

RELG 204

Judaism, Christianity and Islam **Abrahamic Religions and their Historical and Cultural Environments**

3.000 Credit hours
Winter 2021

This course explores the three Abrahamic religions and the multiple influences that concurred to shape them. Due to Covid-19, the course will be delivered remotely. For the modalities of asynchronous delivery and posting of the lectures, see below under 'Course Organization.' Weekly synchronous remote Zoom sessions will be held on Mondays 10:35am—11:25am. They will be dedicated to discussing the previous week's topics and readings and introducing those of the new week.

Duration: Jan 07 – Apr 16, 2021

Instructor:

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Keenan Chair in Interfaith Studies; Professor of Global Religious Studies

Teaching Assistant/Course Coordinator:

Jason Blakeburn jason.blakeburn@mcgill.ca (moderation, coursework, and assignments)

Teaching Assistants:

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Please use your McGill student email and identify yourself with your name and student number. Email your TA with questions about content, assignments, and grading. For complex queries, it may be preferable to arrange an online meeting with your TA by appointment.

Whenever problems are not solved, you can email the instructor.

Course Materials

We draw our required readings from a variety of textbooks on the Abrahamic religions. They are accessible as ebooks within McGill's library system and are hyperlinked within this syllabus (under 'Course Schedule').

All other required readings, including the assigned chapters from *The Vision of Islam*, will be posted directly on myCourses (Printed copies of this book should be available at

Paragraphe Bookstore, 2220 McGill College, <https://paragraphbooks.com/>), where they can also be ordered remotely.)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be familiar with the milestones of the history and faith of each of the religions studied, including their mutual interactions. Students will be able to identify some of the most significant events, personalities, and worldviews associated with each tradition. Students will also begin to recognize the cultural and political contexts that enable, inhibit, and problematize religious interactions. The course will facilitate developing a structured vocabulary to explore each tradition's richness, the dialogues between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the impact other religious cultures had on them.

Course Organization and Instructional Methods

Two short weekly lectures will be pre-recorded and posted as podcasts on myCourses on Tuesdays (for the Intro Week on January 7, a Thursday). The two lectures are labeled Part I and II of the weekly program. Each weekly program is listed below under 'Course Schedule' and will require two or three short readings. To facilitate equal access to participants on lower bandwidth, recordings will be provided as MP3 audio files.

Recordings will be supported by weekly PowerPoint slides, which will be numbered and posted on myCourses on Tuesdays together with the lecture recordings. We recommend listening to the podcasts without looking simultaneously at the slides. The slides include skeletal notes covering a few milestones of the lectures. An initial slide provides the weekly program outline; a final slide lists the week's main takeaways.

Viewing the slide content cannot replace listening to the lectures and studying the assigned readings. We recommend comparing your written notes from the lectures to the slides as part of your review and study process. Please note that, based on McGill regulations, both lecture recordings and slides are for exclusive use within this class and should not be shared outside of it.

There will be online live Zoom classes on Mondays during the scheduled class time (10:35-11:25 EST). These classes, moderated by the course coordinator, will consist of a plenary Q&A session with the instructor. The first Monday live class will take place on January 11, when the teaching team will introduce itself. Such Monday classes will review the content of lectures and readings of the prior week and introduce those of the new week. There will be three Zoom live practical sessions, replacing Zoom live classes on those same days, to present the three graded take-home assignments.

We will also organize a moderated online discussion forum on myCourses. Participation in the online forum is optional but recommended. We encourage you to post short replies to

the reading responses and ask questions to your peers. While posts should generally reflect on the course material, we hope that the online forum will be a place of mutual exploration as we journey through the course together.

Assignments and Evaluation

Reading Responses (10% of the final grade): For each third of the course, every student is responsible for completing a minimum of two (2) responses to readings listed under 'Course Schedule.' While reading responses should be optimally prepared during the week to which a given reading belongs, they are all due four days before the take-home graded assignments (see below). Due February 8 by 6pm, the first two reading responses should be chosen from any of the assigned readings from the Intro Week through Week 4. Due March 8 by 6pm, the second two reading responses should be selected from any assigned readings from Week 5 through Week 8. Due April 15 by 6pm, the final two reading responses should be chosen from any of the assigned readings from Week 9 through Week 12. They should be posted on myCourses in the appropriate discussion forum. Each reading response should be 100-150 words in length. Their purpose is to support students' timely engagement with the texts and aid preparation for the graded take-home assignments. The reading responses will be evaluated Pass/Fail based on sufficient quantity (posting the minimum number of times) and quality. I.e., if you pass all of them, you'll get 100 % of this grade's portion.

First take-home graded assignment (25% of the final grade), due on February 12, by 6pm. It will consist of four questions. Each student must answer three questions overall. These answers should be at least 300 words each so that the total length of the submitted work should amount to no less than 900 and no more than 1200 words. The assignment questions will be posted on myCourses no later than February 5. The assignment will cover weeks 1 to 4. The assignment should be submitted via myCourses. Assignments submitted after the due date without a serious, valid, and well-documented justification will receive a 3% reduced grade per day late.

Second take-home graded assignment (25% of the final grade). Same modalities as above. Due on March 12 by 6pm, it should be posted on myCourses no later than March 5. The assignment will cover weeks 5 to 8.

Third ('final') take-home graded assignment (40% of the final grade) due on April 19 (unless otherwise determined by the Examination Office). Same modalities as above, but with the following differences. It will consist of six questions. Each student must answer four questions overall so that the total length of the submitted work should amount to no less than 1200 and no more than 1500 words. The assignment questions will be posted on myCourses no later than April 9. The assignment will cover weeks 9 to 12 but may also include more general and/or comparative questions that require knowledge acquired in the earlier weeks.

The TAs will play an active role in the grading process, but all grades will be confirmed with the instructor. The assessment rubric consists of accuracy of content (40%), style (20%), and originality of interpretation (40%).

Informal questions about grades for take-home graded assignments should be submitted immediately to your TA.

The TAs will share with you a package of norms and acceptable practices for correct quotations and avoiding plagiarism.

Disabilities

If you have a disability, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/> (tel. 514-398-6009). After that, if they recommend doing so, you are welcome to contact the instructor to discuss your situation. Our common goal is to make sure that all your learning needs will be accommodated, while the matter will be treated with the necessary degree of confidentiality.

Some key McGill regulations

1) Languages: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté

2) Academic Integrity Statement [approved by Senate on 29 January 2003]:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/plagiarism> for more information).

3) In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

All other McGill regulations apply: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/exams/regulations>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Intro Week (No Zoom)

The Origins of Religious Inspiration, Myth, and Ritual

- Bellah, *The Kalapalo*, pp. 138-146 [ebook access](#)

Week 1 (Zoom Jan 11)

The First Prophet: Zoroaster

- Muesse, Chapter 1. *The Noble Ones* [ebook access](#)
- Muesse, Chapter 2. *The World of Zoroaster*
- Muesse, Chapter 3. *Zoroaster's Legacy*

Week 2 (Zoom Jan 18)

The Soteriological Turn of the Axial Age

- Muesse, Preface
- Muesse, Introduction. *What Was the Axial Age?*
- Hick, *The Soteriological Character of Post-Axial Religion* [on myCourses]

Week 3 (Zoom Jan 25)

The Greek Factor: Between Religion and Philosophy

- Nissinen, *Why Prophets Are (Not) Shamans?* [on myCourses]
- Bellah, Chapter 7. *The Axial Age II. Ancient Greece*, pp. 347-360
- Hermann, *Pythagoras*, pp. 19-36 [on myCourses]

Week 4 (Zoom Feb 1st)

The Early Settings of Ancient Israel: Peoplehood, Religion, and Divination

- Bellah, Chapter 6. *The Axial Age I. Ancient Israel*, pp. 283-298
- De Tarragon, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Canaan and Ancient Israel* [on myCourses]

Week 5 (Zoom Feb 8 in preparation for the first take-home)

The Axial Dualism of Priests and Prophets

- Bellah, Chapter 6. *The Axial Age I. Ancient Israel*, pp. 298-323
- Eisenstadt, *The Axial Age Breakthrough in Ancient Israel* [on myCourses]
- Knoll, *Axial Transformations within Ancient Israelite Priesthood* pp. 202-215 [on myCourses]

Week 6 (Zoom Feb 15)

Second Temple Judaism and the Messianic Impulse

- Eisenstadt, *The Secondary Breakthrough in Ancient Israelite Civilization—The Second Commonwealth and Christianity*, pp. 227-235 [on myCourses]
- Knoll, *Axial Transformations within Ancient Israelite Priesthood* pp. 215-20
- Goodman, *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* [on myCourses]

Week 7 (Zoom Feb 22)

From the Sectarian Milieu to the Jesus Movement

- Eisenstadt, *The Secondary Breakthrough in Ancient Israelite Civilization—The Second Commonwealth and Christianity*, pp. 235-40
- Woodhead, *Jesus: The God-Man* [on myCourses]
- Solomon, *How Did Christianity and Judaism Split Up?* [on myCourses]

Reading Week: No classes

Week 8 (Zoom March 8 in preparation for the second take-home)

Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and the Rise of Islam

- Cohen, *Constructing Judaism and Christianity* [ebook access](#)
- Stroumsa, *Introduction: From Qumran to Qur'an: The Religious Worlds of Late Antiquity* [on myCourses]
- Woodhead, *Biblical Christianity* [on myCourses]

Week 9 (Zoom March 15)

Islamic Practice

- Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Preface and Introduction [on myCourses]
- Cohen, *Islam: Religion, Politics, and the State* [on myCourses]

Week 10 (Zoom March 22)

Islamic Faith

- Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Chapter 4 [on myCourses]

Week 11 (Zoom March 29)

Islamic Spirituality

- Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Chapters 7 and 8 [on myCourses]
- Khan, *Ihsan: Classical and Contemporary Understanding* [on myCourses]

Week 12 (Zoom April 7, Wednesday, since Monday is a holiday)

The Abrahamic Conundrum: Comparisons and Interactions

- Stroumsa, *The History of Religions as a Subversive Discipline: Comparing Judaism, Christianity and Islam* [on myCourses]
- Pormann *The Abrahamic Religions and the Classical Tradition* [on myCourses]

Final Week (Zoom April 12, in preparation for the 'final' take-home)