

Department of Religion and Culture
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

RLCL 1024
Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Fall 2017
Dr. Samuel J. Kessler
kessler@vt.edu

Graduate Teaching Assistant
Sarah Plummer, M.A.
splummer@vt.edu

Tuesday/Thursday
9:30-10:45AM
SAUND 409

Office Hours for Dr. Kessler:
211 Major Williams
T/H 12-2PM (and by appointment)

Final Exam (scheduled):
December 18, 2017
7:45-9:45AM

This course explores the history and core tenets of the major (normative) streams of the Abrahamic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these traditions will be studied in their cultural and political context, with frequent reference to their interactions and conflicts with other monotheistic and non-monotheistic cultures, using the most recent scholarly theories and methodologies. We will learn many concepts in the study of religion, such as myth, ritual, cosmology, theodicy, legalism, and the effects of geography and modernity. We will discuss the various ways all three traditions have been in continual dialogue over the past two millennia, and how this interaction has both reified and diversified traditional beliefs and practices. Finally, the multitude of sources we encounter will help us to develop a more complex vocabulary when discussing the various branches, sects, societies, ethics, and communities associated with all three traditions.

Students will leave this course with a thorough sense of the historical trajectory of the interacting cultures of the Near East, Mediterranean, and Europe from Biblical times to the present. Students will be expected to learn many of the key figures, texts, beliefs, and geographies associated with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as to have a visual sense of the migrations and political instantiations of all three traditions across the centuries. This is a reading-intensive course. Instead of relying on a textbook, students will be introduced to primary and scholarly sources (all in English translation) through engagement with a variety of authors and publications. Finally, students will be asked to write two brief essays reflecting on key aspects of religious experience: communal practice and liturgy/poetry.

All readings for this course will be available as PDF documents on Canvas (under “Files”). Readings should be completed before the Tuesday or Thursday class meeting for the week that they are listed. You are not required to bring a copy of the week’s reading class, but if you choose to do so you may only bring the texts on a tablet (not a laptop) computer or as printed pages. **Use of laptop computers is strictly prohibited during class time. You may take notes with pen and paper or on a tablet.** *You are responsible for checking your VT email regularly for communications about the course.*

Note: The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus as needed (which can include assignment due dates) to best meet the learning objective of this course. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Guidelines and Policies

Accessibility Resource Policy

Those who qualify under the VT policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through University ADA Services can be found here: <http://oca.vt.edu/ada-accessibility-services.html>.

University Honor Code

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

Required Texts

All texts for this course will be available via the “Files” tab on Canvas.

Course Assignments and Expectations

Class Attendance

Attendance will be taken throughout the semester. If you arrive late and attendance has already been completed you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than three unexcused absences will affect your final grade by 2% per absence. If you have more than six unexcused absences you cannot receive a course grade higher than a C. Please notify the Professor or GTA as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the VT Class Attendance Policy can be found here: <http://www.policies.vt.edu/6330.pdf>.

Thematic/Vocabulary Quizzes

You will be asked to complete three (3) thematic/vocabulary quizzes over the course of the semester. Each quiz will be taken on Canvas and will consist of 20 multiple choice questions. *All quizzes will be available on Canvas for 72 hours. You will have 30 minutes to complete each quiz once you have begun.*

(First: Opens Tuesday, September 19 at 10:45AM)

(Second: Opens Tuesday, October 17 at 10:45AM)

(Third: Opens Tuesday, November 7 at 10:45AM)

Geography Quizzes

You will be asked to complete two (2) geography quizzes over the course of the semester. Each quiz will be taken in class. You will be given a map with numbered locations and a list of names and asked to correctly identify each number with each name. *You will have 20 minutes to complete each quiz.*

(First: Tuesday, October 3)

(Second: Tuesday, December 5)

Contemporary Community Ethnography (2 pages, double-spaced)

For this paper you will write a brief essay about a religious community with which you are familiar. This community can be your own, one you (or your family or friends) have frequented in the past, or one that you explore specifically for this class. This paper is not about your personal religious beliefs. Instead, it is a “thick description” of a contemporary religious community and its practices.

In your paper, you should address such questions as: Where is this community located? What sort of rituals, services, or liturgies does it perform? Who frequents its space or practices its customs? If you have never seen or been present at a religious ceremony you will need to take the time to visit one around campus or at home to complete this assignment. *You must upload this paper to your Canvas course Dropbox.*

(Due Thursday, October 5 at 9:30AM)

Religious Liturgy/Poetry Essay (3 pages, double-spaced)

In this essay, you will engage with a work of religious liturgy or poetry that originates outside of your personal (or familial) tradition but within the framework of normative Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. This liturgical/poetic work can be either historical or contemporary, but it must be from a recognized source (e.g. prayer book; song book; book of poems) in one of these three traditions.

In the essay, you need to describe who wrote the work or where it is found; who is the intended readership; how/if it is used in a ritual setting; and provide an analysis of its contents. In terms of content, you need to explore the following: the work’s structure (is it poetry/narrative/lyric/scripture?); its dogmatic/creedal/theological statements (how does it describe God or the world?); and its visual details (what images does it employ or specific descriptions does it make?). *You must upload this paper to your Canvas course Dropbox.*

(Due Thursday, November 16 at 9:30AM)

Midterm Exam

The Midterm Exam will consist of 30 multiple choice questions and 1 two-paragraph essay question (you will choose from two prompts). You will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of specific facts in the multiple-choice section and an ability to utilize scholarly methodologies to synthesize various theological and historical narratives in the essay question. *The Midterm Exam will be available on Canvas for 72 hours. You will have 1 hour to complete the exam once you have begun.*

(Available beginning Thursday, October 26 at 10:45AM)

Final Exam

The Final Exam will consist of 30 multiple choice questions and 2 two-paragraph essay questions (you will choose from four prompts). You will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of specific facts in the multiple-choice section and an ability to utilize scholarly methodologies to synthesize various theological and historical narratives in the essay questions. *The Final Exam will be available beginning with the final day of class and ending during our allotted Final Exam hour. You will have an hour and a half (1:30:00) to complete the exam once you have begun.*

(Available from December 12 at 10:45AM to December 18 at 9:45AM)

Grading

Attendance	5
Thematic/Vocabulary Quizzes	20
Geography Quizzes	10
Contemporary Community Ethnography	10
Religious Liturgy/Poetry Essay	15
Midterm	20
Final Exam	<u>20</u>
	100

Schedule

Week 1: August 29-31

Introduction

Topic and Reading (for Thursday)

- Studying the Monotheistic Traditions
 - Guy Stroumsa, *A New Science*, pp. 14-38

How to Study Religion

Week 2: September 5-7

Theory and Method in the Study of Religion

Topics and Readings

- Defining Religious Languages and Categories
 - Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory*, pp. 289-309
- Studying Religious Communities
 - Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, pp. 1-28

The Biblical World

Week 3: September 12-14

Before 1000 BCE: Israelite History from Abraham to King Solomon

Topics and Readings

- Geography and Empire in the Ancient Near East
 - Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, “Historical and Geographical Background to the Bible,” pp. 2048-2062
- Introduction to the Torah
 - Genesis 1-2; Exodus 19-20; Leviticus 17-23; Deuteronomy 1, 32-34

Week 4: September 19-21

Before 586 BCE: The Age of Israelite Kings and Prophets

Topics and Readings

- Judges and Tribes; Kings and Empires
 - Joshua 1-3, 24; Judges 1, 4-5; I Samuel 9-10, 15-17; I Kings 5-10; II Kings 18-20
- The Books of the Prophets and the Destruction of the First Temple
 - Isaiah 6, 36-38, 66; Ezekiel 37; Habakkuk 1-2; Lamentations 1

(First Thematic/Vocabulary Quiz: Opens Tuesday, September 19 at 10:45AM)

***No class September 21 (Rosh Hashanah)**

The Classical World

Week 5: September 26-28

Before 70CE: The Era of the Second Temple and Mediterranean World

Topics and Readings

- Greek Politics, Philosophy, and War
 - Plato, *Symposium* (selections)
 - Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, pp. xi-xxxiv

- The Hasmoneans and Herodians
 - Ecclesiasticus 1-7; II Maccabees 1-10:8

Week 6: October 3-5

The Creation of Year Zero

Topics and Readings

- Roman Culture and Governance in the Near East
 - Robin Lane Fox, *The Classical World*, pp. 1-9, 547-569
- The Jesus Movement and the Call to the Gentiles
 - The Gospel of Matthew; I Corinthians; Ephesians

(First Geography Quiz: Tuesday, October 3)

(Contemporary Community Ethnography Paper Due: Thursday, October 5 at 9:30AM on Canvas)

Week 7: October 10-12

From the 2nd to 10th Centuries CE: The Development of Rabbinic Discourse, Law, and Politics

Topics and Readings

- The Jewish Community in Diaspora
 - Robert Goldenberg, *The Origins of Judaism*, pp. 160-178
- Rabbinic Epistemology
 - Mishna Rosh Hashanah (selections)
 - David Stern, “Midrash and Jewish Interpretation,” pp. 1863-1875

Late Antiquity and the Eastern Roman Empire

Week 8: October 17-19

From the 2nd to 6th Centuries: Christianity in the Roman World

Topics and Readings

- Peter, Paul, and the Growth of Early Christianity around the Mediterranean
 - Origen of Alexandria, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom* (selections)
 - Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity*, pp. 112-137 (*Suggested*)
- The Codification of Catholic Doctrine and the Movements in Opposition
 - St. Augustine, *The City of God* (selections)
 - Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, pp. 129-148 (*Suggested*)

(Second Thematic/Vocabulary Quiz: Opens Tuesday, October 17 at 10:45AM)

Week 9: October 24-26

The 6th Century: Arabia and the Rise of Islam

Topics and Readings

- The World of Mohammed
 - Qur’an, “The Cow”
 - Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, pp. 76-105 (*Suggested*)
- The Early Expansion of Islam
 - Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate*, pp. 1-32

(Midterm Exam: Available beginning Thursday, October 26 at 10:45AM)*The Middle Ages*Week 10: October 31-November 2

After 1054CE: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Mediterranean

Topics and Readings

- Catholic Expansion in Europe, Divorce with Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Crusades
 - Letter of Pope Leo IX to the Emperor Constantine Monomachos (1054)
 - Accounts of Urban II's Speech at the Council of Clermont (1095)
 - Solomon Bar Samson, "The Crusaders in Mainz" (1096)
 - Albert of Aix and Ekkehard of Aura, "Emico and the Slaughter of the Rhineland Jews" (1096)
- The Islamic Caliphate from Spain to India
 - Rabi'a Basri, *Poems* (selections)
 - Jalaluddin Rumi, *Poems* (selections)
 - Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of Incoherence*
 - Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate*, pp. 205-228 (*Suggested*)

Week 11: November 7-9

Before October 31, 1517: Crusaders and Mystics

Topics and Readings

- Judaism in Europe and the Holy Land
 - Rabbi Yehuda Halevy, *Poems* (selections)
 - Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi), *Commentary* (selections)
 - Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, *L'cha Dodi*
 - Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides), *The Guide of the Perplexed* (selections)
- Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Levantine Churches
 - St. Theresa of Ávila, *The Way of Perfection* (selections)
 - Peter Abelard, *Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian* (selections)
 - *The Philokalia* (selections)

(Third Thematic/Vocabulary Quiz: Opens Tuesday, November 7 at 10:45AM)*Modernity*Week 12: November 14-16

From 1517 to 1815

Topics and Readings

- Islam in the Heart of Europe
 - Roger Crowley, *1453*, pp. 9-36
 - Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Enemy at the Gate*, pp. 1-9, 245-265
- Europe From Renaissance to Enlightenment
 - Martin Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian*
 - Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, pp. 1- 25 (*Suggested*)

(Religious Liturgy/Poetry Essay due: Thursday, November 16 at 9:30AM in Canvas)

***Thanksgiving Break: November 20-24**Week 13: November 28-30

1789 to 1914: Christianity and Islam

Topics and Readings

- France and Britain in the Near East
 - Alexander W. Kinglake, *Eothen* (selections)
 - Freya Stark, *Baghdad Sketches* (selections)
- Darwin Through the Eyes of Protestants and Catholics
 - Ian Heskith, *Of Apes and Ancestors*, pp. 76-87
 - William Jennings Brian, *Last Speech*
 - Pius XII, *Humani Generis*

Week 14: December 5-7The 20th Century: Tradition, Spirituality, and Politics from America to the Near East*Topics and Readings*

- Islam and Arab Nationalism
 - Gamal Abdel Nasser, “Speech to the Egyptian National Assembly” (May 29, 1967)
 - Aase Lionaes, “Nobel Award Ceremony Speech” (on the occasion of the Nobel Peace Prize being presented to Anwar al-Sadat, President of Egypt, and Menachem Begin, Prime Minister of Israel, December 10, 1978)
 - Robert F. Worth, “Aleppo After the Fall”
 - Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, pp. 7-28 (*Suggested*)
- The American Melting Pot
 - Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No Religion is an Island”
 - Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, pp. 247-269 (*Suggested*)

(Second Geography Quiz: Tuesday, December 5)Week 15: December 12The 21st Century: Searching for a History of Monotheism*Topic and Reading*

- History, Religion, and Our Multicultural Moment
 - Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The Cumulative Tradition”

Final Exam**Available:****Tuesday, December 12 at 10:45AM to Monday, December 18 at 9:45AM**

“It is written: [‘How precious are your dear ones to me, O God...] If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.’ [Psalms 139] ... This is saying: [If] I should count the deeds of the righteous, they are greater in number than the [grains of] sand. And [it follows] *a fortiori*: If the sand, which are fewer, [still] protect [all the shores] from the sea, do not (all the more so) the deeds of the righteous, which are greater, protect [all the righteous]?” —Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 8A