

TH 571 Foundational Traditions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Spring 2010

Instructor Information:

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Course Meeting Times: Tuesdays, 6:00 p.m. – 8:50 p.m.

Introduction to Course Content:

What are the functions of religious tales of origin? This introductory-level course will explore the basic content as well as some of the functions of originary tales (foundational traditions) in the formation and incremental development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The course will compare and contrast different foundational traditions within these traditions, as well as between the different religious traditions. In addition to exploring common characteristics (such as founders, sacred sites, 'defining' events, canons, 'heresies,' narratives, and counter-narratives), the course will consider some of the functions of foundational tales – sacred, authoritative narratives of religious and cultural origins -- in the present day.

Pre-requisites: none.

Competencies:

In completing this course a student will

- Be able to define briefly a set of basic terminology (i.e., 10 – 12 terms) required for *beginning* study of each of the three religious traditions
- Be able to describe the core components of the foundational or originary traditions of each of the three traditions, including founding figures, institutions, historical contexts of critical events, and approximate geographical locations
- Demonstrate research skills for working with the three religious traditions at an introductory level
- Be able to articulate an understanding of similarities and differences between and among the three religious traditions in terms of characteristics iterated in the introductory paragraph above (i.e., sacred sites, heresies, etc.)
- Be able to review and evaluate a bibliographic resource informed by critical questions raised through lectures, class discussions, and assigned reading
- Be able to articulate some of the complications of the comparative study of foundational religious traditions
- Be able to articulate some important theological differences between early and subsequent versions of and approaches to foundational religious traditions

- Be able to discuss the relationship between foundational traditions and one's personal theology

Format:

The course consists of two principal segments. The first segment entails lectures and discussions regarding historical foundations and foundational narrative traditions in the three religions under consideration. This segment of the course will be grounded in the textbook, which provides a comparative framework for examining the foundational traditions as well as for gaining a degree of competence in basic terminology. In the second segment of the course, guided by material engaged in the textbook and supplemented further by a few additional essays and journal articles, the class will analyze the elements of foundational religious traditions in the context of historical developments from the middle ages to the present. In this phase of the course, questions will be posed regarding divergent retrospective approaches to religious traditions, including in the present day. At times students will work in groups or pairs; a portion of some class sessions is dedicated to research group work and group presentations.

Expectations of the Student:

- *Attendance, preparation* for, and *participation* in all class sessions, according to VST policies
- As assigned, prepare summaries of weekly readings in advance of class
- Presentation of a written summary of one of the assigned readings, not to exceed 500 words or two typed pages, *due in class on Feb. 9.*
- Small group presentation on a topic selected from a series of options provided by the instructor, or on another topic acceptable to the instructor
- Research paper on chosen topic (length: 3000 – 3750 words / 15 typed pages maximum, double spaced in 12 point font with standard margins)

Differentiating MDiv/MATS Requirements: The “Expectations” noted above apply to MDiv students. MATS students have an additional requirement: their major research paper must be 3750 - 4500 words / 18 – 20 pages.

Required Reading:

Textbook: Peters, F. E. 2003. The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition. Vol. 1: The Peoples of God. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Coursepack (CP). See Timetable for sequence and precise reading assignments. Primary source texts taken from the three canonical traditions will be distributed in class by the instructor.

Timetable: Weekly assigned reading averages well under 70 pages. Course readings are to be read before the class for which they are listed in preparation for lecture and discussion.

| Date | Theme | Readings |
|------------------|--|---|
| 5 January | Introduction: Terms of Reference for Foundational | Gruen, Cultural Fictions (1–14; in CP); Wilson, Urban |

| Date | Theme | Readings |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| | Traditions | Legends (77 – 99; in CP) |
| 12 January | “The Covenant: From Israelite to Jew” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Intro. & Ch. 1 (xix – 46) |
| 19 January | “The Good News of Jesus” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 2 (47 – 82); Arnal, Making and Re-Making (308 – 319; in CP) |
| 26 January | “Muhammad the Prophet of God” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 3 (83 – 119); Humphreys, Qur’anic Myth & Narrative Structure (271 – 290; in CP) |
| 2 February | “A Kingdom of Priests” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 4 (120 – 156) |
| 9 February | “Orthodoxy and Heresy” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 5 (157 – 201); Boyarin, A Tale of Two Synods (20 – 58; in CP) |
| 15 – 26 February | READING WEEK | |
| 2 March | “Community and Authority”; “Church & State: Popes, Patriarchs, and Emperors” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 6 (202 – 239); Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 7 (240 – 267); Yuval, Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages. (88 – 117; in CP) |
| 9 March | “The Church as the State: The Islamic Community” | Peters, <u>The Monotheists</u> . Ch. 8 and End Thoughts (268 – 312) |
| 16 March | Complicating Medieval Boundaries | Dodds, Spaces (83–95; in CP); and Nirenberg, Spanish ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ (149–172; |

| Date | Theme | Readings |
|--|--|---|
| | | CP) |
| 23 March – Last class, as Passover begins on the 29th | Theological Intersections and Divergences | Kuschel, <i>One in Abraham?</i> (183 – 203; in CP); Signer, <i>Abraham</i> (204 – 212; in CP) |

Assignments:

1. **Weekly preparation:** As assigned, prepare a summary of readings for class discussion; you need not turn in these summaries, which should assist you in contributing to class discussions. Weekly readings average well under 70 pages per week.
 - a. Summarize the key points in the assigned reading.
 - b. Evaluate the argument critically in light of other readings, lectures, and class discussion.
 - c. Suggest one or two contemporary applications and implications, bearing in mind problems of reductive comparativism (anachronism, ‘parallelomania’, and so on, which will be discussed in class).
2. **Written summary** of one of the assigned readings, not to exceed 500 words or two typed pages, *due in class on Feb. 9.*
3. **Group presentation:**
 - a. Meet (at least once) with professor to select and focus topic and preparation.
 - b. Prepare and lead presentation or class activity on your selected topic. If you wish to assign any additional reading(s) beyond the already assigned reading(s) designated for the day of your presentation, distribute these for presentation at least one week before class.
 - c. Presentation of a written summary of the presentation not to exceed 500 words or two typed pages to be distributed to all class participants on the day of the presentation; prepare discussion questions; prepare a 30 minute oral presentation followed by a 30 minute discussion or small group activity)
4. **Research paper** on chosen topic.
 - a. The research paper topic need not be the same as the group presentation topic, but you are welcome to integrate these assignments.
 - b. Length: 3000 – 3750 words / 15 typed pages maximum, double spaced in 12 point font with standard margins.
 - c. The paper will show comparative, informed, critical analysis (commensurate with the MDiv level for a core course without prerequisites) of an aspect or aspects of foundational traditions, with reference to a canonical text narrating a component of that tradition, and articulating a contemporary, present-day theological application or implication.
 - d. You are *encouraged, but not required*, to submit a non-binding, tentative outline, bibliography, and thesis statement six weeks prior to the due date. In exchange you will receive general feedback in an appointment with the professor.
 - e. **DUE: 12 Noon on Thursday, April 1.**

Differentiating MDiv/MATS Requirements: The “Expectations” noted above apply to MDiv students. MATS students have an additional requirement: paper must be 4500 – 5750 words / 18 – 23 pages.

Required Textbook:

Peters, F. E. 2003. The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition. Vol. 1: The Peoples of God. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Required Coursepack (see timetable for sequence):

Arnal, William E. 1997. Making and Re-Making the Jesus-Sign: Contemporary Markings on the Body of Christ. In Whose Historical Jesus?, ed. William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins, 308 – 319. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press.

Boyarin, Daniel. 2004. A Tale of Two Synods: Nicaea, Yavneh, and Rabbinic Ecclesiology. In “Turn it Again”: Jewish Medieval Studies and Literary Theory, ed. Sheila Delany, 20 - 58. Asheville, North Carolina: Pegasus Press.

Dodds, Jerrilyn D. 2000. Spaces. In The Literature of Al-Andalus, eds. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Michael Sells, 83 – 95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gruen, Erich S. 1993. Cultural Fictions and Cultural Identity. Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974 -) 123: 1 – 14.

Humphreys, R. Stephen. 1989. Qur’anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography. In Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity, ed. F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, 271 - 290. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press.

Kuschel, Karl-Josef. 2001. One in Abraham? The Significance of Abraham for Jews, Christians, and Muslims Today. In Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism. Ed. Michael A. Signer, 183 - 203. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Nirenberg, David. 2009. Spanish ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ in an Age of Mass Conversion. In Rethinking European Jewish History, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, 149 - 172. Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Littman.

Signer, Michael A. 2001. Abraham: The One and the Many. In Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism, ed. Michael A. Signer, 204 - 212. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Wilson, Walter T. 2001. Urban Legends: Acts 10:1 – 11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives. JBL 120/1: 77 – 99.

Yuval, Israel Jacob. 1999. Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: Shared Myths, Common Language. In Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia, ed. Robert S. Wistrich, 88 - 117. Canada: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Recommended (but not required) for further reading:

Abu-Lughod, Janet L. 1987. The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance. International Journal of Middle East Studies 19:2 (May): 155 – 176.

Armstrong, Karen. 2000. Islam: A Short History. New York: Random House.

Berger, Michael S. 1998. Rabbinic Authority. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bowman, Alan K. and Greg Woolf, eds. 1996. Literacy and Power in the Ancient World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boyarin, Daniel. 2004. The Yavneh Legend of the Stammaim: On the Invention of the Rabbis in the Sixth Century. In Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity, 151 – 201. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Cameron, Averil. 1991. Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clover, F. M. and Humphreys, R. S., eds. 1989. Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Cook, Michael. 2000. The Koran: A very short introduction. Oxford: University Press.

Firestone, Reuven. 1990. Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis. Albany: SUNY Press.

Frank, Daniel and Matt Goldish, eds. 2008. Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics: Jewish Authority, Dissent, and Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Times. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Goldenberg, Robert. 2007. The Origins of Judaism: From Canaan to the Rise of Islam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldhill, Simon, ed. 2001. Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hallaq, Wael B. 2001. Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hendel, Ronald S. 1997. The Poetics of Myth in Genesis. In The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response?, ed. S. Daniel Breslauer, 157 - 170. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Jacobs, Andrew S. 2004. Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Khalidi, Tarif. 2009. Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries. NY: Doubleday.

Lewis, David Levering. 2008. God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570 – 1215. New York: W. W. Norton.

Markus – Takeshita, Kinga Ilona. 2001. From Iranian Myth to Folk Narrative: The Legend of the Dragon-Slayer and the Spinning Maiden in the Persian Book of the Kings. Asian Folklore Studies 60/2: 203-214.

Myers, David N. and David B. Ruderman, eds. 1998. The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Myers, David N. 1995. Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History. New York: Oxford University Press.

Peters, F. E. 2003. The Monotheists: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conflict and Competition. Vol. 1: The Peoples of God. Vol. II: The Words and Will of God. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Peters, Edward, ed. 1980. Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Said, Edward W. 1978. Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books.

Sanders, E. P., A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson, eds. 1981. Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. Vol. 2. Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period. London: SCM Press, Ltd.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. 1992. Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development. Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society.

Stanton, Graham N. and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds. 1998. Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wasserstrom, Steven M. 1995. Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam. Princeton: Princeton University Press.