Faith and Critical Reason: Living Religious Diversity
Asynchronous Lectures 3 hours per week plus Synchronous Meetings: Tue, Wed, Thu 10:00-12:00
Online Summer Session 2020

Professor Jeannine Hill Fletcher
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Office Hours: during synchronous meetings, or by appointment

Faith and Critical Reason introduces students to basic theological issues as well as some of the ways that various religious communities and individuals have confronted the pressing questions of meaning in human life. Our readings will include historical theological sources as well as modern critiques of traditional religious belief and practice. 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.

Upon successfully completing Faith and Critical Reason, students should be able to:
1) Use the foundational vocabulary and conceptual tools of theological study to reflect critically upon human concerns and experiences.
2) Recognize the diversity of Christian experience, belief, and practice in various historical and cultural manifestations, as well as the diversity within and among the religious traditions of the world.
3) Evaluate challenges (philosophical, political, ethical) to religious thought and the role of religion in society.
4) Discuss questions of faith constructively in the context of a religiously plural world.

Course Assessments and Expectations
10% Synchronous Attendance: 10:00-12:00 Tues, Wed, Thu.
10% Asynchronous Entry Tickets: Evidence of having viewed the lecture
60% Interfaith Portfolio
   • 20% Four Analytic Essays (2-3 pages each)
      o Due Fridays (5/29, 6/5, 6/12, 6/19)
   • 20% Religion on Film and in Practice (1-page each)
      o Due Mondays (6/1, 6/8, 6/15)
      o Select one of the films listed (or propose an alternative)
      o View the film making note of specific connections with readings
         ▪ Sites of connection can be complementary, in conflict or otherwise
      o Use a key quote from one of the readings to make a connection with the film
   • 20% Contributions to Interfaith Council
      o One research slide on the rates of religious intolerance
      o One research slide on interfaith activist(s)
      o One research slide on interfaith programming
      o One slide (created collaboratively) proposing interfaith programming
20% Final Exam

Course Format
For each module, students will be required to
• read primary texts and articles (approximately 6 hours) (accessed via Blackboard)
• investigate online religious presence (approximately 3 hours)
• view 3 hours of pre-recorded guided-learning
• attend 6 hours of online class (with discussions and active projects)
• commit 4 hours to writing (engaging the texts of the course).
• and view one film (personal streaming service required).
Module Week 1

Throughout this week, we will explore the Jewish Congregational presence online at Temple Emanu-el, Stephen Wise Free Synagogue and others including the video recording of the Rosh Hashanah services.

Tuesday, May 26: Course Introduction


Yaakov Ariel, “A Faith Worth Preserving: Introduction to Judaism”

Prepare: 1 hour exploration of Stephen Wise Free Synagogue

View Lecture: Theological Thinking and Religious Pluralism

Online Class: 10:00-12:00 Introduction to the Course

Wednesday, May 27: Approaching Sacred Texts

Read (3 hours)

Hebrew Bible, Genesis Chapter 1  Skim the remaining chapters of Genesis
Hebrew Bible, Exodus, Skim Chapters 1-19 to get a sense of the characters of the story

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

View Lecture: Introduction to Torah

Online Class: 10:00-12:00 Historical-Critical Approaches to Sacred Texts

Thursday, May 28: Sacred Storytellers and Archeological History

Read (3 hours)

Allan Boesak, “The riverbank, the seashore and the wilderness: Miriam, liberation and prophetic witness against empire” hervormed teologiese studies (Theological Studies/South Africa) (1-15)


Video Lecture: Exodus, Establishment and the Role of the Prophets

Online Class: 10:00-12:00 Sacred Texts and their Relationship to Archeological History

Paper #1 Due Friday May 29 at noon: TOPIC TBA

Weekend: By Monday, June 1 at noon, please view one of the following films from each tradition and submit a film-report connecting the movie with a direct quote from our readings.

Judaism: Unorthodox (2019), Keeping up with the Steins (2006) or other film as approved
Christianity: Son of Man (2006), Jesus Camp (2006) or other film as approved
Film Report on Judaism and Christianity due Monday at noon.

Throughout this week we will explore the online communities in the Christian tradition including St. Paul’s (at Lincoln Center) and Bronx Christian Fellowship (https://www.facebook.com/bcfchristian/)

**Tuesday, June 2: Prophets in the Jewish Tradition**

Read: Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What Manner of Man is the Prophet?” from *The Prophets* (3-14)

View: Amy-Jill Levine, “Jesus and the Jews” (Taped from Zoom Conference Thursday, May 7, 2020).

**Video Lecture: The Prophetic Tradition in Judaism and Christianity**

**Online Class: Identifying the Characteristics of ‘The Prophet’**

**Wednesday, June 3: A Jewish Prophet in the Roman Empire**


**Video Lecture: Jesus and the Jews in the Roman Empire**

**Online Class: The Reconstruction of the Historical Jesus in the Lens of Empire**

**Thursday, June 4: From Jesus to Christ**

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


Martin Luther King, Jr. “A Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10 (Selection)

Primary Text: Nicene Creed

**Video Lecture: How did we get from a Galilean Jew to the Face of God?**

**Online Class: Christian Confession of Jesus as the Christ**

**Paper #2 Due Friday, June 5 at noon:** Based on the readings, online investigation and films, how would you interpret the Christian creed, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ”? Who was/is ‘Jesus Christ’ as explained by the course readings?

**Weekend:** By Monday, June 8 at noon, please view one of the following films from each tradition and submit a film-report connecting the movie with a direct quote from our readings.


**Film Report on Islamic Traditions Due Monday at noon.**
This week we will explore the online presence of Muslim communities including “How to attend a Muslim Friday Prayer Service” and live streaming from Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam.

**Tuesday, June 9: The Revelation of the Qu’ran**


John Esposito, “Introduction to Islam” from *Handbook for Interreligious Dialogue*


Qur’an, on Creation

Ninety-Nine Names of God (Islamic Tradition)

**Video Lecture:** The Expansion of Christian Empire and the Revelation of the Qur’an

**Online Class:** Comparative Theologies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam

**Wednesday, June 10: Prophethood and the Prophet Muhammad**

Falzur Rahman, “Prophethood and Revelation” from *Major Themes from the Qur’an* (p. 56-73)

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

Qur’an -- Selections on Jesus, and on Creation

**Video Lecture:** Prophet and Prophethood

**Online Class:** The Relationship of Islam and Other Religions

**Thursday, June 11: Islam in America**


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*

Review also Mosque Access Project Community Reports: https://womeninislam.org/mosque-access-project/

**Video Lecture:** Islamic Diversity in America

**Online Class:** The Transformations of Religious Traditions

**Paper #3 Due Friday, June 12 at Noon:** How is the Muslim understanding of Jesus different from the Christian understanding of Jesus? What does this say about each tradition’s conceptualization of ‘God’?

**Weekend:** By Monday, June 15 at noon, please view the following film and submit a film-report connecting the movie with a direct quote from Tuesday’s readings: *Walk with Me* (2017)

**Module Week 4**

Film report on Buddhist tradition at Plum Village (film: *Walk with Me*) due Monday at noon.
DRAFT: For informational purposes only; specific assignments subject to change.

This week we will explore online Buddhist communities with live-streamed meditation services.

**Tuesday, June 16: Seeing Things Clearly: The Story of the Buddha**

“The King of Samadhi’s Sutra” *Translating the Words of The Buddha* (http://84000.co/new-84000-translation-and-reading-room-publication-the-king-of-samadhis-sutra/)

Dhammapada: The Path of Dharma [Teachings of the Buddha]

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

Patricia Phelan, “A Practice of Body, Mind and Consciousness: An Introduction to Buddhism”

**Video Lecture: The Origins of Buddhism**

**Online Class: Meditation as a Buddhist Practice**

**Wednesday, June 17: Meditation as a Buddhist Practice**

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

**Video Lecture: Global Disparity and Modern Day Prophets**

**Online Class: Religious Diversity and Prophetic Resistance**

**Thursday, June 18: Buddhism in America**

Bram Colijn, “Interrituality in Contemporary China as a Field of Tension between Abstention and Polytropy”


**Video Lecture: Comparative Theology and the Meeting of Worldviews**

**Online Class: Diversity and Encounter in America**

**Paper #4 Due Friday June 19 at noon:** Although the concept of ‘God’ separates Buddhism from the theistic traditions of our study, how might the concept of ‘prophet’ offer a connection? Students are required to reference Sulak Sivaraksas’s essays in this essay.

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**Module Week 5**

**Tuesday, June 25: Putting Worldviews into Action: Interfaith Councils**

Read:

Research:
Spend 1-2 hours researching the rates in religious intolerance and hate crimes in the US.
Spend 1-2 hours researching interfaith activists who are putting religious values into action.

**10:00-12:00 Interfaith Council Meeting #1**

In our imagined interfaith council meeting, the council will dedicate our time to understanding religious intolerance in the United States. Council members will elect to prepare two slides, in each of two areas: (1) the rise in religious intolerance or (2) interfaith activists who are putting religious values into action.

At the meeting of the council one hour will be spent building a shared understanding of the rise of religious intolerance based on the information shared by council members. The second hour will be used to identify religious activists we might invite to address the council at a future meeting.

**Wednesday, June 26: Navigating Religious Diversity and Racial Diversity**

Read:

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

Prepare Contribution for Interfaith Council

**9:00-12:00 Interfaith Council #2 Please note the extended meeting time for this session.**

In our second imagined interfaith council meeting, the council will meet in three parts.

9:00-10:00 council will prepare written responses to the issues on this year’s agenda:
- ‘One nation under God’ should we require this line in the pledge?
- Revising the Calendar: Eliminating Christmas Vacation and Accommodating Ramadan
- Building Permits for Houses of Worship

10:15-11:00 Working groups will finalize proposals for pro-active interfaith programming

11:00-12:00 The full council will hear proposals (5 minute presentation each) and vote on programming.

**Thursday, June 27: Final Exam held during class time**

The final exam will provide an opportunity for an essay to be crafted in advance (asynchronous), and will also include a synchronous timed exam starting at 10:00am.

**Course Expectations**
- Attendance at every synchronous online class meeting (10:00am-12:00pm EST Tues. Wed. Thu.)
- Members of the class will have read the texts listed for the day prior to our class meeting.
- All members of the class will participate in the discussion, listening actively to one another and collaboratively engaging the texts.
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).

**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).