

## **REL 132g: Origins of Abrahamic Religions**

**Fall 2016 - Professor Lisa Bitel**

### **COURSE PURPOSE:**

**This class examines the earliest history of three major western faith traditions --Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-- and the relations of their respective practitioners, leaders, and thinkers over time. Through lectures, readings, and discussions we'll ask some very basic questions, such as:**

- - **What is religion?**
  - **How do people create religions? How did these three religions begin?**
  - **How did/do people decide what to believe and how to practice?**
  - **What do these three faith traditions share--doctrines? theologies? rituals? places?**
  - **How did Jews, Christians, and Muslims interact in earlier centuries?**
  - **How does the past of these three religions affect modern religions and believers?**
  - **How does religion influence our society, culture, politics?**

**We start with the historical origins of each of these three faith traditions in the context of ancient societies, politics, and other religions in the same historical moments. We will compare their God(s) and prophets, sacred texts, and important doctrines and practices. We'll examine their laws, art & architecture, and gender ideologies. Finally, we will analyze the changing ways practitioners of these traditions interacted—collaboratively, fruitfully, competitively, and violently--as they created and lived their respective religion.**

**The territory of our study stretches from Africa to France, and from Iberia to Persia, and beyond. Our period of study begins with the ancient origins of these three great desert religions and continues through the initial spread of Islam, concluding on the brink of the catastrophic medieval collisions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the holy wars of the Middle Ages.**

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

- **Religious literacy**
- **Learn about three major Western faith traditions and their histories**
- **Learn to identify and explain religious themes and trends in pre-modern Western history**
- **Probe the connections of religions to society, culture, politics, gender, landscape**
- **Sharpen critical thinking skills**
- **Learn to examine religious materials as insider/outsider**
- **Learn how to evaluate ideas and arguments in textual and visual forms**
- **Enhance ability to argue persuasively both in writing and orally**
- **Develop writing skills**
- **Learn how to use religion to understand society & politics**
- **Learn how to use the past to understand the present**

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **1. PLAGIARISM**

**Plagiarism is, according to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, "the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work." Plagiarism on any exam or paper will result in a failing grade on that assignment and possible disciplinary action.**

**Plagiarism is not always easy to identify. You don't have to lift words verbatim from another text to commit plagiarism. If you use someone's ideas without identifying the source, or if someone else does work that you turn in under your own name, that's plagiarism. If you repeat or rephrase material from Wikipedia or elsewhere on the internet--even anonymous material--you are a plagiarist.**

**If you aren't certain whether it's plagiarism, just ask a professor or TA.**

**Plagiarism is dishonest, dishonorable, and totally uncool.**

**If you commit plagiarism, you insult teachers, classmates, and USC.  
You could be subject to disciplinary action, including a failing grade in this course.**

**You probably already know that you won't learn anything if you don't do the work yourself.**

## **2. DISABILITIES STATEMENT**

**Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me or the TA as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.**

**PLEASE alert your instructors if you require accommodations based on a registered disability.**

## **3. ATTENDANCE IN LECTURES & SECTIONS**

**LATE arrivals and early departures are rude & disruptive, so please DON'T BE LATE.**

**If you are consistently late, absent, leave early WE WILL NOTICE and it will affect your grade**

**4. ELECTRONIC DEVICES ARE NOT ALLOWED IN LECTURE. This includes cellphones, iPads, computers, and anything else that has an ON button.**

---

## **SYLLABUS**

	<b>LECTURES</b>	<b>READINGS</b>	<b>THEMES</b>
		<b>...for each week are to be completed by the</b>	

		<p><b>date under which they are listed.</b></p> <p><b>Students MUST BRING COPIES of readings to section.</b></p>	
<b>Aug 23</b>	<p><b>Intro: WHAT IS WESTERN RELIGION?</b></p> <p><b>Why study these religions together?</b></p> <p><b>Premises of course:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• religion is pertinent to modern life</li> <li>• history of religions help us understand life now</li> <li>• shared historical origins &amp;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peter Berger, "Secularization Falsified," First Things 180 (2008) 23-7 [4 pp.]</li> <li>• Biale, 3-40</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is religion?</li> <li>• How to study religions?</li> <li>• monotheism</li> <li>• scriptural traditions</li> <li>• Abraham</li> <li>• historic interactions</li> <li>• modern engagement with tradition</li> </ul>

	interactions of these three traditions help explain religions now		
<b>Aug 25</b>	<b>Thumbnail of Abrahamic religions today</b>		<b>No sections</b>
<b>Aug 30</b>	<b>WHAT IS RELIGION? How do religions begin?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 59-76</li> <li>• Enuma Elish</li> <li>• Sargon</li> <li>• Creation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God</li> <li>• Scriptures</li> <li>• Place</li> <li>• Historical events</li> <li>• Group identity - ethnicity belief</li> <li>• Revelation</li> <li>• Inside/outsider perspectives</li> <li>• emic/etic</li> <li>• Scripture v. hst sources</li> <li>• Prehistoric "religion"</li> </ul>
<b>Sep 1</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 76-80, 225-31, 317-21, 376-78</li> <li>• Isaac story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abraham</li> <li>• Patriarchs</li> <li>• sacrifice</li> <li>• the land</li> </ul>

	<b>Origins of Judaism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ken sermon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Chosen</li> <li>• monotheism</li> <li>• <i>Religion: create a history, an institution, a canon</i></li> </ul>
<b>Sep 6</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>  <b>Moses &amp; Covenant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 77-98</li> <li>• Excerpt Plaskow, <i>Standing Again</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moses</li> <li>• Torah</li> <li>• Covenant at Sinai Israel/Palestine</li> <li>• law</li> <li>• Davidic kingdom</li> <li>• Babylonian captivity</li> </ul>
<b>Sep 8</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Article on film &amp; relig</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we put religion on visual media?</li> <li>• How did de Mille &amp; audiences see Moses &amp; covenant?</li> <li>• How do we place this interpretation in history of interpretations of Torah?</li> </ul>

<b>Sept 13</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>		
<b>Sept 15</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND &amp; ENDURE?</b>  <b>Re-Making Judaism</b>  <b>Extra credit Film reflections duer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Biale, 202-214, 232-44</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Maccabees</b></li> <li>• <b>Second destruction</b></li> <li>• <b>Rome &amp; religions</b></li> <li>• <b>rabbis</b></li> <li>• <b>oral Torah</b></li> <li>• <b>Talmud</b></li> <li>• <b>people without a land</b></li> <li>• <b>Negotiated religion</b></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i><b>Create a history, an institution, a canon</b></i></li> </ul>
<b>Sep 20</b>  <b>1<sup>st</sup> paper due</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>  <b>Jesus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cunningham 45-58, 101-139, 200-206</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>reform</b></li> <li>• <b>Messiah, moshiach</b></li> <li>• <b>Prophecy</b></li> <li>• <b>Weber, charisma</b></li> <li>• <b>Jesus</b></li> <li>• <b>Christ</b></li> <li>• <b>Logos</b></li> <li>• <b>Salvation</b></li> <li>• <b>Apocalypse</b></li> <li>• <b>teleology</b></li> </ul>

<b>Sep 22</b>	<b>Cpv Jesus on film</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How do filmmakers imagine &amp; present Jesus?</b></li> <li>• <b>Trinity</b></li> <li>• <b>resurrection</b></li> <li>• <b>dual nature</b></li> <li>• <b>race &amp; gender</b></li> </ul>
<b>Sep 27</b>  <b>Extra Credit Film reflections due</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>  <b>Paul</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cunningham, 140-162</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Paul</b></li> <li>• <b>Jewish Christians</b></li> <li>• <b>Epistles</b></li> <li>• <b>vision/prophecy</b></li> <li>• <b>religious authority</b></li> <li>• <b>gender</b></li> <li>• <b>Supercessionism</b></li> </ul>
<b>Sep 29</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND &amp; ENDURE?</b>  <b>Organization of</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cunningham, 163-99, 207-235</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Christianity</b></li> <li>• <b>Priesthood</b></li> <li>• <b>Bishops</b></li> <li>• <b>Empire</b></li> <li>• <b>Martyrs</b></li> <li>• <b>“pagan” philosophy</b></li> </ul>



	<b>a religion</b>	<b>Clip from Agora</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>classical culture</b></li> <li>• <b>Jerome</b></li> <li>• <b>Augustine</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 4</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND &amp; ENDURE?</b>  <b>Christianities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cunningham, 236-245, 261-286</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>the desert</b></li> <li>• <b>monasticism</b></li> <li>• <b>Benedict's Rule</b></li> <li>• <b>Gregory I</b></li> <li>• <b>Barbarian conversion</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 6</b>  <b>Second paper due</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND AND ENDURE</b>  <b>The Eastern Empires</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>East v. West</b></li> <li>• <b>Byzantium</b></li> <li>• <b>Sassanids</b></li> <li>• <b>Zoroastrians</b></li> <li>• <b>Arab peninsula before Islam</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 11</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>  <b>Qur'an</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>McAuliffe 45-49, 86-130</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who wrote Qur'an</b></li> <li>• <b>How to read Qur'an</b></li> <li>• <b>Comparative scriptures</b></li> </ul>

<b>Oct 13</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>		
<b>Oct 18</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS BEGIN?</b>  <b>The Prophet &amp; his followers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>McAuliffe 49-85, 131-87</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Life of Prophet</b></li> <li>• <b>Revelations</b></li> <li>• <b>Early followers</b></li> <li>• <b>Hadith</b></li> <li>• <b>Sunna</b></li> <li>• <b>sira</b></li> <li>• <b>Abbasids</b></li> <li>• <b>Ali</b></li> <li>• <b>shi'a</b></li> <li>• <b>sunni</b></li> <li>• <b>jihad</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND &amp; ENDURE?</b>  <b>Sharia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>McAuliffe 195-56</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mecca</b></li> <li>• <b>Five pillars</b></li> <li>• <b>Religious &amp; legal authority</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 25</b>	<b>HOW DO RELIGIONS EXPAND &amp; ENDURE?</b>  <b>Arab Empire</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Persia</b></li> <li>• <b>Al Andalus</b></li> <li>• <b>Dhimmi</b></li> <li>• <b>Cultural mixing</b></li> <li>• <b>Schools &amp; learning</b></li> </ul>

<b>Oct 27</b>  <b>Third paper due</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McAuliffe, 324-82</li> <li>• Song of Roland – exc.</li> <li>• First Crusade</li> <li>• Speyer records</li> <li>• [Nurnberg art]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christian Europe</li> <li>• Anti-semitism</li> <li>• Amixia</li> <li>• crusades</li> <li>• holy land</li> <li>• pogroms &amp; massacres</li> <li>• blood libel</li> <li>• religious terrorism</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 1</b>	<b>LIVED RELIGION:</b>  <b>Seasons, holidays, rituals- Judaism &amp; Islam</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale 214-21, 342-55, 414-417, 446-55, 600-604</li> <li>• [accounts of holidays]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic religion</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Ritual</li> <li>• Calendar</li> <li>• Holy day – holidays</li> <li>• Sabbath</li> <li>• Time as sacred space</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 3</b>	<b>LIVED RELIGION:</b>  <b>Seasons, holidays, rituals - Christianity</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• liturgical calendar</li> <li>• church &amp; state</li> <li>• teleology</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 8</b>	<b>LIVED RELIGION:</b>  <b>Bodies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 234-237, 397-403,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bodies</li> <li>• Sex &amp; gender</li> <li>• Body-soul duality</li> <li>• Asceticism</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [female clergy]</li> <li>• Cunningham, 287-89</li> <li>• McAuliffe 318-24</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• body as sin</li> <li>• body as female</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 10</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICE</b>  Mysticism, direct union, transcendence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 420-39</li> <li>• Cunningham, 300-305</li> <li>• [Eriugena?]</li> <li>• McAuliffe, 382-453</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• soul</li> <li>• mysticism</li> <li>• Sufis</li> <li>• Kabbalah</li> <li>• Christian mystics</li> <li>• sensory religion</li> <li>• interiority</li> <li>• vision</li> <li>• revelation</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 15</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICE</b>  Death & afterlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale 103-113, 129-33, 312-13</li> <li>• McAuliffe 294-305</li> <li>• [burial liturgies?]</li> <li>• [theo on evil]</li> <li>• [Penitentials?]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• death</li> <li>• afterlife</li> <li>• resurrection</li> <li>• burials &amp; cemeteries</li> <li>• liturgies</li> <li>• Heaven &amp; Hell</li> <li>• Sin</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 17</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICE</b>  Supernatural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biale, 404-13</li> <li>• McAuliffe, 492-98</li> <li>• [Aquinas on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angels</li> <li>• Daemones/demons</li> <li>• Djinn</li> <li>• Golem</li> </ul>

	<b>religion</b>	<b>angels]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [ss' lives]</li> <li>• [golem]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>spells &amp; magic</b></li> <li>• <b>esotericism</b></li> <li>• <b>Saints</b></li> </ul>
<b>Nov 22</b>	<b>NO CLASS/NO SECTIONS</b>		
<b>Nov 24</b>	<b>NO CLASS/NO SECTIONS</b>		
<b>Nov 29</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS PRACTICE</b>  <b>Holy Places</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Egeria</b></li> <li>• <b>[narr of Mecca]</b></li> <li>• <b>[Jerusalem]</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Churches, temples, mosques, shrines</b></li> <li>• <b>sacred spaces</b></li> <li>• <b>shared places</b></li> <li>• <b>Jerusalem</b></li> <li>• <b>Mecca</b></li> <li>• <b>Rome</b></li> <li>• <b>pilgrimage - hajj - aliyah</b></li> </ul>
<b>Dec 1</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS:</b>  <b>How do religions change yet endure?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Biale, 611-35</b></li> <li>• <b>McAuliffe 601-49</b></li> <li>• <b>Cunningham 624-44</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>pluralism &amp; diversity</b></li> <li>• <b>secularization</b></li> <li>• <b>religion &amp; violence</b></li> <li>• <b>religious accommodation</b></li> </ul>



**3 papers (2-3pp. each) = 30% of grade**

Students may choose to write any three of the four assigned papers.

Papers must focus on texts selected from a list provided by professor.

**7 pop quizzes= 35% of grade**

Quizzes will consist of ID questions, chronology, text identifications, maps, key terms.

A quiz may happen at any time in any lecture class.

Quizzes are cumulative.

**Attendance/participation in sections = 10% of grade.**

**Final exam OR research paper = 25% of grade**

The Final Exam will be cumulative and will consist of a combination of ID questions, chronology, text identifications, and essay questions.

A detailed Study Guide will be circulated on the last class meeting.

Those who wish to write a Research Paper in place of the Exam will need to meet with Prof. Bitel in office hours and have a topic approved at least one month before the scheduled date of the Exam; for those who chose this option, the paper is 10-15 pages in length and due on the date of the Exam.

**Extra credit:**

**Film reflections (2-3 pp. each)** you may substitute an EC that earns an B+, A-, or A for any quiz or paper grade

Other EC assignments earning B or below will be taken into consideration when assessing final course grade

**Other ECs TBA**

**Note: Students may complete no more than two ECs.**