Course Title: A Comparative Study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Legacy of Abraham
Course Code: REL 86
Instructor: Dr. Patricia Nabti

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.

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

Grade Options and Requirements:
- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided. Students choosing this option will be encouraged to attend all sessions, do the reading assignments, and participate in discussions. Depending on the size of the class, they may have the opportunity to give a five minute presentation that is required for the other two options.

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
  - Attendance (at least 7 sessions)
  - Five minute class presentation (Submit written notes or PP of the presentation)

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  - Attendance (at least 8 sessions)
  - Five minute class presentation (Submit written notes or PP of the presentation)
  - 5-page research paper comparing the three religions on a selected topic as it fits with the broader issues presented in the course (it can be the topic of the class presentation)

*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:

Note: Students are requested to attend at least one worship service or visit a place of worship for a faith group one is an outsider to before Session 4, preferably both (or all three if one is not connected with any of the three faith groups). In Session 1 we will discuss possible group visits.

Primary Textbook: Why Can't They Get Along?: A conversation between a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian by Dawoud El-Alami, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, and George D. Chryssides (June 1, 2014)

**Week 1**
Course Introduction:
Problems of commonality, diversity, generality, and representation
Theological versus anthropological perspectives
Terms, translation, and transliteration
The course Venn diagram
Discuss possible group visits to worship services/places of worship
Selection of presentation topics

**Week 2**
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can’t They Get Along?* Pp 6-41
- Foreword
- Preface
- A Word from the Authors
Part I: Teachings:
  - Chapter 1: Predicament and Hope
  - Chapter 2: God

**Week 3**
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can’t They Get Along?* Pp 42-67
Part I: Teachings:
  - Chapter 3: Jesus
  - Chapter 4: Sacred Texts
Read selections on Adam and Eve and on Abraham in the Talmud, the Christian Old Testament, and the Qur’an (editions of your own choice), for us to compare in class. Specific passages will be
Week 4
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 70-94
Part II: Religious Practice
  • Chapter 5: Initiation
  • Chapter 6: Worship

Students are requested to attend at least one worship service or visit a place of worship for a faith group one is an outsider to before this session – see note at top of Weekly Outline.

Student presentations

Week 5
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 95-133
Part II: Religious Practice
  • Chapter 7: Holy Days
  • Chapter 8: Evangelism
Part III: Ethics and Lifestyle
  • Chapter 9: Declaring Identities

Week 6
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 134-171
Part III: Ethics and Lifestyle
  • Chapter 10: Diet
  • Chapter 11: Sex and Gender
  • Chapter 12: Wealth

Week 7
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 174-210
Part IV: Societal Issues
  • Chapter 13: Law Codes
  • Chapter 14: Social Justice
  • Chapter 15: Blasphemy

Week 8
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 211-223
Supplementary readings to be assigned
Part IV: Societal Issues
- Chapter 16: The Middle East Problem

**Week 9**
Overflow from earlier weeks OR additional topic chosen by the students
Readings to be assigned

**Week 10**
Reading assignment for discussion during this session:
*Why Can't They Get Along?* Pp 224-229
Part IV: Societal Issues
- Chapter 17: Conclusions
Supplementary readings to be assigned
Final Q&A/Discussion
Commensality experience

**Topics for Class Presentations:**
Forty-four topics related to an anthropological approach to comparative religion are presented below. Most likely we will not have presentations on all of them. During the first class session, students seeking credit (Credit/No Credit or a Letter Grade) need to select one of these topics for a five-minute presentation in Sessions 2-10. Non-credit students may also choose to do a presentation to the extent that time allows. In general, we should not have more than 4 presentations per class session. This is a research assignment – ideally viewing at least five different sources (books, articles, or websites). The presentation should cover:
- How is this topic treated in each of the three religions?
- Where do beliefs and practices related to the topic fit in the course Venn diagram?
- Is there greater diversity on this topic within each of these religions or between them?
Students are need to support their presentations with PowerPoint slides and/or notes that can be distributed in class.

**Week 2**
1. Angels, jinn, devils, demons
2. Eschatology (end of world concepts)
3. Prophecy
4. Salvation, heaven, hell, purgatory

**Week 3**
5. “Truth” vs freedom of inquiry (religion vs. science) – evolution vs creationism

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
6 Censorship (list of books one is allowed to read)
7 Sacred historical persons (prophets, saints, sayyids)
8 Sacred symbols (star, cross, crescent)

**Week 4**
9 Mortality, aging, afterlife, spiritual bonds to the dead
10 Religious hierarchy/stratification (pope, bishops, priests, ayatollah, imam, ulama, laypeople)
11 Petitions, prayers, religious oaths
12 Rites of passage (birth, coming of age, marriage, death)

**Week 5**
13 Endogamy vs exogamy (marriage within/outside the group)
14 Internal diversity (sects, denominations, movements, cults)
15 Mysticism, ecstasy, and alternate reality
16 Religious orders (monks, nuns, Sufis, etc.)
17 Sacred time – days, hours, holidays, calendar (Gregorian, Jewish, Islamic)
18 TV, Internet, social media evangelism
19 Religious dress both male/female (believers/clergy/religious leaders)

**Week 6**
20 Gender related body changes (circumcision, female circumcision/genital mutilation)
21 Birth control, family planning, abortion, surrogate kinship
22 Ritual purity and pollution
23 Sexuality (Incest restrictions/consanguinity, monogamy, polygamy, serial polygamy, LGBT, frequency and satisfaction)
24 Gender (religious roles, family roles, expectations, restrictions)
25 Dietary restrictions (kosher/halal/fastig practices)
26 Personal status laws (marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, custody of children)

**Week 7**
27 Apostasy, blasphemy, heresy
28 Suicide, euthanasia, doctor assisted suicide
29 Bioethics, conceptions of when life begins, stem cell research
30 Slavery

**Week 8**
31 Exclusion – Jew/Gentile – Muslim/People of the Book/Kafir
32 Fertility rates/patterns
33 Theocracy, separation of religion and politics/governance
34 Religion of empires (imperialism, conquest, white man’s burden)
**Week 9**

35  Commensality, breaking bread together (bread and salt)
36  Religious accommodation in the workplace, in public space (hospital, airport, university)
37  Religion and environmentalism, humans as custodians of the earth, natural hazards and disasters
38  Sacred geography (holy places, shrines, pilgrimage, inclusion/exclusion of entry, sanctification, desecration)
39  Sacred architecture/interior design

**Week 10**

40  Altruism, benevolence, philanthropy – to those within one’s group, others
41  Sacred artifacts (icons, prayer rugs, menorahs, prayer beads, prayer stones, necklaces, rings)
42  Sacred art
43  Sacred music
44  Sacred dance – rhythmic body movement