HST 203/REL 203 Judaism/Christianity/Islam: Comparative Perspectives
Fall 2012

Time: M/W/F 11:45am-12:50pm
Location: NWSE 116

Instructor: Prof. Peter Bedford
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Office Hours: M/W/F 2-3; others times by appointment

Please make use of office hours. Please stop by too if you are interested in advice about other offerings in Religious Studies or how Religious Studies, including a Minor in Religious Studies, might fit into your program. If you are interested in the Jewish Studies Minor or the (prospective) Islamic Studies Minor come see me also. I am very happy to arrange to meet outside of office hours: just contact me!

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course offers a comparative approach to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, three closely related religious traditions. It attempts to draw out commonalities among and differences between these traditions by focusing on their histories, their understandings of God, revelation and tradition, religion and society, and responses to social and political change.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
*3 short papers (3 pages double spaced in length; 10% each) 30%
(due Wednesday Sept 19, Monday Oct 1, Monday Oct 15)
*1 x 7 page (double spaced) comparative paper 30%
(due last day of class; Monday Nov 12 at 5pm)
*Final exam covering parts B and C (in exam week; 1.5 hrs) 30%
*Class participation 10%

The curriculum has three sections: History of Religions; Comparative Perspectives; Religion and Society. The first section is examined through three short papers that draw out the salient features of each of the three religious traditions studied. The other two sections are examined through class tests. The questions will be directly related to the class readings and lectures. The comparative paper will afford an opportunity to reflect on aspects of at least two of the traditions. I have included some paper topics, but you should feel free to develop your own topic. If you do so, please discuss it with me before writing the paper.

TEXTBOOKS (can be purchased from the bookstore)

Other readings to be handed out in class.

ABSENCES AND LATE WORK
No tests may be made up unless arrangements have been made in advance of the scheduled exam. Sick? Going on a field trip? Have an intercollegiate sports commitment? These things happen, but if you wish to have an opportunity to make up a test, you must contact your instructor ahead of time! In respect to the paper, unless you have a very good excuse (like a medical certificate) the paper will be reduced by one grade for every day it is late (that is, an A paper becomes A-, or a B+ becomes B when handed in one day late; an A paper becomes B+ when handed in two days late).

HONOR CODE
Union College recognizes the need to create an environment of mutual trust as part of its educational mission. Responsible participation in an academic community requires respect for and acknowledgement of the thoughts and work of others, whether expressed in the present or in some distant time and place. Matriculation at the College is taken to signify implicit agreement with the Academic Honor Code, available at honorcode.union.edu<http://honorcode.union.edu>.

It is each student's responsibility to ensure that submitted work is his or her own and does not involve any form of academic misconduct. Students are expected to ask their course instructors for clarification regarding, but not limited to, collaboration, citations, and plagiarism. Ignorance is not an excuse for breaching academic integrity. Students are also required to affix the full Honor Code Affirmation, or the following shortened version, on each item of coursework submitted for grading: “I affirm that I have carried out my academic endeavors with full academic honesty.” [Signed, Jane Doe]

ADA REQUIREMENTS
It is Union College policy to make accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have any disability or special concern, please let me know what your needs are in order that they may be accommodated. All discussions will remain confidential to the extent permissible by law.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must also:
1. Register with and provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office.
2. Bring a letter to the instructor from the Dean of Students Office indicating what academic accommodations you require. This must be done within the first two weeks of term

For more information about services available to Union College students with disabilities, please contact the Dean of Students Office:
Shelly Shinebarger, Director of Student Support Services
Dean of Students Office
shinebas@union.edu; (518) 388-6116

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SCHEDULE OF CLASSES
I will hand out additional readings in secondary literature in class. There will also be primary texts for discussion.

PART A: HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Week 1 Sept 5
Introduction to course; issues in the historical and comparative study of religion.
Reading: Oxtoby and Hussain, pp. 4-25 (particularly pp. 21-25).

Week 1 Sept 7; Week 2 Sept 10, 12, 14 and Week 3 Sept 17
History of Judaism

Paper topic: To what extent is Rabbinic understanding of God in continuity with, or divergent from, earlier conceptions of God in this tradition?
**Paper due on Sept 19**

Week 3 Sept 19, 21 and Week 4 Sept 24, 26, 28
History of Christianity

Paper topic: What were the key theological debates and developments in the Christian idea of God in the Patristic period?
**Paper due on Oct 1**

Week 5 Oct 1, 3, 5 and Week 6 Oct 8, 10
History of Islam

Paper topic: What was the process through which ‘normative’ Islam emerged?
**Paper due on Oct 15**

PART B: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Week 6 Oct 12
Abraham

Week 7 Oct 15
The Image of God in Humanity
Reading: Solomon, Harries, Winter, pp. 147-79.
Week 7  Oct 17
Pluralism

Week 7  Oct 19
Gender
Reading: Solomon, Harries, Winter, pp. 216-47.

Week 8  Oct 22
The Environment

Week 8  Oct 24
Life after Death

PART C: RELIGION AND SOCIETY
Week 8  Oct 26 and Week 9 Oct 29
Modernity and Negotiating Change: Judaism
Theme—Emancipation and Beyond

Week 9  Oct 31, Nov 2
Modernity and Negotiating Change: Christianity
Theme—The Enlightenment and Beyond

Week 10 Nov 5, 7
Modernity and Negotiating Change: Islam
Theme—Colonialism and Beyond

Week 10 Nov 9, 12
Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Modern World, and the Comparative Study of Religions

Comparative Paper Due on Nov 12

Exam weeks
Final exam—on Parts B and C (1.5 hrs)

ESSAY TOPICS
Essay to be handed in at the final class on Nov 12.

1. Evaluate the claim that Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

2. How comfortably does mysticism sit in relation to the theological ‘mainstream’ in at least two of Judaism, Christianity and Islam?

3. Compare and contrast mystical experience in any two of Judaism, Christianity, Islam.

4. Compare and contrast the role of scripture and its interpretation in any two of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

5. How does Judaism or Christianity or Islam imagine the ideal society? In respect to two of these traditions, discuss how such a society is to be attained.

6. What might it mean for a State to term itself ‘Jewish’ or ‘Christian’ or ‘Islamic’? Illustrate your answer with discussion of specific examples from at least two traditions.


8. Is philosophy incompatible with religion? Discuss the relationship between philosophy and religious thought in two of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

9. Are Judaism, Christianity and Islam ‘patriarchal’ religions? Discuss the place of women in two of these traditions. (You may choose to limit the discussion to a particular time and/or place.)

10. Take one or more of the topics/questions addressed in Solomon, Harries, and Winter and discuss this topic/question greater depth. To do justice to this you will need to undertake an investigation beyond the two textbooks.
RESOURCES
There are a number of excellent encyclopedia that you should use as a starting point in any research.

General

Judaism

Christianity
The Cambridge History of Christianity. 5 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. (These volumes are shelved separately in Schaffer Library; consult catalogue)

Islam

Other resources:
Comparative

**Judaism**

**Christianity**

**Islam**