

	<p><i>School of Arts &amp; Science Humanities</i></p> <p><b>RELIGION 100</b></p> <p><b>World Religions of the West</b></p> <p><b>Winter, 2011</b></p>
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*What is hateful to yourself, do not to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah and the remainder is but commentary. Go and study.*

**Rabbi Hillel** (ca. 30 BCE - 10 CE)

*The holy books say one thing about a religion, the people who believe in and practice that religion do quite another. Trying to understand the difference between official religion, defined by the religious virtuosi, and the believed and practiced religion of the faithful defines a central problem in making sense of religion as we see it in today's world.*

**Jacob Neusner, The Way of the**

*'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.'*

Qur'an 3:65

### Course Description

An introductory survey of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this course explores the sources, beliefs (including representative texts), and practices of these religions. The traditions of each will be studied in their cultural and political contexts from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

## 1. Instructor Information

(a)	Instructor:	Clarence Bolt		
(b)	Office Hours:	MW -- 9:00-10:00, Th -- 4:00-5:00		
(c)	Location:	Y323		
(d)	Phone:	370-3347		
(e)	Email:	cbolt@camosun.bc.ca		

## 2. Intended Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course you will be able to:

1. Explain the contexts/historical settings in which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam arose.
2. List major dates, events, and places central to each.
3. Describe the historical linkage/relationships among them.
4. Summarize their major beliefs, teachings, ideals, and practices.
5. Explain variations/splits/divisions in each tradition.
6. Analyze their similarities/differences.

7. Compare/contrast each religion's view of the others.
8. Evaluate their relationship to and impact on the world today.

### **3. Required Materials**

- a. Willard Oxtoby, ed., *World's Religions: Western Traditions, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* and companion website -- [www.oupcanada.com/OxtobyWest3e](http://www.oupcanada.com/OxtobyWest3e) (handy for studying for class and for tests)
- b. CoursePack
- c. Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Very Short Introduction*
- d. *Bible*, recommended editions, New Revised Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, Or the New International Version
- e. *Qur'an*, recommended edition by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (available in the bookstore)
- f. Deborah Ellis, *Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. (Optional)

The following website links to online scriptural sources:

<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/>

### **4. Course Content and Schedule**

The Lecture component of the course is based on the Oxtoby text, with occasional excursions into the CoursePack or the various scriptures. Read the assigned reading before class. I will provide an outline for each lecture for ease of note-taking as well as provide guide questions. For studying from the book, note that each chapter's sections have titles in UPPER CASE letters with subheadings in lower case. To understand the book's approach more easily, ask yourself the following:

1. What is the main question of this section and how is it answered?
2. What are the main and the sub- themes of this section?

Questions for the quizzes will reflect both the book's major themes/points and those emphasized in class. They will include items from the list of terms at the end of each chapter. Reading the book and attending the lectures will ensure good results.

The Seminar component of the course is for discussion of materials (mostly primary sources) assigned for those sessions. Please note that one seminar group meets on Monday, the other on Wednesday. You will hand in short, concise responses to the questions on the seminar readings before they start. Each student will do a brief presentation on an item from the media.

#### **Week 1**

##### **Lecture One – Jan. 10**

Introduction: Definitions, Religion/Religious Studies

##### **Lecture Two – Jan. 12**

About Religion

Oxtoby, ch. 1

##### **Seminar**

Open discussion

#### **Week 2**

##### **Lecture One – Jan. 17**

Common Sources of the 3 Traditions

Oxtoby, ch. 2

Coogan, chs; 1,2

##### **Lecture Two – Jan. 19**

Israelite background to Judaism

Oxtoby, pp. 72-84

Coogan, chs 3, 6 (optional, for a wider background)  
Background scriptures for the lecture:  
Same as seminar readings

**Seminar:** From the Hebrew Scriptures  
Origin Accounts

Genesis 1-4, 6-8, 12  
Gen.15-17, 21-2 (optional)  
Exodus 1-7, 19, 20:1-20, 32  
Deuteronomy 27-30 (optional)

Questions for the seminar discussion:

Considering the Creation, flood, Abraham, and Exodus accounts, what is the relationship between God and ‘his people?’ What is meant by ‘covenant?’

### **Week 3** **Lecture One – Jan. 24**

The Formative Period of Judaism (Captivity and Definition)

Oxtoby, pp. 85-91  
Coogan, ch.8

Background Scriptures for the lecture:

Joshua 1-8  
Judges 1-2  
I Samuel 3, 8-10, 16

### **Lecture Two – Jan. 26**

Hellenistic Judaism

Oxtoby, pp. 90-98

Background scriptures for the lecture:

I Kings 5, 12  
II Kings 17, 24-25  
Skim over I Chronicles 1-9 (what purpose would these chapters provide?)  
Ezra 1, 3

**Seminar:** From the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 1, 9:1-17, 11  
Hosea 1-3

Esther (skim for the overall story)

Questions for the seminar discussion:

Bear in mind answers to previous seminar’s questions: how do the prophets connect to the themes of ‘god’s people’ and ‘covenant?’ What is their underlying purpose? What twist does the story of Esther add?

## **Media Project Option Must be selected by Jan. 26**

### **Week 4** **Lecture One – Jan. 31**

Rabbinic Judaism

Oxtoby, pp. 98-113, CoursePack 1. Literature of the Oral Torah

### **Lecture Two – Feb. 2**

Differentiation -- Medieval Judaism and Beyond

Oxtoby, pp. 113-127

**Seminar:** From the Hebrew Scriptures

Job 1, 2, 38-42

Psalms 1, 8, 46, 47

Ecclesiastes 1, 2, 4, 6, 12

Song of Solomon (skim)

Questions for the seminar discussion:

What are the main themes of these passages? Are these themes surprising given the ones discussed in previous seminars? Are they more universal?

**Project Proposal Due Feb. 2**

**Week 5**

**Lecture One – Feb. 7**

Judaism in the Contemporary World

Oxtoby, pp 141-157, 239-43, CoursePack 2, Essence of Judaism

**Lecture Two – Feb. 9**

Modern Dilemmas – Identity in a Racialized World

Oxtoby, pp 141-157

**Seminar:** Jewish Observances

Oxtoby, pp. 111-130

Questions for the seminar discussion:

What is the purpose of ‘ritual?’ How do these Judaic rituals connect with the themes we have covered so far in this course?

**First Journal Entry Due Feb. 7**

**Hand in Media Project Work to date, Feb. 9**

**Week 6**

**Lecture One – Feb. 14 – Quiz on Judaism**

**Lecture Two – Feb. 16**

Christian Origins – New Testament

Oxtoby, pp. 166-175

Background scriptures for the lecture:

Matthew 1-8, 26-8

Mark 1, 16

Luke 1, 2

John 1.1-18

**Seminar:** The Gospels

Matthew 1-8, 26-8

Mark 1, 16

Luke 1, 2

John 1.1-18

Questions for the seminar discussion:

How do the accounts introducing the ‘gospel’ (define this word) differ? Why might that be?

**Week 7**

**Lecture One – Feb. 21**

From Sect to Church  
Oxtoby, pp. 175-181, 227-239

**Lecture Two -- Feb. 23**

Imperial Christianity

Oxtoby, pp. 181-193, CoursePack 4, Augustine

**Seminar: From the Christian Scriptures**

Galatians 3-6, James, CoursePack 3, Tertullian

Questions to ponder for the seminar discussion:

Do James and Paul contradict each other? Construct a defense of both positions (imagine that you are each). Can Christianity accommodate both positions or are they fundamentally different? What does Tertullian's perspective reveal about how this issue can be interpreted?

**Week 8**

**Lecture One – Feb. 28**

Roman (Catholic) Christianity

Oxtoby, pp. 197-209

**Lecture Two – Mar 2**

The Protestant Reformation

Oxtoby, 209-227, Hebrews 10:19-12:29

**Seminar: Reformation Writings**

**Luther, CoursePack 5**

Questions to ponder for the seminar discussion:

What is Luther's criticism of the church? Can both the Catholic and Lutheran positions be accommodated in the church? Think of the Galatians/James discussion. What does Luther recommend for Weller's depression?

**Week 9**

**Lectures One – Mar. 7**

Modernity

Oxtoby, pp. 239-49

**Lecture Two -- Mar. 9**

Contemporary Christianity in a World of Diversity

Oxtoby, pp. 249-59

**Seminar: Two Modern Responses**

Scan Revelations 11-22.

What is the overall theme here?

**Fundamentalism -- Evangelicalism vs Atheism.**

From Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

<http://richarddawkins.net/firstChapter,101>

From LeHaye and Jenkins, *Left Behind*

<http://files.tyndale.com/thpdata/FirstChapters/978-0-8423-2911-8.pdf>

Questions for the seminar discussion: What is 'fundamental' to each position? What makes them different/similar?

**Article Review for those doing a paper -- Due March 9**  
**Second Journal Entry Due – Mar. 7**

**Week 10**      **Lecture One – Mar. 14 -- Quiz on Christianity**

**Lecture Two – Mar. 16**

Origins of Islam

Oxtoby, pp. 268-78, Coursepack 6, *The Collection of the Qur'an*

Background Scriptures for the lecture:

**Introduction to the Qur'an -- read the following *sura***

1

96:1-5

**View of Scriptures -- read the following *sura***

3:1-10

**Relationship between Qur'an & Muhammad -- read the following *suras***

3:144-148

16:101-105

25:1-13, 32-39

**View of Creation -- read the following *sura***

24:41-45

**Jinn – read the following *sura***

72

**Seminar:**

**View of Abraham -- read the following *suras***

2:124-140

3:67-68

4:125

**View of Noah -- read the following *sura***

71

**View of Moses -- read the following *suras***

20:9ff

26:1ff

Questions for the seminar discussion:

Compare the views about the three with those from the Old Testament. How different/similar are the Jewish and Qur'anic texts? How do you account for that?

**Week 11**      **Lecture One – Mar. 21**

Formation of Practice and the Issue of Succession (Caliphate)

Oxtoby, pp. 297-302, 283-85

**Lecture Two – Mar. 23**

Sufism and the Question of Culture

Oxtoby, pp. 285-91, 302-5

**Seminar:**

**View of Jesus -- read the following *suras***

3:33-59

4:171-2

17:111

61:1-7

**View of Satan -- read the following *suras***

15:27-40

17:61-65

**View of Jews and Christians -- read the following *sura***

5:56-86

**Questions for the seminar discussion:**

How does the Qur'an view Jesus and Satan? How does it see the relationship of Muslims to the other people of the book (Jews and Christians)?

**Week 12**

**Lecture One – Mar. 28**

Islamic Law

Oxtoby, pp. 278-83

**Lecture Two – Mar 30.**

The Spread of Islam, and Splits in the Community

Oxtoby, pp. 291-97, CoursePack 7

**Seminar**

**View of Paradise – read the following *suras***

44:40-57

47:15

52:17-27

55:39-76

56:1-26

82:22ff

**View of Women -- read the following *suras***

2:222-228

4:1-35, 126-30

9:71

16:56-9

24:27-31

30:21

33:35

**Questions for the seminar discussion:**

How is paradise viewed? What kind of place is it? How are women written about?

**Students doing the Journal option – Article Review Due Mar. 28**

**Paper due for those doing the Paper Option – Mar 30**

**Week 13**

**Lecture One and Two – Apr. 4 and 6**

Modernity and Islam

Oxtoby, pp. 305-17

Background scriptures for the lecture:

**View of *Jihad* -- read the following *suras***

2:189-195

4:71-76

16: 105ff (dissimulation)

**Seminar: From the Course Pack 8, Religion and Political Order**

Questions for the seminar discussion:

Contrast and account for the views of Sayyid Qutb and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Why is the role of sharia so controversial, especially for contemporary women?

**Media Project Due Apr. 6**

**Week 14**      **Lecture One – Apr. 11**

New Religions and Movements

Oxtoby, ch. 7, pp. 388-89, 397-407, 409-12, 416-18

**Lecture Two – Apr. 13**

Current Issues

Oxtoby ch. 8

**Seminar: Ellis (all)**

Questions for the seminar discussion:

Who/what is responsible for this state of affairs? Do you find room for hope?

**Final Journal Entry due Apr. 13**

**Cumulative Final** in the exam period.

**5. Basis of Your Assessment (Weighting)**

<b>1. Two quizzes</b>	10% each
<b>Final</b>	20%

**2. Media Project, Paper, or Journal**

**A. Media Project**

**First Presentation**      **5%**

**Final Project**            **35%**

**Or**

**B. Paper**

**Proposal**                **05%**

**Review**                 **10%**

**Paper**                 **25%**

**Or**

**C. Journal**

**Journal**                **30%**

**Review**                **10%**



**3. Participation 15%**

**4. Media Presentation 05%**

**1. Quiz/Final** details will be handed out well in advance. They will consist of

three types of questions:

- a. Terms to identify based on the list given at the end of Oxtoby chapters as well as ones provided in class.
- b. Short paragraph-size answers to questions on themes and issues.
- c. Longer essays from a list of topics handed out before the tests.

## **2. Media Project, Paper, or Journal**

### **A. Media Project – Due Apr. 6**

How we see or understand 'religion is often shaped by what we read/see in books and media. Media tend to be quick and dirty, that is, they respond immediately (often superficially) to issues and events.

The assignment will examine the manner in which a selected group of media approaches religion.

#### **The Method**

You will collect items from the media listed below and organize the selections into a scrapbook/portfolio.

- i. **By January 26 (the last date by which I will accept this as an option)** you will have selected either
  - a. Two newspapers – the Globe and Mail and the National PostOr
  - b. Two networks – BBC (western) and Aljazeera (southwest Asia)
- ii. From each, pick out **all** stories which have a religious theme about, or significant reference to, one or all, of the 3 traditions we are covering in this class. Keep a separate file on each Medium chosen.
- iii. For each story, include the following
  - a. the article (story) headline or title
  - b. the date – stories must be arranged in chronological order
  - c. a hard copy of the story, a saved copy, **or** a link to the story. If you use a link, you must summarize the story and explain its content and the reason for inclusion
- iv. For five marks, for **February 9**, hand in what you have collected so far.
- v. The final project is due by **April 6**. The remaining marks will be divided up in the following way: 25 marks for the collection of articles/stories, 10 marks for analysis.

The analysis will contain no more than 3000 words, consisting of the following:

  - a. Who owns/controls each medium, and what is the bias tendency in each?  
Who is the target audience of each?
  - b. How is each tradition presented treated in each of the media?
  - c. List/briefly explain 3 major insights that you gained from this exercise.

The final submission will be graded on comprehensiveness, presentation, and depth of analysis.

## **B. Paper**

The paper, **due March 30**, will be on a topic from the list below or one approved by me. It will focus on either

- a. key concepts/movements *within* one of the traditions or
- b. historically significant *contacts among* the traditions.

**Please consult with me before starting your work** and do so regularly to stay on track.

For many topics, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is a good reference work and starting point to define the topic. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* is also a great source and is on-line.

## **Step 1. Proposal**

**By Feb. 2**, you will submit a proposal (annotated bibliography) with a list of sources, a minimum of three books and two academic articles, specific to the topic.\*

**The proposal should look like this:**

### **a. Paragraph with Topic Proposal**

This paragraph will

- introduce the topic (who, what, when, where – not how or why)
- will explain which question that the paper will answer
- will lay out the approach/style of presentation.

There is no need to formulate a thesis at this point. Theses should be generated by research rather than the other way around.

Before choosing books or articles, use reference works to define the topic [e.g., the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, *Catholic Encyclopedia* and other encyclopedias (even Wikipedia)]. Reference works are important to define a topic, but sources for the essay must be academic books/articles focussed on the topic.

### **b. Bibliography**

Author. *Title*. Place: Publisher, Date.

e.g. a book

Ellis, Deborah. *Three Wishes, Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 2004

e.g. article

LaViolette, Forrest. "Missionaries and the Potlatch." *Queen's Quarterly* 58 (1951):237-51.

**Entries must be alphabetical, double-spaced, and first-line indented. Consult the *History Style Guide* for direction.**

**Suggestions for finding books and articles:**

Using the **Camosun library**, find **six books** and four articles either completely devoted to your topic or with substantial references to it. If you have difficulty finding these numbers, you may wish to widen your topic or select a different one. Since content may not live up to what the titles suggest, it is helpful to look up more titles than you need, locate them in the stacks or on-line, skim them for content, and then select those that best fit the topic. [Camosun an e-books collection]

**C. Once you have settled on three books and two articles, write out a summary that will:**

Explain why your choices will be useful for an essay on this topic. Usefulness/value is determined by both the author's argument and the work's content. Your mark will be partially determined by the work's usefulness and your assessment of why it is so. Do not simply say that you liked the book or that it covered the topic. Try to figure out the author's point. This will explain why the work is useful. The summary may be written beneath the bibliographic entry.

To find articles, use the indexes noted in class. JSTOR and EBSCO are especially useful. An academic journal is peer-reviewed, well documented (footnotes and bibliography). *National Geographic*, news magazines, *Life*, *Reader's Digest*, and other popular magazines **are not** appropriate. **The articles must be from respected and established periodicals.**

**c. Attachments**

1. a photocopy of the title page; and the table of contents of each book
2. the 1<sup>st</sup> page of the articles.

Papers will not be considered unless a proposal is submitted. Late work is not accepted without permission from the instructor.

Note. I will entertain proposals of your choice, ones that may include Primary Sources. Maintain regular communication with me to keep things on track.

**Step 2 -- Article Review**

**By Mar. 9**, you will write a review of one of the two academic articles chosen for the essay. The review will be 300 words and consist of three paragraphs:

- paragraph one will define the theme (argument, thesis, main point)
- paragraph two will discuss style, sources, and method of argument
- paragraph three will give your opinion on the basis of the information in paragraphs one and two.

Include a full bibliographic citation as well as attach the complete article (or a direct link). Failure to follow these instructions will mean the return of the review.

**Step 3 –The Essay**

The paper, **due Mar 30**, will meet the following Conditions and Standards:

1. It will be no longer than 2500 words (approx. 7-8 pp).

2. It will consist of a thesis, supported by evidence, analysis of alternative interpretations, and a conclusion summarizing why the chosen interpretation fits the evidence best.

3. It must contain

--title page

--double spacing, with no headings and no extra space between paragraphs

--justified margins

--minimum of 20 end/footnotes documenting specific information, themes, ideas, quotes, or paraphrases

--proper end/footnote and bibliographical style (see the Humanities web page, *History Style Guide*)

--copy of the original proposal, along with the article review

--a second copy of the essay (one to be kept on file for 5 years)

4. Grammar, spelling, and syntax are critical to a good paper. Marks will be lost for deficiencies in these areas.

5. The final grade is based on the quality of work and presentation (see 4), use of sources, a clear/strong thesis, consistent argument, proper transitions, and originality of approach.

## **C. Journal**

A journal is a record of personal reactions and responses over time. Subjects in journals can vary widely. An academic journal is a specialized form. It is not to be confused with a private diary. Entries in an academic journal, while personal, must be analytical, intellectual responses. They are focused on specific subjects and must meet established criteria. For this course, entries will be based on two foundations:

--the course material (that is, the texts, the readings, the lectures, and the discussions)

--previous knowledge, intuitive reactions, and feelings about the material

With respect to the latter, these must be solid, well-articulated positions. It is not adequate to say that you like or do not like something. Note this is not to be an award-winning document. This is neither a creative writing nor psychology course.

You must make a minimum of two entries per week, one responding to the material assigned for the upcoming classes, and a second after those classes (after the assigned reading material has been dealt with). Each entry should not exceed 500 words. Be precise and to the point but do not over-edit.

Your grade will be based on the following:

--engagement of material

--depth of response

--use of course material

--quality of writing (but not expected to be literary masterpieces)

The entries may be handwritten or printed but hard copies are due on the assigned dates.

**Due dates are – Feb. 7, Mar. 7, Apr. 11.**

For those choosing this option, you will also submit, by **Mar. 28**, an academic journal review. It will be based on one of your journal topics which has especially caught your interest. Please note the following:

--consult with your instructor when you have a topic that interests you  
--find an article  
--see **Paper ii** (above) for details on how an article review should be set up. You must include a Bibliographical citation, double space, and justify the margins.

**All work is due in class on the due date, before the class meets. Attendance for that class is mandatory. Failure to follow these rules forfeits the mark.**

**3. Participation** in classroom activities is an important component of the course. Seminar sessions will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings. Attendance is required. If you must miss one, your absence must be arranged/discussed with me ahead of time. More than 3 unexcused absences will reduce this component of the course, unless prior arrangements have been made.

## **4. Media Presentation**

For each seminar, one student will present a news item on a religious topic, for the week prior to the seminar, from any media. Be prepared, to present a (very) brief summary of the story and why it caught your attention. A short written summary will be handed in. Each student will sign up for a seminar media presentation during the first week.

### **List of Possible Paper Topics**

Dead Sea Scrolls, Essenes, Qumran

Jihad

Formation, gathering together of the 'Scriptures' in each tradition, or a comparison

Baha'i faith

Mormonism

Jehovah's Witnesses

20<sup>th</sup> c fundamentalism – in any of the three traditions or comparison of two

Sufism

Modernism's impact on a particular group within a tradition

Black Muslims

Kabbalism

Wahhabism

Shi-ism

Shari a law in a particular place, time

Science/culture and faith – are they compatible –pick one tradition or compare

Zionism

View of the Nature of Christ within Christianity or by the other two traditions

Islam's view of the nature of Muhammad

Creating the Talmud

Thinkers/philosophers/theologians in any of the tradition (browse through the text)

Augustine

Roman vs. Orthodox Christians

Creation versus evolution

Eschatology

Any other topic ideas, please consult me

Sects and denominations within any of the traditions

Note the dimension of time. Be sure to be clear about which time in history, which place, and about whom you are writing. **Context is crucial in writing accurate papers.**

**Other**

**1. Grading System**

Percentage	Grade	Description	Grade Equivalency	Point
90-100	A+		9	
85-89	A		8	
80-84	A-		7	
77-79	B+		6	
73-76	B		5	
70-72	B-		4	
65-69	C+		3	
60-64	C		2	
50-59	D		1	
0-49	F	Minimum level has not been achieved.	0	

### Temporary Grades

Temporary grades are assigned for specific circumstances and will convert to a final grade according to the grading scheme being used in the course. See Grading Policy at [camosun.ca](http://camosun.ca) or information on conversion to final grades, and for additional information on student record and transcript notations.

Temporary Grade	Description
<b>I</b>	<i>Incomplete:</i> A temporary grade assigned when the requirements of a course have not yet been completed due to hardship or extenuating circumstances, such as illness or death in the family.
<b>IP</b>	<i>In progress:</i> A temporary grade assigned for courses that are designed to have an anticipated enrollment that extends beyond one term. No more than two IP grades will be assigned for the same course.
<b>CW</b>	<i>Compulsory Withdrawal:</i> A temporary grade assigned by a Dean when an instructor, after documenting the prescriptive strategies applied and consulting with peers, deems that a student is unsafe to self or others and must be removed from the lab, practicum, worksite, or field placement.

Temporary grades are assigned for specific circumstances and will convert to a final grade according to the grading scheme being used in the course. See Grading Policy E-1.5 at [camosun.ca](http://camosun.ca) for information on conversion to final grades, and for additional information on student record and transcript notations.

### 2. Recommended Materials or Services to Assist Students to Succeed Throughout the Course

#### LEARNING SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

There are a variety of services available for students to assist them throughout their learning. This information is available in the College calendar, at Student Services or the College web site at [camosun.ca](http://camosun.ca).

#### STUDENT CONDUCT POLICY

There is a Student Conduct Policy **which includes plagiarism**. It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with the content of this policy. The policy is available in each School Administration Office, at Student Services and on the College web site in the Policy Section.

## Notes on the Readings from the Scriptures of Each Tradition.

1. Scriptures are not historical works, academic treatises, analytical inquiries, or literary creations in the modern sense of these words. They are literary, written expressions of beliefs, values, teachings, lessons, and the like. Certainly, one can find contained in them history, reasoned argument, and literature but they are religious expressions first of all, fundamental to the writers' existence as human beings. They record the 'deeds whereby [God] has made himself manifest.' They were writing 'religion,' not 'history,' 'philosophy,' or 'theology.'<sup>a</sup>

2. With that in mind, as you read each section, try to determine what is being said. Remove preconceived notions as much as possible. The scriptures employ various writing genres. Understanding how each genre works is vital to comprehending meaning and message. About each selection, ask the following:

- Why was it written, and in what genre?
- What was the message to its audience?
- What was being said about God?

<sup>a</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of history* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 12-15

- What was it telling humans about how they ought to live? not to live?
- What should the believer walk away with?

3. We are all outsiders to faiths, traditions, and belief systems not our own. Hence, because we are covering three ‘religions’ in this course, no matter what our belief and value systems, we will all be outsiders at most or all points this semester. Even if you do share the values/beliefs of any of these traditions, recognize that the scriptures in each tradition are sacred to adherents. These readings have been chosen to provide a sense of what is meaningful to large numbers of people.

### **Note on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, known in popular circles as the Old and New Testaments**

There is no such thing as a perfect Bible translation and so no particular translation is assigned for this class. However, some translations are more appropriate than others.

**Most recommended:** The **New Revised Standard Version** has become the standard academic translation of the Bible for many Jewish, Christian and non-religious Bible scholars. It is based on the best original texts available. Other recommended version include the **Revised Standard Version, New International Version, New American Bible** (with the *revised New Testament*), **New American Standard Bible, Modern Language Bible**.

**Acceptable but not recommended:** The **King James Version** (Authorized Version) uses 400-year-old English, which is partially resolved by the **New King James Version. Their New Testaments** are based on slightly different Greek texts from those used for most modern translations. The **Jerusalem Bible, Good News Bible** (Today’s English Version), and **New English Bible** are less literal.

**Not suitable:** Paraphrases are not really translations, and include the **Living Bible, Amplified Bible, The Message, and Barclay’s Bible**. The **Douay-Reims Bible** is a Catholic translation of a Latin translation rather than a direct translation from the Greek or Old Testament Hebrew.

### **Note on the Qur’an**

For most Muslims, the Qur’an (‘to read’ or ‘to recite’ – ‘a collection of things to be recited’) is God’s final revelation, God’s single greatest sign, containing all that is needed for salvation, whether instructions for how to live or ethical principles. Most also believe that God’s word(s) is written on a tablet, one that resides in God’s presence. The revelations in the Qur’an, revealed to Muhammad, as well as the ones revealed to Jews and Christians before him, came from this original holy source.

Hence, the Qur’an confirms the teachings of the older scriptures: the laws, the prophets, and the gospels. The Qur’an’s style differs from the other 2 ‘books,’ reflecting Arabic religious traditions, consisting of rhymed prose (rather than poetry) which is easy to memorize.

There are 114 chapters, known as *suras*. Some are long, others are short. They are not arranged chronologically but in terms of length, starting with longer the longer ones. The name for each *sura* is chosen from a word that appears somewhere at its beginning. Each *sura* has verses called *ayat* (‘signs’). Twenty-nine *suras* begin with seemingly disjointed letters which may be a code or simply a filing system.

Even if they do not understand Arabic, Muslim children across the world continue to learn the Arabic alphabet and to sound out the words of the Qur’an phonetically. Thus, the Qur’an is both a *source* of prayer and a *prayer* in its own right, highly venerated and shelved with other books but resting in its own bookstand. Muslims generally do not buy or sell it; gifts rather than money

are often offered in exchange. An aesthetic consequence of such veneration is that calligraphy is a most highly developed art form in the Islamic world.

The recitation of the Qur'an is captivating and reciters have a high status. Simply reading it for content does not do it justice or capture its significance for Muslims.