

Religious Studies 2110
JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM
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Steve Smith (smithsg)
Christian Center 11--office hours posted
Home phone 354-2290

The Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions are now often studied together as a family unit, "the religions of Abraham." What kind of family do they really form?

All three share a commitment to monotheism--and not only to the bare affirmation of one holy Being, a Creator-Provider-Judge-Redeemer, but also to the kind of faithful partnership with this self-revealing God that the biblical figure Abraham exemplified. Beyond this agreement, however, the different experiences and emphases in these faith communities have led them to define themselves in opposition to one another and have often (though not always) fueled bitter conflict. Is conflict necessary? Or can these communities affirm one another while remaining true to their inspirations? The Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions are so closely connected historically and theologically that we fail in an important way to understand any of them if we do not see how to address this question about their relationship.

The purposes of this course are

1. To improve our acquaintance with the chief historical sources of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religiousness.
2. To expand our awareness of the complex developments of the three great monotheist traditions, especially those affected by their relations with each other.
3. To strengthen our ability to think about religion and religious issues in comparative perspective.

Required activities will include field trips to local places of worship for direct observation of religious practices (timing to be arranged as the semester unfolds). Grading will be based on oral class participation and journal writing (25%), the exams (10-10-10-20%), and the research project (25%). The first three exams are short essay exams on key terms discussed in the Fishbane, Frankiel, and Denny books listed below.

Readings will be required in handouts and in these books available in the bookstore:

The New Oxford Annotated Bible
The Koran, trans. N. J. Dawood
Michael A. Fishbane, *Judaism*
Sandra S. Frankiel, *Christianity*
Frederick M. Denny, *Islam and the Muslim Community*
Naguib Mahfouz, *Children of Gebelaawi*

PROJECTED SCHEDULE

Note: Reading and homework assignments will be announced in class. Check with me about them if you miss class.

Week of

8-26 Discussion of class structure and goals.

- 8-31 Religious thought in ancient Egypt and Southwest Asia.
How does monotheism arise?
The birth of Israel: Exodus.
- 9-7 Patriarchs, prophets, and kings: Israel's covenant traditions.
- 9-14 The fall of Israel and Judah. Hellenism and Judaism.
PROJECT PROSPECTUS DUE 9-16.
- 9-21 Rise of the Pharisees. The Talmud.
- 9-28 EXAM #1. Jesus and Paul.
- 10-5 Early self-definition of Christianity--social, theological, artistic.
- 10-12 EXAM #2. Muhammad and his world. The Qur'an.
- 10-19 MIDTERM BREAK. Early rise and self-definition of Islam.
- 10-26 The Sunni-Shi'a split. The Shari'a.
- 11-2 PROJECT ABSTRACT DUE 11-2.
The Sufis. EXAM #3.
- 11-9 Jewish and Christian mystics.
- 11-16 Upheavals in the Abrahamic faiths in the modern period.
- 11-23 NO CLASS MONDAY (annual AAR meeting).
PROJECT REPORT DUE 11-25.
THANKSGIVING BREAK.
- 11-30 Mahfouz's portrayals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Children of Gebelaawi.
- 12-7 Mahfouz on modern science; the Abrahamic faiths in the contemporary world.

FINAL EXAM DUE AT ASSIGNED TIME IN FINALS WEEK.

PROJECT GUIDELINES

Choose a project topic that intrigues you for any reason that relates to the class inquiry. You might study a theological, historical, social, or ethical problem; or the biography of a specially interesting figure in any of the three traditions; or themes in literature or other arts inspired by one or more of the three traditions. This semester, projects will be especially helpful to the class in these areas

Doctrine of inspiration (prophecy, scripture, religious leadership)
 Doctrine of God (e.g. issues of divine power, modes of divine action)
 Eschatology (judgment, eternal life, eternal reward and punishment)
 Religious art (including architecture, music, etc.)
 Monasticism
 Political theory
 Zionism

The Holocaust
Feminism
Fundamentalism
--and other contemporary movements

You will need to get my advice on your specific topic and you must submit for my approval a 1-page project prospectus by Sept. 19. Here are all the project components:

THE PROSPECTUS. Nothing elaborate--just a succinct indication of the question(s) you want to tackle and the sorts of sources you think you will need to work with.

The PROJECT ABSTRACT is a 2-pp. document to be handed out to the class by Nov. 2 that states as succinctly as possible the questions and main findings (at that point) of your project. It also lists three or four of the most helpful sources you have found with brief comments on their nature and significance. (You will receive peer responses to this.)

THE FULL PROJECT REPORT, due Nov. 25, will be somewhere between 10 and 15 pages typed. Style guidelines will be given. You will have a chance to revise, so don't be shy about getting into tough issues or offering conjectures. In deciding what is more relevant and important and what is less so, think of your project as one unit of an inquiry into "the Abrahamic religions," i.e. as a set of questions and materials that you would present if you were teaching Religious Studies 2110. A short ORAL REPORT on your project will be scheduled in a class toward the end of the semester.

GUIDELINES FOR THE JOURNAL

For your course notebook, a loose-leaf binder is strongly recommended. This will allow you to hand in just the newest pages of your journal each week, and also to incorporate the course materials that are handed out with your own writings.

Each week you will be asked to write one page in answer to a given question, usually bearing on assigned readings. You will be expected to turn in with it another page of independent reflections on the general theme: "What insights into religion am I getting into while participating in this course?" Here you can bring in anything. I will be responding to your reflections, and although you are never bound to speak to a particular point I raise, I do hope for a fruitful dialogue with you.

You can miss two pages of work without penalty--either by not turning in the entire assignment for one week or by leaving out parts of assignments on two separate occasions.

The journal will be graded unsatisfactory (-), satisfactory (), or very good () depending on the attentiveness and thoughtfulness it shows.

OBSERVING A FORM OF WORSHIP:

Some questions to consider

You will be observing a Jewish, a Christian, and a Muslim worship service this semester and writing a 1-2 pp. account of each experience. Each of these papers fulfills one of your independent journal page assignments. Following are some questions you'll want to bear in mind while observing and writing (except that you don't have to answer all of, or only, these questions). You may have to guess or speculate in addressing some of them.

How is sacred space marked off? Inside these boundaries, what does the sacred landscape look like?
How do the worshipers place themselves in it, move in it?

How is sacred time defined? What sort of flow does the service have? Is there a climactic event in the service? If so, how can you tell?

What are the most important objects used in the service? What makes them important?

In what ways does the service allow for or promote a purely individual religious experience? In what ways does the service promote a communal experience? What is said or done to define the worshipers and the worshipping community? What is said or done, if anything, to relate the worshipers to the wider world?

Does music play a significant role? If so, how?

What are the main uses of language? (e.g. storytelling, praying, praising, lamenting, instructing, discussing.)

Are there any specially significant gestures made by the worshipers?

How, if at all, is the service as a whole expressive of a basic attitude or belief?

SOME COURSE RULES

1. Class Attendance. Being in class, being engaged with the work of the class, and behaving courteously are all expected. One discourtesy to avoid is coming into class late. Better late than never, definitely; but lateness counts as half an absence.

One percent of the course grade will be lost for each absence from class for any reason, beginning with the third absence. (For example, someone who missed class 7 times would thereby lose 5% of the course grade, or half a letter grade.) The reason for this: our in-class inquiry is a crucial and irreplaceable part of the substance of the course.

2. Late papers. Written assignments turned in late will lose a letter grade or equivalent. Homework may not be turned in more than one week after its due date. No work of any kind will be accepted after the last day of final examinations. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted to the victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.

3. Academic honor. All of us at Millsaps are pledged to uphold academic honor, the core of which is refraining from giving or receiving unauthorized aid on any assignment. I particularly caution against plagiarism, that is, using the words or ideas of others without acknowledgement. Plagiarized work means a mandatory referral to the Honor Council and may result in expulsion from the class.

4. Incompletes. An "Incomplete" grade for the course will only be given to students who, due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, find themselves unable to complete course requirements during the term and can reasonably be expected to complete them within a few weeks after the term's end. The "Incomplete" must be requested and appropriately justified before the end of final examinations.