

Rutgers University Department of Religion

Spring 2010

840:212 Religions of the Western World

Monday & Thursday 10:55 – 12:15

Instructor: Dr. Kathleen Bishop

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Course Description

This course will begin with the “how” and “why” of religion as the text explores the origin, history and philosophy of religion in the West. We will then begin with one of the earliest monotheistic religions—Zoroastrianism--and move from there to the most well known monotheistic religions still extant today: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These traditions, known collectively as “Religions of the Book” and “The Abrahamic Traditions,” will be studied in dialogue with the sacred texts of each religion. Students will emerge from this class with a general knowledge of these great traditions and how they relate to one another. The course will conclude with the study of new religious movements such as Ba’hai and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and examine their link to the Abrahamic Traditions.

Required texts:

Ludwig, Theodore M. *The Sacred Paths of the West*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2006

Van Voorst, Robert E. *Anthology of World Scriptures*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007

Photocopied handouts will also be distributed periodically which are also required reading

Course requirements:

Attendance: Attendance at all class sessions is crucial to the student’s success in the course. Only excused absences are acceptable. Class participation grade will be adversely affected due to absence.

Participation: The course schedule is designed to permit the opportunity for extended discussion and I will expect it. This means DO THE READING assigned for that day, otherwise you will not be able to make a contribution. I *will* notice and your grade will be adjusted accordingly. Exceptional participation will result in a maximum of 5 extra points toward your final grade. Failure to participate will subtract points. No “A” is possible without participation.

Examinations

There will be a total of 5 exams, one of which will take place during final exam period (tba). If (and only if) all exams are taken, I will drop the lowest grade. On Mondays when exams are scheduled, the first

half of class will be devoted to the exam. You must arrive promptly or you will not have sufficient time to take the test. **These exams will cover the concepts and vocabulary at the end of each chapter as well as lecture material and film content.** 90% of your grade will come from your performance on these exams.

Short presentation: Religion in the News

As the course progresses I will refer frequently to religious news “ripped from the headlines.” As a class we will apply our knowledge of Western religion in order to read between the lines and interpret the events in light of what we know about religion’s impact on the philosophy (what the textbook calls “Worlds of Meaning”), ritual practices, ethics and social life of the people who practice it.

Each student will be assigned a date when they are responsible for bringing a news item to class, summarizing it, and explaining their choice by pointing out the religious content and its significance. What makes this newsworthy? What impact will this news have on the religious people that are quoted or mentioned? What do you understand about this piece of news that you might *not* have understood before the course?

How it all adds up:	
5 exams:	90 %
Short presentation	5%
Class Participation	5%

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 21	Thursday	Introduction to the Course Perspectives on the Religious Path Read: Ludwig chap. 1
January 25	Monday	Film: The Devil’s Playground (first half) Read: Ludwig chap. 2
January 28	Thursday	Religions of the Mediterranean World Read: Ludwig chap. 4 (we will not be reading chapter 3)
February 1	Monday	Film: The Devil’s Playground (conclusion)
February 4	Thursday	Religions of the Book Van Voorst chap. 1
February 8	Monday	Zoroastrian Tradition Read: Ludwig chap. 5

February 11	Thursday	Zoroastrian Scripture Read: Van Voorst chap. 2
February 15	Monday	Exam #1 Film: A Life Apart (1 st half)
February 18	Thursday	Jewish Sacred Story and Historical Context Read: Ludwig chap. 6
February 22	Monday	Film: A Life Apart (conclusion) Read: Ludwig chap. 7
February 25	Thursday	Jewish Scripture Read: Van Voorst chap. 3
March 1	Monday	Jewish Ritual and Ethical Practice Read: Ludwig chap. 8
March 4	Thursday	NO CLASS
March 8	Monday	Exam #2 Judaism Film: The Long Search (Protestantism) Christian Sacred Story Read: Ludwig chap. 9
March 11	Thursday	Christian Worlds of Meaning Read: Ludwig chap. 10, Van Voorst chap. 4
March 13 – March 21		SPRING BREAK
March 22	Monday	Christian Scripture
March 25	Thursday	Christian Ritual and Ethical Practice Ludwig chap. 11 Short film: "Father Matthew Presents the Sacraments"
March 29	Monday	Film: Catholicism
April 1	Thursday	Exam # 3 Film: The Muslims (1 st half)

April 5	Monday	Muslim Worlds of Meaning Reading: Ludwig chapter 12
April 8	Thursday	Film: The Muslims (conclusion) Read: Ludwig chap. 13
April 12	Monday	Muslim Scripture Read: Van Voorst chap. 5
April 15	Thursday	Muslim Ritual and Ethical Practice Read: Ludwig chap. 14
April 19	Monday	Exam #4 Islam Film: The Mormons (1 st half)
April 22	Thursday	Film: The Mormons (continued) Read: Ludwig chap. 15
April 26	Monday	New Religious Movements: Ba'hai Faith Read: Ludwig chap.
April 29	Thursday	Scripture of New Religious Movements Read: Van Voorst chap. 6
May 7 [FINAL EXAM PERIOD]	Friday	Exam # 5 9:50 – 11:10 am*

*Exam will be the same length as other exams and therefore not require the entire time allotted.
Exam will begin sharply at 9:50. No students will be admitted to take the exam after 10 a.m.