

# RLGN 208: Introduction to Western Religions

*Peter Haas (MWF 10:30-11:20)*

## DESCRIPTION

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This is a basic introduction to the three great monotheistic religions of the Western World: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The course presupposes no previous knowledge on your part of these religions, nor does it presuppose that you have any previous background in the academic study of religion.

The course will be conducted as a comparative study of the three Western religions, in which we will discuss and compare the origins, history, theology and modernization process undergone by each. The course will also include a look at the current conflicts within and among these traditions in Europe and the Middle East. Some class time will be devoted to reading original texts of each religion so that you can see how each tradition describes itself in its own words. Reading assignments for each day are meant to give you the background you will need to understand the texts and class discussion. It is important that you keep up with the readings because class discussion will assume you know the background material.

## GRADING

The course grade will be based on three papers and a final paper or project.

A. PAPERS: There will be three 5-page papers, one dealing with each major section of the course (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Questions for the papers will be drawn primarily from the readings and will be handed out approximately one week before the paper is due.

B. FINAL PAPER: The final paper (8-10 pages) will be a comparison of some theme as it applies to all three religions.

### C. DUE DATES AND WEIGHTS

Sept 29	Judaism	25%
Oct. 29	Christianity	25%
Dec. 1	Islam	25%
Dec. 9	Final paper	25%

# Religious Studies 208: Introduction to Western Religions

## **1. (Aug 25-29) -- INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE: THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND**

Introducing the Bible and the Religious Traditions of the West  
Stories of The Founder : Abraham  
Stories of the Revelation: Moses

## **2. (Sept 1-4) -- JUDAISM I: BEGINNINGS**

Interpreting Judaism Through History – Breslauer, Chapter One  
Judaism in the Roman World -- Breslauer, Chapter Two

## **3. (Sept 8-12) -- JUDAISM II: CLASSICAL RABBINIC JUDAISM**

Rabbinic Judaism – Breslauer, Chapter Three  
Medieval Judaism – Breslauer, Chapter Four

## **4. (Sept 15-19) -- JUDAISM III: MODERN FORMS OF JUDAISM**

Modern Judaisms – Breslauer, Chapter Five

## **5. (Sept 22-25) -- JUDAISM IV: JUDAISMS FACE THE FUTURE**

Postmodernity and its Possibilities – Breslauer, Chapter Six

## **6. (Sept 29 – Oct 3) -- CHRISTIANITY I: ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT [First Paper Due: Sept 29]**

Jesus – Weaver/Bakke, I: Chapter Two  
The Early Church -- Weaver/Brakke, I: Chapter Three

## **7. (Oct 6-8) -- CHRISTIANITY II: CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND**

**THEOLOGY [No Class Oct. 10]**

Western Christianity – Weaver/Brakke, 2: Chapter Four  
The Protestant Reformation – Weaver/Brakke, 2: Chapter Five  
Protestant Christianities – Weaver/Brakke, 2: Chapter Six

**8. (Oct 13-17) -- CHRISTIANITY III: MODERN FORMS OF CHRISTIANITIES**

Christianity in the Modern World – Weaver/Brakke, 3: Chapter Seven  
American Christianity – Weaver/Brakke, 3: Chapter Eight  
Christianity in the Modern World – Weaver/Brakke, 3: Chapter Nine

**9. (Oct 22-24) – CHRISTIANITY IV: CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN LIVES  
[Fall Break Oct 20]**

Christianity in the Modern World – Weaver/Brakke, 4: Chapter Ten  
Christianity and Modern Culture – Weaver Brakke 4: Chapter Eleven

**10. (Oct 29-31) -- ISLAM I: MOHAMMAD AND EARLY ISLAM [No Class  
Oct. 27] [Second Paper Due: Oct. 29]**

Muhammad and the Beginnings of Islam – Hewer, Chapter Two  
The Quran – Hewer, Chapter Three

**11. (Nov 3-7) -- ISLAM II: CLASSICAL ISLAMIC HISTORY, BELIEFS AND  
PRACTICES**

Islamic History – Hewer, Chapter Four  
Central Beliefs of Classical Islam – Hewer, Chapter Five

**12. (Nov 10-14) -- ISLAM III: CLASSICAL ISLAMIC HISTORY< BELIEFS AND  
PRACTICES**

Principles of Islam -- Hewer, Chapter Six  
Living a Muslim Life -- Hewery, Chapter Seven

**13. (Nov 17-21) -- ISLAM IV: CLASSICAL ISLAMIC LIFE AND LAW**

Islamic Law – Hewer, Chapter Eight  
Islam, Other Faiths and the West -- Hewer, Chapter Nine

**14. (Nov 24-26) -- ISLAM V: THE STRUGGLES WITHIN ISLAM TODAY**  
[Thanksgiving Break Nov 28]

Islam in the West – Hower, Chapter Ten  
Black Muslims -- reading to be assigned

**15. (Dec. 1-5) -- OTHER MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN RELIGION [Third Paper**  
Due: Dec. 1]

Mormonism; ASSIGNMENT --History of the Church of Later Day Saints  
Neo-Paganism/Wicca; ASSIGNMENT -- What is Wicca?

**December 8 -- FINAL PAPER DUE by 3:00 pm**

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