Faith and Critical Reason: Living Religious Diversity
Tue, Wed, Thu 1:00-4:00 / Summer Session
Lincoln Center Campus, Fordham University

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Office Hours: 

DRAFT SYLLABUS – FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY – ALL READINGS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

This course will introduce students to some of the living religious traditions in New York City. We will explore the theological, philosophical and ideological foundations of various religions, and try to examine how religion functions in 21st century life.

As a course in Theology, we will examine the internal logic of religious claims to truth, meaning and value reflected in the traditions under examination. As comparative we will do this by placing the views of multiple communities in conversation with each other.

Course Objectives:
The subject matter of the course will:

- Introduce students to the discipline of theology as critical reflection on a faith tradition.
- Provide an overview of various religious traditions.
- Consider the outlooks of various faith traditions in comparative perspective
- Underscore the diversity of perspectives among different traditions and within each tradition.

The methods of the course aim to:

- Encourage critical analysis of texts (assessed in papers, essay exams and in-class discussions)
- Develop writing skills (assessed in papers and in-class writing assignments)
- Empower students in public presentation (assessed in class presentation and discussions)
- Foster a climate of communal learning (through in-class collaborations & off-campus travel)
- Encourage active learning (in Socratic/democratic discussions and site visits)
- Engage in interdisciplinary exploration (through diverse course resources)
- Invite investigation into and expression of embodied epistemology (through site visits)

Learning goals and student outcomes (used as basis for assessment). Students can:

- Recognize the distinctive features of some among the different religious traditions in New York City
  - Explain the function of a ‘worldview’
  - Identify specific components of the worldviews associated with particular religious traditions.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the beliefs, rituals, texts and figures related to a variety of religious traditions. They can:
  - Describe the basic teachings and practices of the religious traditions in our study.
  - Present some of the significant historical moments of the religious traditions in our study.
  - Compare and contrast principal similarities and differences between traditions.
  - Identify some of the living practices of faith traditions in New York City.

- Engage in comparative theological thinking. Students can:
  - Identify sites of overlap between two or more theological outlooks in religious traditions.
  - Engage in the practice of comparative theology by considering a theme from diverse theological perspectives.
  - Articulate an outcome of their comparative theological practice.
Week 1

Tuesday: Reading Religious Diversity

Readings to Discuss During Class:

Hebrew Bible, Exodus Chapter 19, Coursepack

Analects of Confucius, Book 4, Coursepack

The Dhammapada (Selections) Coursepack

Living Diversity in NYC: We will review these websites to get a sense of the living diversity in NYC.

http://www.nycreligion.info

https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ny-new-york/spirituality--events/?crt=regular&page=7&sort=best
http://newyorkcity.eventful.com/events/categories/religion_spirituality/?page_number=8&category=religion_spirituality

JCC Manhattan Come together with New Yorkers from across the spectrum of Jewish Life for a revelatory night of study, film, music, dance, yoga, cheesecake and more in celebration of Shavuot.

http://nyc.wonbuddhism.org/programs/weekly-programs.html

Wednesday: Ancient Religious Diversity: 6th century BCE

- Babylonian Captivity: 588-510 BCE (in present-day Iraq)
- Siddhartha Gautama: 6th Century BCE (in present-day Nepal)
- Master K’ung: 551-479 BCE (near present-day Qufu)

Prepare these readings for today’s discussion with the following focus question to guide your reading:

What is the importance of Torah in Jewish tradition? Why would a community stay up all night reading Torah in 21st century New York City?


Judith Plaskow, “Torah: Reshaping Jewish Memory” from Standing Again at Sinai (25-36) (Coursepack)

Thursday: From Ancient Diversity to Living Diversity

Prepare these readings for Today’s Discussion with these focus questions to guide your reading: What similarities and differences do you notice in the traditions of Judaism and Buddhism? What might New Yorkers find interesting/appealing about continuing the Buddhist tradition in NYC?

Patricia Phelan, “A Practice of Body, Mind and Consciousness: An Introduction to Buddhism” in Five Voices, Five Faiths (page 43-61)

Walpole Rahula, “Meditation or Mental Culture” from What the Buddha Taught (67-75)(Coursepack)

Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Five Aggregates” from The Miracle of Mindfulness (45-52) (Coursepack)

QUIZ #1 including terminology: Creator, God, covenant, Torah, exile, Tanakh, Temple, Second Temple, ritual, Sabbath, commandment, Shavuot, sacred history, Buddha, non-theistic, Four Sights, mendicant, Four Noble Truths, suffering, Middle Way, Eightfold Path, interconnectedness, interdependency, Siddhartha, Theravada, Mahayana, Zen
Tuesday: Worldviews Ancient and Contemporary

 Quiz #2 including terminology:  Heaven, self-cultivation, ren, The Way, co-creator, Master K’ung, Qi, anthropomorphic, anthropocentric, anthropocosmic, meditation, enlightenment, Nirvana, mindfulness, liberation, compassion, impermanence, ahimsa, Three Poisons, upekkha, bodhisattva, upaya, structural violence, simplicity, salvation, anatta.

Prepare these readings for Today’s Discussion with these focus questions to guide your reading: What are some of the values in Confucianism, Buddhism and Judaism that might continue to shape practices in our world?


Tu Weiming, “Creativity:  A Confucian View” Dao vol. 6 (2007):141-151 Coursepack

Sulak Sivaraksa, “Buddhist Solutions to Global Conflict” and “The Value of Simplicity and Humility” Coursepack

David Teutsch, “Reinvigorating the Practice of Contemporary Jewish Ethics:  A Justification for Values-Based Decision Making,” from The Reconstructionist (Spring 2005): 4-15 (Coursepack)

Judith Plaskow, “Pesach 5771” (Coursepack)

Wednesday: From Ancient Diversity to Living Diversity: NYC Lower East Side

1:30-2:30 Eldridge Street Synagogue & Museum (12 Eldridge Street, Manhattan)
2:30-3:30 Mahaya Buddhist Temple (133 Canal Street, Manhattan)

Thursday: PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS (3-4 pages): Drawing on the readings of the course so far, how would you describe the role of religion in human life? Include at least two traditions from our study.

The aim of each essay is to demonstrate an understanding of the course readings as they can help us see the similarities and differences between worldviews. Therefore, while your voice and insight will guide the presentation of the essay (including a concise thesis), it will be assessed on the degree to which you have demonstrated an understanding of the readings. Your paper should:

(1) Directly respond to the prompt in a single, concise thesis.
(2) Directly cite the texts of the course with internal citations (see below).
(3) Follow the thesis through with a clear presentation of ideas.

As a paper demonstrating engagement with the readings, you should cite as many works as possible with these formats:
A. Direct Quotes of full sentences:
   As Tillich has indicated, “It is meaningless to question the ultimacy of an ultimate concern.” (Tillich, 488)
B. Direct Quotes of partial sentences:
   Christian theologian Elizabeth Johnson recognizes that God is “literally incomprehensible” (Johnson, 17).
C. Using an author’s ideas, although not quoting directly:
   In the Jewish tradition, idolatry is taken very seriously.  (Hefter, 15)

Readings for in-Class Discussion:


**Week 3**

**Tuesday: Traditions Emerging from Judaism**

Jesus of Nazareth / Christianity 1st century CE  
Revelation to the Prophet Muhammad / Islam 7th century CE

Hebrew Bible, Genesis Chapter 1, *Coursepack*

Qur’an, on Creation, *Coursepack*

Ninety-Nine Names of God (Islamic Tradition) *Coursepack*


Amanda Millay Hughes, “We Believe: Remembering the Heart of the Tradition: An Introduction to Christianity” in *Five Voices, Five Faiths* (page 67-92)

**Focus Question:** What are the central components of a Christian worldview? What are the central components of an Islamic worldview? How does ‘God’ function in these worldviews?

**Wednesday: Jesus in Christian and Muslim Traditions**

**QUIZ #3** including terminology: God, Father, kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ, Bible, Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, gospels, Word of God, incarnation, Holy Spirit, creed, sin, eternal life, Easter, Jesus of Nazareth, ascetic, mystic, Jesus Movement, Nicene Creed, Son of God, Wisdom/Sophia of God, resuscitation, Christology


Marcus Borg, “From Galilean Jew to the Face of God” from *Jesus at 2000*, p. 7-17 *(Coursepack)*

James Cone, “Jesus Christ in Black Theology” from *A Black Theology of Liberation*, p. 110-128 *(Coursepack)*

Qur’an -- Selections on Jesus, and on Creation *(Coursepack)*

Mahmoud Ayoub & Daniel Madigan, “Jesus and Muhammad” from *Bearing the Word* (87-99) *(Coursepack)*

**Focus Question:** What are the various dimensions of a Christian view of Jesus? What are the various dimensions of a Muslim view of Jesus? How are Jesus and Muhammad both similar and distinctive?

**Site Visit:** During class time we will go to St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church (www.stpaultheapostle.org) adjacent to Fordham’s Lincoln Center campus

**Thursday: PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS (3-4 pages)**

Focus for Paper #2: What are some of the diverse interpretations of Jesus represented in our readings? *See guidelines for paper #1 (above).*
Tuesday: Introduction to Islam

QUIZ #4 including terminology: Islam, islama, Allah, shirk, Qur’an, Straight Path, Arabic, Day of Judgment, salat, saum, zakat, hajj, ummah, religions of the book, surah, shahada, incarnation, ontological, oneness, unity, transcendence, immanence, ilah, monotheism, hadith, salam, tawhid, Prophet Muhammad


Riffat Hassan, “The Qur’anic Perspective on Religious Pluralism,” from Peace-Building By, Between and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians, 91-101. Coursepack


Wednesday: Islamic Site Visit

The location of our mosque visit will be announced. All visitors to the mosque should wear loose clothing that is respectful of the close proximity of bodies in prayer. Details on clothing requirements will be shared in class.

Depending on the location of our mosque visit, we may also attempt to visit another religious site during our excursion.

Thursday: PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS (3-4 pages)

Focus for Paper #3: How do the living traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam continue to be dynamic when viewed through the lens of gender and/or race?

Consider these readings for your paper and as part of our in-class discussion on this day:

Women in Islam, Inc., “A Call to Action for Masjid Leaders” from “Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working Together to Reclaim our Heritage” p. 5-14 (Coursepack)


National Catholic Reporter, “Pope Francis Confirms Finality of Ban on Ordaining Women” (1-page) Coursepack

Additional terminology: hijab, Islamic feminism, hyphenated identity, masjid, ummah, shari’ah, imam, ordination, quaestio disputata, in persona Christi.
**Tuesday: PAPER #4 DUE IN CLASS (3-4 pages)**

Focus for Paper #4: Drawing on what you have investigated in the readings and site visits for this course, how would you describe the variety of truth claims, symbolic narratives and communal practices that shape religious life in New York City today? How do you envision people of different faith traditions sharing the same space as we live in the 21st century together?

*As in every paper, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate deep engagement with the readings of the course. Be sure to draw on and properly cite the readings of the course in presenting your argument in this essay.*

*This week’s reading will be drawn from publicly available religious discourses including:*

**American Values Religious Voices** is a national nonpartisan campaign that brings together scholars from a diverse range of religious traditions to articulate core American values that have grounded our nation in the past and should guide us forward at this time of transition. For the first 100 days of the new administration, we will send a one-page letter to President Trump, Vice President Pence, Cabinet Secretaries, and Members of the House and the Senate. The letters offer insight and inspiration drawn from the collective wisdom of our faith communities and their sacred texts. [http://www.valuesandvoices.com](http://www.valuesandvoices.com)

**Wednesday: Living Religious Diversity: How/Do We Get Along?**

Discussion of American Values Religious Voices ([http://www.valuesandvoices.com](http://www.valuesandvoices.com))

A practical examination of living religious diversity.

Review for Final Exam

**Thursday: Final Exam held during class time**
Required Materials for the Course:


2. **Coursepack** Purchase from the instructor.

3. **A notebook.** An emphasis will be placed on our presence to one another, to the material at hand and to our hosts at each site visit. Students are required, therefore, to take notes in a notebook as technology such as computers and phones will be put away during the duration of each class session. Our class takes place in a SMART classroom with internet access which can be made available for our use if we need to look something up on the internet during class meeting.

4. **Metrocard** For travel to our site visits.

Course Expectations
- Attendance at every class.
- Members of the class will have read the texts listed for the day prior to our class meeting. Papers will be submitted in hard copy in class on the due date.
- All members of the class will participate in the discussion, listening actively to one another and collaboratively engaging the texts. All members of the class will attend each site visit and actively engage our hosts, listening actively and raising questions as appropriate.
- All work in the course will be the student’s own original work. Any violations of academic integrity will be addressed according to University guidelines (see [http://www.fordham.edu/undergraduateacademicintegrity](http://www.fordham.edu/undergraduateacademicintegrity)).

Course Requirements and Assessment:
- Class participation (10%) including:
  - active participation at site visits
  - in-class consistent engagement with discussion drawing on texts/visits
  - **Students must be present in class/at site visits to earn their participation grade.** Because each class is the equivalent of a full week’s work in a normal semester, any absence will negatively impact final grade. After two absences students will be asked to withdraw from the course.
- Quizzes (20%)
- Four (4) Papers (40%)
- Final Exam (30%)

Grading Scale

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Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (RH: O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at LC: Room 207, x6282).