

THEO 107: Introduction to Religious Studies
Course Syllabus

Fall 2024

Tuesdays & Thursdays | 9:00 am – 10:15 am

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Office Hours: Tues./Thur., 10:30 am – 12:15 pm and by appointment

Course Description

Delve into the dynamic sphere of religious studies, examining humanity's search for meaning in a mosaic of religious rituals and realizations. Explore the foundations of religion amidst the backdrop of modernity considering the psychological, social, and existential critiques of religion. Then examine how religion provides a vital means to elevate the human condition offering a transcendent anthropological and social vision. Experience the meditative rituals of Buddhism while also engaging the beliefs and practices of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The course culminates in a reflection on religion's role in personal liberation and its relevance in a technocratic, intuitional age. Engage with seminal texts, partake in critical discussions, and gain a nuanced understanding of religion's historical impact and its place in the world of tomorrow. Embark on a journey into the core of human belief and an exploration of humanity's God.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students should be able to:

- Examine the foundations of religion amidst contemporary psychological, sociological, and existential challenges.
- Identify and apply humanity's search for meaning within religious frameworks.
- Contextualize the historical impact of religion and its engagement with social justice.
- Describe and analyze the beliefs, rituals, and practices of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.
- Respectfully participate in interreligious dialogues and appreciate diverse religious perspectives.
- Develop cultural competence and empathy, understanding diverse religious worldviews in their complexity.
- Improve their oral and written communication skills, in articulating religious concepts and their relevance today.
- Contribute constructively to group discussions and thoughtfully engage with alternative viewpoints.

Required Texts and Supplementary Reading

All required readings for this course are accessible through Sakai, the designated learning management system of Loyola University Chicago. Supplementary texts for further exploration include C. Partridge, *Introduction to World Religions*; Becker & Morali, *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*; G. D'Costa, *The Catholic Church and the World Religions*.

Attendance Policy

In alignment with the John Felice Rome Center's (JFRC) commitment to academic excellence, this course upholds a strict attendance policy. Students are expected to be punctual, prepared, and actively engaged in discussions. This course convenes twice weekly, therefore, *a student cannot incur more than two unexcused absences*. Additional absences beyond the allowance specified will result in a 1% deduction from the final course grade for each absence per JFRC policy. Absences will be excused only in the event of sickness or an emergency and upon written communication with the professor. Students should consult the on-campus medical staff if they are sick.

Assessment Components

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| • Sakai Discussions | 10% |
| • Inside Seminar: Discussion + Talking Points | 40% |
| • Outside Seminar: Discussion + Cornell Notes | 10% |
| • Midterm Exam | 20% |
| • Final Exam | 20% |

Grading Scale	89-87: B+	79-77: C+	69-67: D+
100-94: A	86-84: B	76-74: C	66-60: D
93-90: A-	83-80: B-	73-70: C-	59 or lower: F

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Upholding these values means students must not plagiarize, self-plagiarize, fabricate data, collude, cheat, use unauthorized materials during examinations, or facilitate academic misconduct in any way. Students are required to familiarize themselves with and adhere to the standards of “Academic Integrity” detailed in the [Undergraduate Academic Standards and Regulations](#) of the *Academic Catalog*. Embracing these values is not just a matter of personal integrity, it is a foundation for a lifetime of leadership and service to others, preparing our students to impact the world in meaningful ways.

Sakai Discussions

One component of the course requires each student to submit two posts under the Discussions tab of the course’s Sakai webpage. The first post consists of a thoughtful and creative question that includes a direct citation from the assigned reading and fosters analytical dialogue. The second post is an academic response to a fellow student’s post which ought to be informed by the text and add depth to the discussion. Posts must be submitted within the time designated, as late submissions will be subject to a grade reduction. Further indications can be found on Sakai under the Assignments tab. This component provides students with the opportunity to employ digital communication to articulate unique perspectives and demonstrate their creativity in a professional and respectful manner.

Inside/Outside Seminars (I/OS)

An important component of this course features Inside/Outside Seminars, focused on text-based discussions facilitated by open-ended questions. Active participation, critical thinking, and clear expression of insights are expected. The collaborative nature of these discussions is non-competitive and aimed at reaching a deeper, collective understanding.

The structure of our seminars involves an “Inside/Outside” approach. Here, a small group of 5 to 7 students forms the inner circle and engages in an academic conversation for a set duration, of at least 40 minutes. During this time, the rest of the class forms an outer circle, observing the discussion and taking notes silently. These outside notes are not just a record of the discussion but a part of your participation, as they are to be submitted at the end of the class.

Following the inner circle’s discussion, participants in the outer circle join the dialogue by offering their observations, elaborating on the points discussed, and posing questions that delve deeper into the subject matter. This phase weaves together the insights of all participants into an integrated whole and thereby yields newer insights.

Grading for these seminars is systematic and based on a clear rubric provided in the Assignments tab of the Sakai course page. For all participants, grades involve two components: verbal discussion, which accounts for 70% of the grade, and a written submission, which makes up the remaining 30%. The written component for inside participants requires you to submit talking points, which should include questions and citations from the text, by the evening before the seminar.

Attendance is mandatory for inside seminar participants, given the small group size and the significant grade weight. If an inside participant is absent on the day of the seminar, they are *required to attend a make-up session for another inside seminar*.

Late Assignments and Incomplete Participation

All assignments must be completed to earn a passing grade in the course. Late submissions incur the following penalties: (1) an assignment that is submitted between 1 hour to 3 days late will incur a 10% penalty; (2) an assignment that is between 4 and 7 days late will incur a 20% penalty; (3) an assignment that is over a week late will incur a 30% penalty. Assignments over two weeks late may receive no credit at all. Overdue or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor.

Students must attend and complete their final exams at the designated time as scheduled by the JFRC. If a student is unable to be present for the exam, make-up tests will be considered only if the student has submitted a formal written request and obtained explicit approval from the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Approval for make-up tests is given solely in cases of exceptional circumstances; travel plans do not constitute a valid justification.

Assistive Technologies in Learning and Production

Distinguishing critical from non-critical sources is vital for academic integrity and scholarly excellence. Students are expected to exercise judicious evaluation of any non-critical materials such as Wikipedia or large language model text generators (often referred to as AI), which may offer an elementary understanding of concepts in an accessible format. However, reliance on these tools should not replace deep analytical engagement with primary texts or neglect the critical examination of inherent biases and lack of nuances present in non-critical material. Misuse of these technologies which truncates, rather than expands, the learning process is strictly prohibited.

Students should always be self-aware in the process of learning, continuously make informed judgments, and take responsibility for their choices. Jesuit Bernard Lonergan outlined a set of precepts designed to align our conscience with cognitive activities: *“Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.”* Each principle calls us to a specific mode of engagement with our work— understand the context, notice the details, evaluate the truth, and act ethically based on our conclusions.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

In line with the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#) guidelines, students are required to fully disclose all sources used in their research, including those generated through Artificial Intelligence. Transparency with the course instructor is essential. Any ambiguity regarding the origin of work submitted will result in a discussion with the involved student(s) before grading the assignment.

Accessibility Accommodations

Loyola University Chicago strives to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. If you have a disability or another condition that may require accommodations, you must register first with the Student Accessibility Center (SAC). For academic accommodations while studying abroad in Rome, students are required to contact the Office of the Dean at the JFRC during the first week of classes. Accommodations are only possible after SAC approval and cannot be applied retroactively.

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
Part 1: Foundations of Religion in the Mirror of Modernity – Controversies & Perspectives			
Sept 3 & 5	1. Religion in the Age of Pluralism: The Enlightenment’s Challenge to Divine Monopoly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Parable of the Ring,” <i>Nathan the Wise</i> III.7, G.E. Lessing • “Freud and the Psychoanalysis of the Believing Soul,” M. Westphal 	Sakai Discussions
Sept 10 & 12	2. The Masters of Suspicion and Faith: The Case for Compatibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Marx and the Critique of Religion as Ideology,” M. Westphal • “Nietzsche and the Critique of Religion as Resentment,” M. Westphal 	Inside/Outside Seminars (I/OS)
Sept 17 & 19	3. Social Justice & Religion: Adversaries or Allies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Frontiers of the Quest for the Living God,” E. Johnson • <i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i>, M.L. King 	I/OS
Sept 24 & 28	4. Altars of the Self: Rituals of the Religiously Remixed and the Crafting of Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Intuitional Religion in America,” <i>Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World</i>, T.I. Burton 	I/OS
Oct 1 & 3	5. Suspicion After Auschwitz: Horizons of Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Man’s Search for Meaning</i>, V. Frankl • <i>I and Thou</i>, M. Buber 	I/OS
Oct 8	6. From Reason to Risk: Cogitating on God, Gambling on Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Proslogion</i> II-III, Anselm • <i>Pensées</i> III-IV, B. Pascal 	Sakai Discussions
Oct 10	Midterm Exam		In class
Oct 11–20	Fall Break		
Part 2: A Mosaic of Religions – Rituals & Realizations			
Oct 22 & 24	7. The Mandala of Mindfulness: Buddhist Gateways to the Sacred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practicing Mindfulness</i>, M. Muesse • <i>The Perennial Philosophy</i>, A. Huxley 	Sakai Discussions
Oct 29 & 31	8. Judaism’s Covenant: Bridging the Personal and the Ancient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Here All Along: Finding a Deeper Connection to Life – in Judaism</i>, S. Hurwitz • <i>A Brief Guide to Judaism: Theology, History and Practice</i>, N. Brawer 	I/OS
Nov 5 & 7	9. Christianity Revisited: Scriptural Roots & Spiritual Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions</i>, M. Borg & N.T. Wright • <i>The Strangest Way</i>, R. Barron 	I/OS
Nov 12 & 14	10. The Dawn of the Crescent: Muhammad, the Qur’ān, & Islam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Islam in Historical Perspective</i>, A. Knysh • <i>111 Questions on Islam</i>, S.K. Samir 	I/OS
Part 3: The Way of the Pilgrim Today – Inner Awakening & Social Concern			
Nov 19, 21, 26	11. Echoes of Eternity: From Spiritual Insight to Social Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Confessions X</i>, Augustine • <i>The Long Loneliness</i>, D. Day • <i>Waiting for God</i>, S. Weil 	I/OS
Nov 28–Dec 1	Thanksgiving Break		
Dec 2 & 5	12. God in the Machine? Religion in a Technocratic Dystopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brave New World</i>, A. Huxley 	I/OS
Dec 9–12	Final Exams		Location TBD

N.B.: The course schedule and reading selections are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to accommodate unforeseen circumstances or enhance educational outcomes. Any changes will be communicated promptly on Sakai.