

**Religious Studies/ILS 234:  
Genres of Western Religious Writing**

*Instructor:*

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*Course Information:*

TR 4:00-5:15pm  
Social Sciences Building 6113  
Office Hours: Th 1:30-3:30

**Course Description:**

This course is designed as an introduction to some major texts and genres in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In order to facilitate our study of the interpretive exchanges that have defined the distance and proximity between these three traditions, we will look at how each has understood and made use of the figure of Abraham. Beginning with the Hebrew Bible, our readings will range across a variety of times, places, and genres, following Abraham as he appears in the New Testament, the Qur'an, medieval Jewish exegesis, European philosophy, modern Arabic literature, and more. By the end of the course, students will have gained a more robust sense of the complicated history of textual borrowings and dynamics that have occurred and continue to occur between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

In addition, this course also satisfies Part B of the General Education Communication Requirement. As such, the class will be writing intensive and will focus heavily on critical reading skills, logical thinking, and the use of evidence. Other objectives include the use of appropriate style and disciplinary conventions in writing as well as the productive use of core library resources. Specific requirements are listed below.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Close reading, interpretation, and written and oral analysis
- Better understanding of the textual exchanges between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Tracing the changing figurations of Abraham across three traditions
- Accessing, appraising, and utilizing a variety of resources and methods for research across disciplinary lines
- Global and local religious literacy; identifying, evaluating, and interpreting the interrelationships and impact of religious worldviews and communities in Wisconsin, the United States, and globally

**Course Requirements:**

During the semester, students will be responsible for completing all assignments and requirements. First, students are expected to fully participate in each class. This means a thorough reading of all required material as well as active engagement in class discussion. Second, over the course of the semester, students will complete a series of assignments: 2 short oral presentations (5 minutes each); 2 short response papers based on the oral presentation; and 2 papers of 4-5 pages. Due dates for the papers (including deadlines for theses, outlines, rough drafts, and other preparatory writing) are listed in the course schedule. Oral assignments and response papers will be arranged during the first week of class.

## Course Policies:

In order to receive full credit on paper submissions, students must follow these formatting guidelines: **Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins**. Papers should also include the **student's name, instructor's name, course title, and date** at the top-left of the page. All papers should also have a **title**.

*Extensions:* Extensions will be considered up to forty-eight hours before the deadline. If no extension is requested or granted, a third of a grade will be deducted for each day late.

*Absences:* More than three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the class.

*Computers:* This class will be a **computer-free** zone. Please bring all readings in **print** form. If you feel that you will require access to a computer in class, please come meet with me.

*Collaboration and Academic Integrity:* The course follows the university's policies on plagiarism and collaboration. Specifically, any material submitted to meet course requirements—homework assignments, papers, projects, posted comments, examinations—is expected to be a student's own work. I ask all students to bookmark and consult regularly the university guidelines on academic integrity, which can be found at this address: <https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/students/>. You are urged to take great care in distinguishing your own ideas and thoughts from information and analysis derived from printed and electronic sources, and you are responsible for knowing and following the university's policy on proper use of sources. These policies are stated clearly on university's website.

*Disabilities Statement:* The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. For more information, see <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>.

## Grading:

Scale:

A=100-94; AB=93-88; B=87-83; BC=82-77; C=76-70; D=69-60; F=60-0

Distribution:

Participation and Attendance: 15%

First Oral Presentation (w/response paper): 15%

Second Oral Presentation (w/response paper): 15%

First Paper (rough draft + final version): 25%

Second Paper (rough draft + final version): 30%

## Required Texts:

The following books are either **on reserve** at the College Library or **available for purchase**:

**JSB:** Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

**KI:** A. J. Arberry, ed., *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

**SQ:** Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

*All remaining texts will be distributed online through Learn@UW.*

## Course Readings and Schedule:

### Week I: Introduction/Torah

*Tuesday, January 17:* In-class readings of Genesis (**NRSV**: New Revised Standard Version/JSB); images from Caravaggio, Rembrandt and others

*Thursday, January 19:* Genesis, chs. 11-15 (NRSV/JSB)

### Week II: Torah (II)

*Tuesday, January 24:* Genesis, chs. 16-19 (NRSV/JSB)

*Thursday, January 26:* Genesis, chs. 20-25; Leviticus 1 (NRSV/JSB)

### Week III: Book of Jubilees (Pseudepigrapha)

*Tuesday, January 31:* Book of Jubilees, chs. 11-15

*Thursday, February 2:* Book of Jubilees, chs. 16-23

### Week IV: New Testament (Epistles)

*Tuesday, February 7:* Paul, Letter to the Romans, chs. 1-4 (NRSV)

*Thursday, February 9:* Paul, Letter to the Romans, chs. 8-11; Galatians, ch. 1-3 (NRSV).

### First Paper Topics Distributed

### Week V: New Testament (Gospel)

*Tuesday, February 14:* Gospel of Matthew, chs. 1-3; Gospel of Luke, chs. 1-3; 16 (NRSV)

### Due Date: Thesis Statement and Outline (in-class peer review)

*Thursday, February 16:* Gospel of John, chs. 1-8 (NRSV)

### Week VI: Philosophical Allegory

*Tuesday, February 21:* Philo, *On Abraham*, pts. 1-32

### Due Date: First Paper (Draft)

*Thursday, February 23:* Philo, *On Abraham*, pts. 33-46

**Week VII: Early Christian Writing (Polemic)**

*Tuesday, February 28:* St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Bk.1, Preface; Bk. 16, chs. 1-11

*Thursday, March 2:* St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Bk. 16, chs. 12-32

**Week VIII: Midrash**

*Tuesday, March 7:* Genesis Rabbah, ch. 38

*Thursday, March 9:* Genesis Rabbah, ch. 55-56

**Due Date: First Paper (Final)**

**Week IX: Qur'an**

*Tuesday, March 14:* Surah 1; 2:1-121 (KI/SQ)

*Thursday, March 16:* Surah 2:122-242 (KI/SQ)

**Week X: Qur'an (II)**

*Tuesday, March 28:* Surah 37:1-74 (KI/SQ)

*Thursday, March 30:* Surah 37:75-182 (KI/SQ)

**Week XI: Medieval Islamic Exegesis (Chronicles)**

*Tuesday, April 4:* Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *History of Prophets and Kings*, selections

**Second Paper Topics Distributed**

*Thursday, April 6:* Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *History of Prophets and Kings*, selections

**Week XII: Medieval Jewish Commentary**

*Tuesday, April 11:* Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides), selections from commentary on Genesis

*Thursday, April 13:* Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides), selections from commentary on Genesis

**Due Date: Thesis, Outline, and Three Sources (in-class peer review)**

**Week XIII: Philosophy**

*Tuesday, April 18:* Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 1-53

*Thursday, April 20:* Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 54-124

**Due Date: Second Paper (Draft)**

**Week XIV: Parable/Poetry**

*Tuesday, April 25:* Franz Kafka, "Abraham"

*Thursday, April 27:* Mahmoud Darwish, *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*, selections

**Week XV: The Novel**

*Tuesday, May 2:* Assia Djebar, *Far From Medina*, selections

*Thursday, May 4:* Assia Djebar, *Far From Medina*, selections

**Due Date: Second Paper (Final)**