's own (the idea or words of another); use (a created production) without crediting the source;

The assigned papers you turn in must be your own work and in your own words. Ideas or passages of text that you take from elsewhere must be annotated to indicate their sources. Attempts to pass on the work of others as your own amounts to plagiarism and violates the "academic integrity" standards of the university. For more information on CWRU's policies regarding academic integrity, go to <http://www.case.edu/provost/ugstudies/acintegrity.htm>

TEXTBOOKS

S. Daniel Breslauer, Understanding Judaism through History (Thomson Wadsworth)

John L. Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path (Oxford Press)

Linda Woodhead, Christianity: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press)

