

Spring 2017-18

INTRODUCTION

The Level I religion course introduces first-year students to the dialogue between the Biblical traditions and the cultures and communities related to them. Students study the Biblical storyline, major Biblical texts and their interaction with, for example, theology, religious practice, ethics, and social values, while considering methods and fields in the study of religion in a liberal arts setting. An additional prospectus describes the theme of each section. For details see below.

121 A: RIPLEY

THE BIBLE AND SALVATION. Are the biblical messages of salvation truly “good news”? From images of personal healing to cosmic renewal, the Bible employs a surprising variety of metaphors to speak of God’s care and faithfulness toward God’s creation and covenant peoples. However, many have not found the church’s message of salvation to be “good news,” especially women, colonized peoples, and those concerned about our environment. Employing literary, historical, and cultural approaches to reading texts, in this course we will explore the rich diversity of biblical images of salvation and engage the concerns that critics have raised. We will also discuss ways theologians have utilized these biblical motifs to address specific cultures and contexts, with an eye toward critically identifying metaphors of salvation appropriate to our contemporary situations and mindful of modern challenges and concerns.

121 B: LAGERQUIST

READING THE BIBLE AROUND THE WORLD. How does the location of the reader inform how the Bible is understood? What can be learned by reading the Bible with someone different from oneself? How do artists’ work help us read the Bible? These questions are central to this section. We consider both what the Bible says and to how it is heard/read by various audiences. We pay particular attention to readers in the global south, where Christianity is growing. In addition, we look at the ways artists interpret the Bible in images drawn from the culture of their time and place. We ask what constitutes a “good” reading and what factors contribute to one.

121 C: BARBOUR

JOURNEYS AND THE BIBLE: TRAVEL AND TRANSFORMATION. This section focuses on geographical movements in the Bible, for instance, exodus, exile, diaspora, and the journeys of Jesus and Paul, and their relationships to religious meaning. “Journey” is also a metaphor for inward change and spiritual development, and we will also look at the ways the Bible depicts such changes. The course also examines recent literary narratives that depict travel and transformation.

121 D: BOOTH

(ENVIRONMENTAL CONVERSATION STUDENTS ONLY)

THE BIBLE AND THE IDEA OF NATURE: In this section we are studying whether the Bible has anything to say about the modern politics of “environmentalism.” Some argue the Bible offers timeless spiritual lessons unrelated to specific political concerns, like environmentalism. But others argue the Bible testifies to God’s loving care for creation, and consequently lays down a religious obligation for modern people to protect the environment. What does the Bible say about the natural world? Using the imagery of *gardens* and *wilderness* as a way of thinking about the natural world, we are trying to determine what Biblical authors thought about nature. And we are trying to understand how modern people employ the Bible in arguments about the environment.

121 E: RIPLEY

For a description of this section, see the description for Section A.

121 F: JOHNSTON

THE DIVINE IMAGE IN THE BIBLE AND GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY. Since the revelation of God to Moses at the Burning Bush, Jews and Christians have been vexed with the question of whether limited human beings can adequately comprehend, represent, or communicate the nature of a limitless divine being. We will explore these issues as they arise in the scriptures while also considering efforts to evoke the reality of God in music, art, poetry, literature, and traditions of contemplative silence. Topics will include the contested nature of representation in ancient Israel as encountered in a brazen serpent, the golden calf, the iconography of prophets, and then later, the claim that Jesus is the incarnation of God, and early Christian efforts to expand Christianity from its originally Jewish context. We finally consider Christianity’s global expansion and the efforts of Christians in Asia to represent God with concepts from local religious cultures such as Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition to the Bible, we will read theological commentaries, novels, and poetry.

121 G: BATEZA

BELONGING AS BLESSING AND CHALLENGE. The Bible is filled with stories of conflict and hope as people interpret their relationship with God and with one another. Lines are drawn and identities are defined within families, communities, and nations. In this section we will discuss how kinship, ethnicity, race, and friendship function within key Biblical narratives. How are identities defined and contested? Are the boundaries fixed or porous? Making use of historical, literary, and theological methods we will weigh the benefits and burdens of belonging. While exploring the Biblical narrative we will also examine the impact of racism on contemporary religious and political struggles.

121 H: BATEZA

For a description of this section, see the description for Section G.

121 I: ODELL

READING THE BIBLE FOR LOVE AND JUSTICE. This course traces the twin themes of justice and love in the Bible. Some of the questions we’ll ask include: How do conceptions of divine love and justice change over the

course of the Bible's history? What kinds of justice and love are envisioned for human communities? How do different contexts, such as family, clan and community, national and international relations, affect biblical perspectives on justice? Where do we see biblical writers wrestling with problems posed by the apparent lack of justice? Can there be love without justice, or justice without love? A major focus of the course will be on the ways contemporary reading communities address lingering problems caused by *unjust* uses of the Bible, for example, in questions of gender, race, and power. We will also ask whether the Bible can continue to be a resource for reflecting on justice in the modern world, and if so, how.

121 J: ODELL

For a description of this section, see the description for Section I.

121 K: GOTTSEGEN

THE BIBLE THROUGH THE PRISM OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY. Jews and Christians have historically related to the Hebrew Bible through the prism of their own interpretive traditions, which are often in agreement and complementary but sometimes sharply divergent. This section of "The Bible in Culture and Community" will read the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures through the lenses of both traditions, and with the assistance of modern historical-critical and literary methods. Distinguishing between those biblical texts and interpretations that emphasize the relationship between God and the individual, and those that emphasize the relationship between human beings, students will explore such biblical topics as election, covenant, sanctification, human freedom, and redemption. Through this engagement, students will come to appreciate how the religious value and cultural meaning of the Bible largely depend upon the community of interpretation in which it is read and understood, an important insight for citizens of a polity whose members are religiously and culturally ever more diverse.

121 L: SCHILLINGER

ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN. Daily news reports regarding violence between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, make remembering these religions share common roots difficult. Yet, all three trace their lineage back to Abraham. This section explores the common roots of these religions by introducing students to the Bible and the Qur'an, and examining the parallel characters and narratives found in each. At the same time, the individual beliefs and practices of each religion will be investigated in order to better understand what makes these religions distinct despite their similarities. In our multicultural world, a basic understanding of the relationship between these three monotheistic religions is perhaps more valuable now than ever before.

121 M: JOHNSTON

For a description of this section, see the description for Section F.

121 N: WILSON

INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION. How did it come about that so many people in the world have grown up in indifference to religion? When and why did these people graduate from the historic religions? How do the indifferent differ from the faithful, from seekers, from atheists and agnostics? How does the

indifference manifest itself in our cultures and on campus? How does the study of religion proceed in the midst of indifference to religion? These sections of Religion 121 will address the passage into indifference and related questions in conversations with biblical traditions and a series of thoughtful films. These sections require that students be free to view films on most Wednesday evenings during the semester in anticipation of Thursday discussions.

121 O: JOTHEN

A WHOLESOME MATERIALITY. The Bible begins with a story about the creation of the material world. It affirms the goodness of material things, of things like bodies, fertility, and food. But it also tasks humans with being responsible for rightly relating to material things, whether one's own body or creation itself. This course will explore the diverse ways the Bible guides its reader into caring about these materially-rooted relationships. In short, we will read the Bible economically, understanding that *economics* means "the law of the household" that stresses the importance of just and sustaining practices towards all material things. To do so, we will look at issues such as wealth, sex, farming, gender relations, diet, and private property. We will reflect on the economic concerns of a diverse biblical world rooted in an agrarian economy, tracing the recurrence of themes such as oppression, idolatry, and poverty as problematic features of how humans relate to the material world.

121 P: HANSON

THE BIBLE AS SCREEN PLAY. Movies have become our common language, one of the principal means by which we communicate and interpret our experiences and ideas (not to mention our primary form of entertainment). Biblical stories and themes have been a central source for filmmakers from the very beginning of the medium. What happens to those stories and themes in the process? What does the process of filmmaking teach us about how the Biblical authors may have brought their stories to life in their time? How do films illuminate the Biblical text, and how are contemporary perspectives, values, and prejudices reflected in the filmmakers' work? The balcony is open. Please note that the films will be screened outside of class; there will be a weekly scheduled screening, and the films will be available on library reserve for those unable to attend.

121 Q: WILSON

For a description of this section, see the description for Section N.

121 R: JOTHEN

For a description of this section, see the description for Section O.