

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

Enter into the world of religious studies, where humanity's search for meaning engages a dynamic sphere of religious rituals and realizations. Survey the modern foundations of religion amidst the backdrop of the masters of suspicion considering the psychological, social, and existential critiques of religion. Then examine how religion provides a renewed approach to understanding the human person in a deeper, transcendent key. Experience the meditative rituals of Buddhism and engage the beliefs and practices of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The course culminates in a vigorous reflection on religion's role in personal liberation and its relevance in a technocratic, intuitional age. Engage with seminal texts, partake in analytical 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 modern critiques and contemporary challenges.
- Identify and apply humanity's search for meaning with a religious anthropology.
- Contextualize the 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, articulating religious concepts in dialogue with others.

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.

Tardiness can be disruptive, therefore, late arrivals, in addition to absences, will also be marked. If students accrue more than three tardy marks, each additional instance will result in a 1% deduction from the final grade. 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

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

<u>Grading Scale</u>	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 responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to the standards of “Academic Integrity” detailed in the [Undergraduate Academic Standards and Regulations](#) of the *Academic Catalog*. Embracing these values is not only a matter of personal integrity, it lays the foundation for a lifetime of leadership, preparing our students to serve others in meaningful ways.

Inside/Outside Seminars (I/OS)

An important component of this course features seminars focused on student-led, text-based discussions facilitated by open-ended questions and analytical responses. Active participation, critical thinking, and clear expression of insights are expected. These seminars are always collaborative in nature, consequently, they are non-competitive and fundamentally aimed at reaching a deeper, collective understanding.

The structure of our seminars involves an “Inside/Outside” method. A small group of 5 to 7 students forms the inner circle and engages in an academic conversation for approximately 45 minutes. During this time, the rest of the class forms an outer circle, observes the discussion, and takes notes silently. These outside notes constitute a part of your participation and 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 further questions that introduce new perspectives to the subject matter. This second phase combines the insights of all participants into a synthetic whole, yielding new collective insights.

The grading system for these seminars is systematic and based on a clear rubric, which is provided on the Sakai course page. For all participants, grading involves two components: verbal discussion, which accounts for 70% of the grade, and a written text submission, which makes up the remaining 30%. Participants of the inside seminar are required to submit written talking points. These materials include questions and page citations from the text. The Talking Points for the inside seminar are to be submitted via Sakai and are due at 11:55pm the evening before the scheduled seminar.

Attendance for inside seminar participants is mandatory, given the small group size and the significant grade weight. Inside seminar absences must rescheduled in advance by emailing the professor. Absent students must complete their make-up session *the same week scheduled or immediately after to avoid late penalties*.

Sakai Discussions

Another 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 involves an academic response to a fellow student's post which ought to be informed by the text and provide depth to the discussion. Posts must be submitted by 11:55 pm the evening before the due date; late submissions will be subject to a grade reduction. This component provides students with the opportunity to engage in digital communication, articulate unique perspectives, and demonstrate their creativity in a professional and respectful manner.

Late Assignments and Incomplete Participation

All assignments must be completed to earn a passing grade in the course. Late submissions will sustain 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 complete their final exams at the designated time as scheduled by the JFRC administration. Rescheduling the final exam will only be considered if the student has submitted a written request and obtained written approval from the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Approval for make-up exams 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 intellectual pursuits. 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. Reliance on these tools should never replace personal 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.

The process of learning is dynamic and students must therefore be self-aware, continuously make informed judgments, and assume responsibility for their choices. According to Jesuit Bernard Lonergan, obtaining knowledge does not consist so much in reproducing a set of unchanging facts but of entering into an ongoing process of investigation that is always open to improvement. Consequently, all inquiry or engagement with reality should always: *"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, carefully apply the truth, and act ethically based on our conclusions.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

In accordance with the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#) guidelines, students are required to disclose all sources used in their research, including those generated through Artificial Intelligence, commonly known as AI. Transparency with the course instructor is essential. The instructor reserves the right to deploy new means of AI detection as they are developed and to apply these methods to both old and new assignments.

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.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
Part 1: Foundations of Religion in the Mirror of Modernity – Controversies & Perspectives			
Sept 3	1. Pascal’s Wager: Gambling on the Divine, Hearts Over Heads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pensées</i>, B. Pascal 	Sakai Discussions
Sept 5, 10, 12	2. The Masters of Suspicion and Faith: The Case for Compatibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Freud, Marx, Nietzsche” in <i>Suspicion and Faith</i>, 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 & 26	4. Altars of the Self: Religion as Collective Effervescence and the Crafting of Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Religiously Remixed” and “Intuition Religion in America,” <i>Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World</i>, T.I. Burton 	I/OS
Oct 1 & 3	5. Beyond Suspicion: Reclaiming a Religious Anthropology	<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 & 10	6. Midterm Review & Exam		Sakai Discussions
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 • “Wellness Culture and the Rebirth of New Thought,” T.I. Burton 	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: Inner Renewal and 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 3 & 5	12. God in the Machine? Religion in a Technocratic Dystopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brave New World</i>, A. Huxley 	Sakai Discussions
Dec 9–12	13. Final Exams		Date & Time 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.