Course Title: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Comparative Study  
Course Code: REL 86  
Instructor: Patricia Nabti  
Day/Time: Thursdays 7:00-8:50 pm  
Dates: 5 weeks, June 25-July 23

Course Summary:  
The course will explore the origins and historical connections of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, comparing their concepts of God, their sacred texts, and their basic beliefs. Beyond this, it will focus on social and behavioral aspects of these religions—the sense of community and hierarchy, the unity and diversity within each religion, examples of extremism and martyrdom, the experiences of their adherents while living as majorities and minorities in modern times, and their perceptions of the other.  

It will cover their main points of commonality and divergence, and consider how both the reality of those points and people’s perceptions of them have affected their interactions over time. A class Venn diagram will be used to illustrate points of commonality and divergence.

This is an interactive course in which all students, regardless of which of the three grading options they choose, will be expected to do the reading assignments, give at least one 5-minute presentation, and participate in discussions.

*Please see course page in Catalog for full description and additional details.

Grade Options and Requirements:  
• No Grade Requested (NGR)  
  This is the default option. Students will be expected and encouraged to attend, do the reading assignments, give at least 1 five minute presentation, and participate in discussions, though there will be no evaluation or consequences for those who do not fulfill that expectation.
• Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)  
  § Attendance (at least 3 sessions)  
  § 1 five minute class presentation  
  § 2-page paper on the presentation topic  
• Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)  
  § Attendance (at least 3 sessions) 25%  
  § 2 five minute class presentations 30%  
  § 5-page research paper on one of the topics 45%

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.
**Tentative Weekly Outline:**

**First Assignment (for the first class session)**

- Read Peters: Foreword, Preface, Chapters 1-2
- Create a list of your personal exposure to each of the three religions (this might include personal contact, travel, attendance at religious events, readings, movies, courses taken, etc.)
- Write 25 words or less on why you are taking this course.
- Spend 10 minutes skimming through each of the three scriptures that you are not familiar with (Torah/Old Testament, New Testament, Qur’an - all are available online as free e-books)

**Week 1: June 25**

- Introductions
- Personal exposure to each of the three religions
- Problems of commonality, diversity, generality, and representation
- Theological versus anthropological perspectives
- Terms, translation, and transliteration
- The course Venn diagram
- Selection of topics (see list of Topics below and select one or two for a five minute class presentation)
- Discussion of the reading assignment: Peters: Foreword, Preface, Chapters 1-2; skimming the 3 scriptures
  - Esposito’s comments
  - Scriptures
  - God’s promise
  - Contested inheritance

**Week 2: July 2**

- Reading assignment for discussion during this session: Peters: Chapters 3-5
  - Community
  - Hierarchy
  - Law
  - Scripture and tradition
- Student presentations

**Week 3: July 9**

- Reading assignment for discussion during this session: Peters: Chapters 6-8, Epilogue
  - Worship of God
  - Renunciation and Aspiration
  - Thinking and Talking About God
  - Sacred History
- Student presentations

**Week 4: July 16**

- Readings: Online readings to be assigned a week ahead, based on topics selected
- Student presentations

**Week 5: July 23**

- Readings: Online readings to be assigned a week ahead, based on topics selected
- Student presentations
- Commensality experience

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Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
Topics:
More than sixty topics related to an anthropological approach to comparative religion are presented below. Topics marked with an * will be covered in the primary text, by the instructor, and in general class discussion. Other topics will also be discussed, but at a less-detailed level. During the first class session, all students will be expected to select one of the topics that are not marked with an * for a five minute presentation in Sessions 2-5, comparing that topic in the three religions.

Students seeking credit (pass/fail) will need to select 1 topic for a presentation and also write a 2-page paper on it. Students seeking credit (letter grade) will need to select 2 topics to present, and a write a 5-page paper on one of them. Students are encouraged to support their presentations with PowerPoint slides or handouts. They will also need to provide some identification of where that topic fits on the class Venn diagram - this will be clarified during the first session.

Each student will also identify 5 topics (not marked with an * or selected for student presentations) that they wish the instructor to present. Every effort will be made to cover as many of those topics as possible, based on student priorities.

1* God, Allah, Yahweh, Trinity
2 Angels, jinn, devils, demons
3 Miracles
4 Astrology, prophecy
5 Saints, holy men
6 Divine presence, divine absence
7 Salvation, heaven, hell, purgatory
8 Eschatology (end of world concepts)
9* Sacred texts (history, content, authors, language, translation, context, length)
10* Ethics, morality
11* Pillars of faith (essential beliefs, rituals, behaviors in a day, week, month, lifetime)
12* Norms vs requirements
13 Petitions, prayers, religious oaths
14* Fundamentalism, extremism, literalism, cultural adaptation, interpretation
14 Religious orders (monks, nuns, Sufis, etc.)
15 Mysticism, ecstasy, and alternate reality
16 Exclusion - Jew/Gentile - Muslim/People of the Book/Kafir
17* Religion versus ethnicity
18 Sacred history
19* Sacred geography (holy places, shrines, sanctified space, pilgrimage, inclusion/exclusion of entry, sanctification, desecration)
20 “Promised land” “Chosen people”
21 Sacred historical persons (prophets, saints, sayyids)
22* Sacred genealogies
23 Religious hierarchy/stratification (pope, bishops, priests, ayatollah, imam, ulama, laypeople)
24 Freedom and slavery
25 Internal diversity (sects, denominations, movements, cults)
26 Sacred symbols (star, cross, crescent)
27* Sacred artifacts (icons, prayer rugs, menorahs, prayer beads, prayer stones, necklaces, rings)
28 Sacred art
29 Sacred music
30 Sacred architecture/interior design
31 Religious dress both male/female (believers/clergy/religious leaders)
32 Proselytization - responsibility to share the good news
33 TV, Internet, social media evangelism
34 Altruism, benevolence, philanthropy - to those within one’s group, others

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Political identity with religion (state religion/inclusion/exclusion)</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Theocracy, separation of religion and politics/governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Religion of empires (imperialism, conquest, white man’s burden)</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Religious syncretism (The fusion/synthesis of diverse religious beliefs and practices)</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Role as majority toward minorities/role as minority</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Religious pluralism, freedom, tolerance, understanding, persecution, defamation,</td>
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<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Apostasy, blasphemy, heresy, atheism, secularism, conversion, denominational mobility</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Attitudes toward violence: religious wars, terrorism, genocide, ethnic cleansing, pacifism, conscientious objection, martyrdom</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>Religious accommodation in the workplace, in public space (hospital, airport, university)</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>“Truth” vs freedom of inquiry (religion vs. science) - evolution vs creationism</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>Censorship (list of books one allowed to read)</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>Sacred time - days, hours, holidays, calendar (Gregorian, Jewish, Islamic)</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>Rites of passage (birth, coming of age, marriage, death)</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>Mortality, aging, afterlife, spiritual bonds to the dead</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>Suicide, euthanasia, doctor assisted suicide</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Personal status laws (marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, custody of children)</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>Dietary restrictions (kosher/halal/kebyr practices)</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>Commensality, breaking bread together (bread and salt)</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>Fluidity of changes in religious affiliation - why people change (faith, economic, intermarriage, scandal and escape, personal status laws like inheritance)</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>Gender (religious roles, family roles, expectations, restrictions)</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>Ritual purity and pollution</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>Sexuality (Incest restrictions/consanguinity, monogamy, polygamy, serial polygamy, LGBT, frequency and satisfaction)</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>Endogamy vs exogamy (marriage within/outside the group)</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Sexually related body changes (circumcision, female circumcision/genital mutilation)</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Bioethics, conceptions of when life begins, stem cell research</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Birth control, family planning, abortion, surrogate kinship</td>
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<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Fertility rates/patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Religion and environmentalism, humans as custodians of the earth, natural hazards and disasters, greening of religion</td>
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