

REL 350 | The Religions of the Middle East. A Comparative Approach Spring 2025

Course Instructor: Despina IOSIF
Email: despina.iosif@cyathens.org

Course Description

Religion is a subject in which people continue to vest powerful emotions. This course focuses on the three monotheistic religions of the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and in order to develop a better understanding of them we will make frequent exciting on-site visits and we will exploit as many primary sources as possible.

Monotheism is the shared theological orientation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam that often embraces almost every aspect of the private and the public life of their followers. The aim of this course is to examine Judaism, Christianity and Islam's main teachings and simultaneously to explore how these teachings manage to affect the everyday lives of their followers. In this course, we will investigate how a devout follower envisaged and how do people shape their lives to fit the image of a devout follower? Additionally, we will describe the ways in which Judaism, Christianity and Islam have constructed their distinctive meanings, compare them and note the similarities and the debts to each other, keeping in mind that various communities with a completely different outlook exist and claim sole orthodoxy. Hopefully, we might even eventually come to question our assumptions of the three monotheistic religions.

Course Requirements

You will be expected to attend all classes (unless prevented by illness), complete the assigned readings **before** the class under which they are listed, participate actively and constructively in discussion and be always ready to do the tests and pop quizzes (composed of fill-in-the-blank sentences, multiple choice questions and short answer questions) with closed books.

Additionally, you will be expected to compose **two papers**, each 4-5 pages long, excluding bibliography, double spaced. **The first paper is compulsory for all** students attending the course to write and submit at the latest by **27/3**. The first paper will be on *Sainthood in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Then, it's up to you to decide if you wish to write and submit the second paper by the **22/4**, **OR** the third paper by the **29/4**. For the second paper you may choose to write on *Jewish, Christian and Muslim Beliefs on War and Violence* or on *The Ideal of Charity as shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. For the third paper you may write on *Conflicts within Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. All papers must be submitted in printed form. You will be called to **present one of your papers** in class. Discussion by the students attending the presentations is anticipated.

Finally, please note that you are expected **to submit a one or two paragraph reflection note**, on any topic discussed in class which you found intriguing OR on one of our on-site visits (3 reflection notes in total).

Grading and Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

Participation 10%
Two Papers 20% + 20% = 40%
Presentation of One Paper 10%
Test 10%
Six Reflection Notes 10%
Pop Quizzes 5%
Final Exam 15%

Please find detailed **rubrics** at the end of this syllabus.

Class Participation: Your attendance and in class participation – is vitally important to your success in this course.

Use of Laptops: In-class or on-site use of laptops and other devices is permitted if that facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended and will affect your grade in a negative way if they are not used for class-related work.

Attendance: Students are expected to report for classes promptly. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site as essential.

Policy on Original Work: Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any

excerpts from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to learning accommodation, please inform the Director of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation.

You will have the opportunity to complete an **evaluation** form for my teaching methods at the end of the course. Should you experience any difficulties before this, please let me know. I promise I will do my best to help you during your studies in Athens. By all means do approach me, if you think I could be of any help!

Books, Course Materials, Moodle

J. Corrigan, F. M. Denny, C. M. N. Eire and M. S. Jaffee, *Jews, Christians, Muslims. A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1998 and the Readings as its companion.

Please note: All required reading (apart from your textbook) can be found in Moodle.

You are strongly advised to consult the books and articles that are kept for you on the library's reserved shelf.

Class Schedule

28 JANUARY Session 1. Introduction

What is religion? What is monotheism? How did monotheism emerge? What does it mean to launch and practise monotheism in a polytheistic environment? How important is the afterlife in order to attract converts?

NO required reading.

30 JANUARY Session 2, and 4 FEBRUARY Session 3. Judaism in a nutshell

Teachings and Conversion: What do Jews believe in? What does conversion to Judaism entail? Beginnings and Leadership: Under which conditions did Judaism emerge? Who do Jews trust as leaders? How are their leaders chosen and how do they gain their authority, by personal charisma or by heredity? Do they get paid for their services? Do they retain their job for life? Sacred Texts: Which are their main sacred texts? Their characteristics, their authors and dates of composition. Worship and Ritual: How do they communicate with God and express their religious experiences?

Required Reading: Textbook p. 3-25 and Companion Readings: 1.1.A, 1.1.C, 1.1.E, 1.1.F.

6 FEBRUARY Session 4. Visit to the Jewish Museum of Athens

Please remember to submit your reflection

7 FEBRUARY Session 5, and 11 FEBRUARY Session 6. Christianity in a nutshell

Teachings and Conversion. Beginnings and Leadership. Sacred Texts. Worship and Ritual.

Required Reading: Textbook p. 26-51, Companion Readings: 2.1.D and D. Iosif, "The present and future worlds are enemies to each other. Early Christian Aloofness and Participation in the Pagan World", in Richard Alston, Onno M. van Nijf and Christina G. Williamson, ed., *Cults, Creeds and Identities in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, Peeters, Leuven, Paris, Walpole, 2013, p. 289-308.

13 FEBRUARY Session 7. Visit to Ag. Spiridon Church

Please remember to submit your reflection

25 FEBRUARY Session 8, and 27 FEBRUARY Session 9. Islam in a nutshell

Teachings and Conversion. Beginnings and Leadership. Sacred Texts. Worship and Ritual.

Required Reading: Textbook p. 52-72 and Companion Readings: 3.2.A and 12.2.

4 MARCH Session 10. Visit to Fetihye Mosque

Please remember to submit your reflection

6 MARCH Session 11. Sainthood in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

How is sainthood defined by Judaism, Christianity and Islam? What does it take to become a saint? The saints' involvement in society and their rewards before and after their death.

Please remember to submit your final reflection

11 MARCH Session 12. Martyrdom

What does it mean to die for the faith? How is resistance understood and described? Should martyrdom be voluntary? The numbers of the martyrs.

Required Reading: Textbook p. 302-303, R. H. Barrow, *The Romans*, Penguin, Baltimore, Maryland, 1961, p. 179-191 and H. Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 2000, 1972¹, p. 87-89 and p. 168-175.

13 MARCH Session 13. Asceticism and Monasticism

How can our body lead us to sainthood? How complete is a saint's renunciation of this world?

Required Reading: Textbook p. 304-307 and Companion Readings: 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 13.3 and D. Iosif, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Illness as Demon Possession in the World of the First Christian Ascetics and Monks", *Mental Health, Religion and Culture, Routledge Journals* 14.4, April 2011, p. 323-340.

Optional reading: A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, London and New York, p. 71-75, G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 60-77, and B. Ward, *Harlots of the Desert*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 57-65.

27 MARCH Session 14. Visit to Moni Kaisarianis

Time to submit 1st paper!

28 MARCH Session 15. MID-TERM EXAM

1 APRIL Session 16. Presentations of Student Papers

3 APRIL Session 17. Sex and Gender

How do sexual relations influence one's life and afterlife? How much is abstinence appreciated? Who exercises power? Do women have any real power? The roles of the other sexes.

Required Reading: Textbook p. 303-304, Companion Readings: 18.3 and D. Iosif, "Shut up woman! The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla and their Impact", *Ancient World Magazine*, March 2021. <https://www.ancientworldmagazine.com/articles/apocryphal-acts-paul-thecla/>

8 APRIL Session 18. War and Violence

Are war and violence considered as legitimate?

Required Reading: Textbook p. 267 and D. Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War, Violence and Military Service*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway NJ, 2013, p. 1-18 and D. Iosif, 'Religious Violence' in *Augustine in Context*, ed. T. Toom, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 197-202.

10 APRIL Session 19. Charity and Pilgrimage

How can money and travel please God? How are the unprivileged treated? Is charity a way to exhibit piety and to forgive sins? What is the meaning of travel to sacred places?

Required Reading: Textbook p. 263-267 and p. 289-291, Companion Readings: 12.1.B., P. Brown, *Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, p. 25-26 and 41-46 and p. 55-56 and A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, London and New York, p. 78- 80.

22 APRIL Session 20. Presentations of Student Papers

Submit 2nd paper, unless you submit the 3rd paper!

24 APRIL Session 21. Visit to the Byzantine Museum of Athens

29 APRIL Session 22. Presentations of Student Papers

Submit 3rd paper, unless you have already submitted the 2nd!

6 MAY Session 23. Presentations of Student Papers.

8 MAY Session 24. Art. Open day Discussion. View Student Visual Material during Study Abroad. NO required reading.

Suggested bibliography for Paper Topics

Please note: The bibliography that follows is **optional**. It is recommended as a guide to help you compose your papers. All the titles, without exception, can be found in the school library. Please try not to restrict yourselves to the present bibliography. Any additional bibliography will be greatly appreciated.

Martyrdom

P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, 1978, C. Brauer, *The Age of the Soldier Emperors*, Park Ridge, New Jersey, 1975, p. 111-120, T. D. Barnes, "Legislation Against the Christians", *Journal of Roman Studies* 58, 1968, p. 32-50, Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 38-59, H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, 1984, 1967¹, p. 116-124, W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*, Oxford, 1965, S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham, 14th Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1981 and R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Asceticism and Monasticism

J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 2002, 1994¹, C. Brauer, *The Age of the Soldier Emperors*, Park Ridge, New Jersey, 1975, p. 218-224, Peter Brown, *Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, 1988 and *Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 51-59, H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, 1984, 1967¹, p. 174-183, Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire*, Oxford, 1966, S. Chondropoulos, *Saint Nektarios*, Massachusetts, 1989, I. J. Davidson, *A Public Faith*, Oxford and Michigan, 2005, p. 133-158 and 363-390, G. Endress, *An Introduction to Islam*, Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 53-58, G. Fowden and E. K. Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads*, Athens, 2004, p. 149-192, S. A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, University of California Press, 1990, Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Penguin, 1988, p. 419-492, S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham, 14th Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1981, p. 11-24, R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, New York, 1989, p. 81-90, J. C. O'Neill, 'The Origins of Monasticism' in *The Making of Orthodoxy*, ed., R. Williams, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 270-287, Paisios, ed., *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, Thessaloniki, 1975¹, 1995, F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Princeton University Press, p. 919-981, M. H. Shepherd, 'Christianity and the Fall of Rome' in *A Short History of Christianity*, ed. A. G. Baker, University of Chicago Press, 1967, 1940¹, p. 33-65, (p. 41-49), Sophrony, *The Monk of Mount Athos*, New York, 1975¹, 1989, H. Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, London, 1936 and J. A. Williams, *Islam*, New York, 1969, 1963¹, p. 123-130.

Sexual Relations and the Ideal of Virginity

P. Brown, *Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 7-10 and 27-34, Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Penguin, 1988, p. 336-374, O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt. Faith and Life*, Cairo, 1970, p. 285-341 and G. Sissa, *Greek Virginity*, Harvard University Press, 1990.

The Three Sexes; Men, Women and Hermaphrodites, Transvestites and Eunuchs

S. A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, London, 1967, 1922¹, p. 222-257, L. M. Anderson and P. D. Young, *Women and Religious Traditions*, Oxford University Press, 2004, L. J. Archer, 'The Role of Women in the Religion, Ritual and Cult of the Graeco-Roman Palestine' and S. A. Harcey, 'Women in Early Syrian Christianity' in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt, p. 273-287 and 288-298, P. Brown, *Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 7-10 and 27-34 and 61-75, A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, London and New York, p. 148-151, J. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, Penguin Books, 1962, p. 89-115, J. L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to know about Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 87-109 and 142-147, A. Hertzberg, ed., *Judaism*, New York, 1962¹, 1968, p. 76-88, A. M. Lutfiyya and C. W. Churchill, *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*, Paris, 1970, p. 492-618, I. Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, Harvard University Press, 1992 and G. Woolf, *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Roman World*, 2003, p. 190-192.

The State

N. Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, London, 1935¹, 1944, p. 328-362, H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, 1984, 1967¹, G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 100-103, M. Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 65-82, M. I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History*, New York, 1962, J. L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, Oxford University Press, 1995, 1992¹, p. 77-118, S. Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, New York, 1968, J. Gustafson, 'Society' in *Handbook of Christian Theology*, New York, 1958, p. 351-354, F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Princeton University Press, p. 347-401, M. Z. Khan, *Islam*, London, p. 158-163, Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 120-125, O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt. Faith and Life*, Cairo, 1970, p. 342-368, A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, University of Chicago Press, 1996 and A. Schmemmann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, London, 1963.

Social Hierarchy, Wealth and Slavery

S. A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, London, 1967, 1922¹, p. 258-267, J. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, Penguin Books, 1962, p. 69-74, J. L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to know about Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 147-148 and 163-168, G. Fowden and E. K. Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads*, Athens, 2004, p. 110-111, M. Goodman, *The Roman World*, London and New York, 1997¹, 2006, p. 177-178, K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, M. Z. Khan, *Islam*, London, p. 150-157, H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York, 1956, p. 62, 120-141 and M. H. Shepherd, 'The Rise of Christianity' in *A Short History of Christianity*, ed. A. G. Baker, University of Chicago Press, 1967, 1940¹, p. 1-32, (p. 28-30).

War and Violence

S. A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, London, 1967, 1922¹, p. 204-221, K. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, London, 2001, 1991 1st, p. 164-249, M. Cook, *Muhammad*, Oxford University Press, 1983¹, 1996, p. 53-55, H. Ellens, *The Destructive Power of Religion*, Westport, Connecticut and London, 2007, J. L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, Oxford University Press, 1995, 1992¹, p. 119-187, J. L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to know about Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 117-138, D. Iosif, "Caesar the Warrior versus Jesus the Peacemaker?", *Eulimene* 4, 2003, p. 167-180, D. Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War, Violence and Military Service*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway NJ, 2013, D. Iosif, 'Religious Violence' in *Augustine in Context*, ed. Tarmo Toom, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 197-202. J. Turner Johnson and J. Kelsay, ed., *Cross, Crescent and Sword*, New York, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1990 and *Just War and Jihad*, 1991, G. Kepel, *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*, London and New York, 2004, M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, Baltimore and London, 1969, 1955¹, M. Khadduri, *The Islamic Concept of Justice*, Baltimore and London, 1982, p. 161-173, M. Z. Khan, *Islam*, London, p. 164-183, B. Lewis, ed., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, vol. 1, New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco and London, 1974, p. 209-213, S. Murata and W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, London and New York, 1996, p. 20-22, Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, New York and London, 2007, P. Partner, *God of Battles. Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam*, Princeton University Press, 1998, V. J. Parry, 'Warfare' in P. M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton, B. Lewis, ed., *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2, 1970, p. 824-850, F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 333-378 and A. Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet*, Colorado and Oxford, 2002.

Charity

Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 71-117, G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 107-111, Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2006, A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome*, Thames and Hudson, London and Southampton, 1968, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 223-227 and S. Murata and W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, London and New York, 1996, p. 16-17.

Pilgrimage

Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, tr. R. M. French, London, 1999, 1930¹, Philip F. Esler and Ian Ruthurford, *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, 2006, D. MacCannell, *The Tourist*, University of California Press, 1973, A. O'Mahony, G. Gunner and K. Hintlian, *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, London, 1995, M. Z. Khan, *Islam*, London, p. 117-126, S. Murata and W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, London and New York, 1996, p. 19-20, Paisios, ed., *Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian*, Thessaloniki, 1975¹, 1995, and F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, Princeton University Press, 1995.

Notions of Orthodoxy and Heresy

S. A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, London, 1967, 1922¹, p. 290-359, J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, Edinburgh, 1996¹, 1998, p. 83-88, G. C. Brauer, *The Age of the Soldier Emperors*, Park Ridge, New Jersey, 1975, p. 97-111, A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, London and New York, p. 64-67, H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, 1984, 1967¹, J. L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to know about Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 39-56, H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, New York, 1955, 1949¹, p. 85-98, A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1973, vol.2, p. 950-956, Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 218-224, Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament. Its Origin, Development and Significance*, Oxford University Press, 1987, J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, New York, 1989, E. Mortimer, *Faith and Power*, London, 1982, p. 39-55, F. E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Princeton University Press, p. 736-750, A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, University of Chicago Press, 1996, T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London, 1997, 1963¹, K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, New York, 1979, J. A. Williams, *Islam*, New York, 1969, 1963¹, p. 197-225 and R. Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Influence of Hellenism

J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, Edinburgh, 1996¹, 1998, J. J. Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics on Humankind and Nature*, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2001, R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, New York, 1956, p. 94-171, Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 72-89, H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1966, E. S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, University of California Press, 1998, E. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, New York, 1957, Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 93-97 and E. G. Weltin, *Athens and Jerusalem*, Atlanta, Georgia, 1987.

Art

H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin, 1984, 1967¹, p. 273-284, J. Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*, Oxford University Press, 1998, I. R. al Fārūqī and L. L. al Fārūqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, New York and London, 1986, p. 162-181, G. Fehervari, 'Art and Architecture' in P. M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton, B. Lewis, ed., *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2, 1970, p. 702-740, M. Gough, *The Early Christians*, London, 1961, S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham, 14th Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1981, p. 11-24, R. Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context*, New York, 1997 and C. Malik, ed., *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, American University of Beirut, 1972, p. 112-131.